



FIFTEEN YEARS OF  
A DANCER'S LIFE  
WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF HER  
DISTINGUISHED FRIENDS

BY  
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FULLER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY  
ANATOLE FRANCE



"SHE OUGHT TO WRITE OUT HER MEMORIES  
AND HER IMPRESSIONS." — *Alexandre Dumas*

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## VI

### LIGHT AND THE DANCE

SINCE it is generally agreed that I have created something new, something composed of light, colour, music, and the dance, more especially of light and the dance, it seems to me that it would perhaps be appropriate, after having considered my creation from the anecdotal and picturesque standpoint, to explain, in more serious terms, just what my ideas are relative to my art, and how I conceive it both independently and in its relationship to other arts. If I appear to be too serious I apologise in advance.

I hope that this theoretical "essay" will be better received than a certain practical essay that I undertook, soon after my arrival in Paris, in the cathedral of Notre Dame.

Notre Dame! The great cathedral of which France is justly proud was naturally the objective of one of my earliest artistic pilgrimages, I may say of the very earliest. The tall columns, whose shafts, composed of little assembled columns, rise clear to the vaults; the admirable proportions of the nave; the choir, the seats of old carved oak,

## EJECTED FROM NOTRE DAME

and the railings of wrought iron—this harmonious and magnificent pile impressed me deeply. But what enchanted me more than anything else was the marvellous glass of the lateral rose windows, and even more, perhaps, the rays of sunlight that vibrated in the church, in various directions, intensely coloured, as a result of having passed through these sumptuous windows.

I quite forgot where I was. I took my handkerchief from my pocket, a white handkerchief, and I waved it in the beams of coloured light, just as in the evening I waved my silken materials in the rays of my reflectors.

Suddenly a tall imposing man, adorned with a heavy silver chain, which swung from an impressive neck, advanced ceremoniously toward me, seized me by the arm and led me toward the entrance, directing a conversation at me which I appreciated as lacking in friendliness although I did not understand a word. To be brief he dropped me on to the pavement. There he looked at me with so severe an expression that I understood his intention was never to let me enter the church again under any pretext.

My mother was as frightened as I was.

Just then a gentleman came along, who, seeing us completely taken aback, asked us what had happened. I pointed to the man with the chain, who was still wrathfully surveying us.

"Ask him about it," I said.

The gentleman translated the beadle's language to me.

"Tell that woman to go away ; she is crazy."

Such was my first visit to Notre Dame and the vexatious experience that my love of colour and light caused.

When I came to Europe I had never been inside an art museum. The life that I led in the United States had given me neither motive nor leisure to become interested in masterpieces, and my knowledge of art was hardly worth mentioning. The first museum whose threshold I crossed was the British Museum. Then I visited the National Gallery. Later I became acquainted with the Louvre and, in due course, with most of the great museums of Europe. The circumstance that has struck me most forcibly in regard to these museums is that the architects have not given adequate attention to considerations of light.

Thanks to this defect I get in most museums an impression of a disagreeable medley. When I look at the objects for some moments the sensation of weariness overcomes me, it becomes impossible to separate the things one from another. I have always wondered if a day will not come when this problem of lighting will be better solved. The question of illumination, of reflection, of rays of light falling upon objects, is so essential that I cannot understand why so little importance has been attached to it. Nowhere have I seen a

museum where the lighting was perfect. The panes of glass that let the light through ought to be hidden or veiled just as are the lamps that light theatres, then the objects can be observed without the annoyance of the sparkle of the window.

The efforts of the architect ought to be directed altogether in that direction—to the redistribution of light. There are a thousand ways of distributing it. In order that it may fulfil the desired conditions light ought to be brought directly to pictures and statues instead of getting there by chance.

Colour is disintegrated light. The rays of light, disintegrated by vibrations, touch one object and another, and this disintegration, photographed in the retina, is always chemically the result of changes in matter and in beams of light. Each one of these effects is designated under the name of colour.

Our acquaintance with the production and variations of these effects is precisely at the point where music was when there was no music.

In its earliest stage music was only natural harmony ; the noise of the waterfall, the rumbling of the storm, the gentle whisper of the west wind, the murmur of the watercourses, the rattling of rain on dry leaves, all the sounds of still water and of the raging sea, the sleeping of lakes, the tumult of the hurricane, the sighing of the wind, the dreadful roar of the cyclone, the crashing of the thunder, the crackling of branches.

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Afterwards the singing birds and then all the animals emitted their various sounds. Harmony was there; man, classifying and arranging the sounds, created music.

We all know what man has been able to get from it since then.

Man, past master of the musical realm, is to-day still in the infancy of art, from the standpoint of control of light.

If I have been the first to employ coloured light, I deserve no special praise for that. I cannot explain the circumstance; I do not know how I do it. I can only reply, like Hippocrates when he was asked what time was: "Ask it of me," he said; "and I cannot tell you; ask it not and I know it well."

It is a matter of intuition, of instinct, and nothing else.

Sight is perhaps the first, the most acute, of our senses. But as we are born with this sense sufficiently well developed to enable us to make good use of it, it is afterward the last that we try to perfect. For we concern ourselves with everything sooner than with beauty. So there is no reason for surprise that the colour sense is the last to be developed.

Yet, notwithstanding, colour so pervades everything that the whole universe is busy producing it, everywhere and in everything. It is a continued recurrence, caused by processes of

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chemical composition and decomposition. The day will come when man will know how to employ them so delightfully that it will be hard to conceive how he could have lived so long in the darkness in which he dwells to-day.

Our knowledge of motion is nearly as primitive as our knowledge of colour. We say "prostrated by grief," but, in reality, we pay attention only to the grief; "transported with joy," but we observe only the joy; "weighed down by chagrin," but we consider only the chagrin. Throughout we place no value on the movement that expresses the thought. We are not taught to do so, and we never think of it.

Who of us has not been pained by a movement of impatience, a lifting of the eyebrows, a shaking of the head, the sudden withdrawal of a hand?

We are far from knowing that there is as much harmony in motion as in music and colour. We do not grasp the facts of motion.

How often we have heard it said: "I cannot bear this colour." But have we ever reflected that a given motion is produced by such and such music? A polka or a waltz to which we listen informs us as to the motions of the dance and blends its variations. A clear sparkling day produces upon us quite a different effect from a dull sad day, and by pushing these observations further we should begin to comprehend some more delicate effects which influence our organism.

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In the quiet atmosphere of a conservatory with green glass, our actions are different from those in a compartment with red or blue glass. But usually we pay no attention to this relationship of actions and their causes. These are, however, things that must be observed when one dances to an accompaniment of light and music properly harmonised.

Light, colour, motion and music.

Observation, intuition, and finally comprehension.

Let us try to forget educational processes in so far as dancing is concerned. Let us free ourselves from the sense that is ordinarily assigned to the word. Let us endeavour to forget what is understood by it to-day. To rediscover the primitive form of the dance, transformed into a thousand shapes that have only a very distant relationship to it, we shall have to go back to the early history of the race. We then get a notion what the origin of the dance must have been and what has made it what it is to-day.

At present dancing signifies motions of the arms and legs. It means a conventional motion, at first with one arm and one leg, then a repetition of the same figure with the other arm and the other leg. It is accompanied by music, each note calls for a corresponding motion, and the motion, it is unnecessary to say, is regulated rather by the time than by the spirit of the music. So much the

## THE MUSIC OF THE DANCE

worse for the poor mortal who cannot do with his left leg what he does with his right leg. So much worse for the dancer who cannot keep in time, or, to express it better, who cannot make as many motions as there are notes. It is terrifying to consider the strength and ability that are needed for proficiency.

Slow music calls for a slow dance, just as fast music requires a fast dance.

In general, music ought to follow the dance. The best musician is he who can permit the dancer to direct the music instead of the music inspiring the dance. All this is proved to us by the natural outcome of the motives which first impelled men to dance. Nowadays these motives are forgotten, and it is no longer considered that there should be a reason for dancing.

In point of fact the dancer on hearing a piece of new music, says: "Oh, I cannot dance to that air." To dance to new music, the dancer has to learn the conventional steps adapted to that music.

Music, however, ought to indicate a form of harmony or an idea with instinctive passion, and this instinct ought to incite the dancer to follow the harmony without special preparation. This is the true dance.

To lead us to grasp the real and most extensive connotation of the word dance, let us try to forget what is implied by the choregraphic art of our day.

What is the dance? It is motion.

What is motion? The expression of a sensation.

What is a sensation? The reaction in the human body produced by an impression or an idea perceived by the mind.

A sensation is the reverberation that the body receives when an impression strikes the mind. When the tree bends and resumes its balance it has received an impression from the wind or the storm. When an animal is frightened its body receives an impression of fear, and it flees and trembles or else stands at bay. If it be wounded, it falls. So it is when matter responds to immaterial causes. Man, civilised and sophisticated, is alone best able to inhibit his own impulses.

In the dance, and there ought to be a word better adapted to the thing, the human body should, despite conventional limitations, express all the sensations or emotions that it experiences. The human body is ready to express, and it would express if it were at liberty to do so, all sensations just as the body of an animal.

Ignoring conventions, following only my own instinct, I am able to translate the sensations we have all felt without suspecting that they could be expressed. We all know that in the powerful emotions of joy, sorrow, horror, or despair, the body expresses the emotion it has received from the mind. The mind serves as a medium and

causes these sensations to be caught up by the body. In fact, the body responds to these sensations to such an extent sometimes that, especially when the shock is violent, life is suspended or even leaves the body altogether.

But natural and violent movements are possible only in the midst of grand or terrible circumstances. They are only occasional motions.

To impress an idea I endeavour, by my motions, to cause its birth in the spectator's mind, to awaken his imagination, that it may be prepared to receive the image.

Thus we are able, I do not say to understand, but to feel within ourselves as an impulse an indefinable and wavering force, which urges and dominates us. Well, I can express this force which is indefinable but certain in its impact. I have motion. That means that all the elements of nature may be expressed.

Let us take a "*tranche de vie*." That expresses surprise, deception, contentment, uncertainty, resignation, hope, distress, joy, fatigue, feebleness, and, finally, death. Are not all these sensations, each one in turn, humanity's lot? And why can not these things be expressed by the dance, guided intelligently, as well as by life itself? Because each life expresses one by one all these emotions. One can express even the religious sensations. Can we not again express the sensations that music arouses in us, either a nocturne of

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Chopin's or a sonata of Beethoven's, a slow movement by Mendelssohn, one of Schumann's lieder, or even the cadence of lines of poetry ?

As a matter of fact, motion has been the starting point of all effort at self-expression, and it is faithful to nature. In experiencing one sensation we cannot express another by motions, even when we can do so in words.

Since motion and not language is truthful, we have accordingly perverted our powers of comprehension.

That is what I have wanted to say and I apologise for having said it at such length, but I felt that it was necessary.