IT IS far back, deep down the centuries, that one’s 
spirit passes when Isadora Duncan dances; back to 
the very morning of the world, when the greatness of 
the soul found free expression in the beauty of the 
body; when rhythm of motion corresponded with 
rhythm of sound; when the movements of the human 
body were one with the wind and the sea; when the 
gesture of a woman’s arm was as the unfolding of a rose petal,—the 
pressure of her foot upon the sod as the drifting of a leaf to earth.

The morning of the world! When the great primitive joy of 
living,—joy in the sun, the wind and the rain, in the motion of trees 
and waves, in the beauty of blue hilltops and fragrant flowers, found 
the expression it was meant to have from the beginning, it was in-
evitable that there should be a joy in every movement, whether its 
meaning was ecstacy, tenderness, regret, sorrow, reverence or renun-
ciation, that expressed the greatest beauty of which the human soul 
was capable. When man and the universe moved together in rhyth-
mic harmony, and all the fervor of religion, of love, of patriotism, 
sacrifice or passion expressed itself to the measures of the cythara, 
the harp or the timbrel; when men and women danced before their 
gods and their hearthstones in religious ecstacy, or out in the forests 
and by the sea because of the joy of life that was in them, it had to be 
that every strong, great or good impulse of the human soul poured 
from the spirit to the body in perfect accord with the rhythm of the 
universe.

The Greeks, perhaps more than any other of the ancient races, 
knew and expressed these wonderful secrets of universal rhythm. 
In what we have left of Greek painting and sculpture one cannot 
escape the sense of an intimate understanding of the mysteries of 
motion, which Nature has withheld from the unthinking and the 
unseeing of all time; and the Greek dancers, consciously or uncon-
sciously, moved always in this perfect harmony with the scheme of 
Nature’s movements. Study, if you question this, the Greek sculp-
ture as shown in the frieze of any old temple, or note, not once but 
many times, the pose of the dancing figures painted on a Greek vase, 
and you will find that there is never any mistake in rhythm. In 
the childish figures, the movements, however perfect, are those that 
express the child feeling; the paintings of Greek youth have again 
the motion that belongs to youth and joyousness; the older figures, 
graceful and strong, are still another development of life, and all have
DETAIL FROM A FRIEZE IN THE ACROPOLIS MUSEUM, ATHENS; SHOWING MOTION AND LINES WHICH MISS DUNCAN HAS FOUND INSPIRING.
CHILDREN FROM ISADORA DUNCAN'S DANCE-SCHOOL. DANCING IN THE WOODS.
SHOWING EXQUISITE GRACE AND BODILY BEAUTY OF CHILDREN TRAINED IN MISS DUNCAN’S BERLIN SCHOOL.
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the absolute rhythmical sequence from which Nature herself never varies.

Thus the Greek dance,—and this Miss Duncan will tell you,—is not a national or an individual expression of rhythm. It is the dance of all times, of the past and of the future. It is putting into motion a knowledge of Nature’s ways and of the perfection of human physical attainment. It is the dance of all people and all ages—or of none—as the races of men open their souls to Nature’s laws and live in her ways, embodying her beauty and her truth.

Such dancing as this is at its best out in the sunlight, with harp and flute and woodwind strains; yet so great is the magic of Isadora Duncan’s dancing that, even in a modern theatre, she makes you forget that you are hedged in by foolish walls, and with music and motion she carries you with her back to wild woods and the god Pan, with his flute and dancing nymphs mad with the sun and the wind and love.

From the moment the orchestra begins and the folds of a green curtain part and a figure clad in gauze of a sunlit hue or the gray of moonbeams or the azure of pale dawn blows past a background that gives the effect of a soft pale cloud-bank, “the dull thoughts of today” drop away and the vision is filled with the great, majestic, simple beauty of the dawn of years. If the Winged Victory could sway and bend from her high pedestal in the Louvre, the motion would be surely the same as that which Miss Duncan shows us in the series of dances picturing “Iphigenie in Aulide,” which she has created for the music of Gluck. And though Greek in effect, because we are accustomed to think of the most perfect dancing as Greek, and because there is no lovely frieze of pagan Athens that is not recalled, it is truly the natural dance of the world. There is such abundance and splendor of beauty in each different movement that the fecund strength of Earth herself, the worship of all gods, the gentle joy of all childish hearts, the glad welcome of all lovers is there. Your heart beats and your eyes are moist, and you know that such perfect moments are years apart, even in happy lives. And then the figure melts back through the green folds and you remember that when Isadora Duncan danced in Paris the great artists and poets, unafraid of tears, wept and congratulated each other for such rare joy. It is most extraordinary—the impression this woman leaves with you even when the dance is over and the stage empty! You fancy a blue dome arching overhead, with glimmering stars to catch her eyes and sweet winds blowing all her draperies and flowers growing thickly for so light a foot to tread.

You do not recall a single “step” of all the dancing, for this
woman of the hilltops has no practiced "stunt" to remember and repeat. And there are no imitators of Isadora Duncan, because, as yet, there have been no other women to give their whole lives to seeing clearly what beauty means, to seeking it sincerely, to giving up all that is not in harmony with Nature's simple, perfect ways. Miss Duncan dances as she feels, and so to imitate her dancing would necessitate first of all the work and study that would enable one to acquire her quality of calm lucid thought and serene spirit, for one does not put on greatness with a smile after a term of lessons.

ONE has heard much of Isadora Duncan since she first danced in New York ten years ago in Ethelbert Nevin's studio at Carnegie Hall. Then she was acclaimed by a few appreciative people as doing rare and lovely things, but the full creative significance of her work was not realized. Her dances were thought pretty in her way, as Carmencita's were in another, and so on,—not but what Carmencita is a passionate delight, but that is another story. Then, with her bits of rose and gray gauze, her ideals and her courage, she sailed away to Germany. There, she chanced one night to dance in the studio of a popular artist,—Franz Stuck's, I think,—and instantly the art world of Munich went wild over her work. Genius is a rare thing, even in Munich, and much appreciated there, and the artists were not slow to recognize an art so great that it stretched back to Phidias and reached out to all eternity.

It was in Munich that Miss Duncan's dancing was established as a definite, significant art; it was also in Germany that she acquired the confidence in her work which enabled her to start her school and prepare to perpetuate in "The Dance of the Future" the art she had already created and developed. And, if there is to be a dance of the future, worthy to be acclaimed as a great art, it must surely spring from this sane return to simplicity, beauty and truth. As Miss Duncan has said in her lectures: "All other arts have recognized that great art must be nude art. Dancing alone has feared the nude." And yet, dancing has not hesitated to sink into pitiable depths in suggesting the nude and in obscene allusions to it. Indeed, many of us have gone so far,—especially in dancing,—from all truth and purity that we seek for vulgarity through the nude instead of recognizing it as one of the great elements of all supreme plastic art.

Believing this, as did the Greeks, Miss Duncan has dared to insist upon incorporating this element into her art, and so, to the terror of the prude and the interest of the vulgar, she dances with limbs bare and uncorseted body draped only with blowing gauze, which reveals when she moves every exquisite emotion she has trained herself to portray.
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To what extent shall I be misunderstood,—but certainly not by Miss Duncan,—if right here I say that, with the exception of her dancing, I know, in the Occident at least, no wholly spontaneous expression of the dance impulse except the genuine ragtime of our own country? Here, again, is the dance of a simple people made an expression of the most primitive emotions, and when done by the negroes themselves it is full of the grace of all natural things. It is the true and rhythmic expression of the way these people feel about life, and so it has the essential beauty that such an expression never fails to hold. The real ragtime, as the darkies used to dance it for their own pleasure, varied with the temperament of every man and woman in the dance, and more than this, with the mood even of each temperament. It became in turn the dance of religion, passion, fear, youth, sorrow—a dance of primal impulse with the movements that are full of uncivilized beauty. We have prostituted it in many ways in our ballrooms and comic operas, but it is none the less, in essence, a great expression of dancing.

"T"o rediscover the beautiful, rhythmical motions of the human body; to call back to life that ideal movement which should be in harmony with the highest physical type; to awaken once more an art which has slept for two thousand years"—these are the expressed aims of Miss Duncan in her dancing and in her work at the school she has established in Berlin. Much has been written in Europe of the Dance School, but I think even now little is known about it in America. It is made up of twenty little girls, given by their parents to Miss Duncan, who has pledged herself to support and train them in all beautiful ways of mind and body. From the start they are made healthy and graceful,—they are taught music, piano and singing, and the theory of music and orchestration, gymnastics, drawing, natural science and a very interesting thing called "artistic control" which here in America we have heard little about. Their dancing lessons are often given out in the woods when possible; and the dress of these little children, working and in play hours, is much the same as the one in which Miss Duncan dances, except that the drapery is wool instead of gauze. It is Miss Duncan's desire that they shall carry out to a greater perfection her own work of creating a dance of the future, and the money she receives for public dances is spent for the support and instruction of her twenty children.

During her recent all too brief stay in New York, Miss Duncan has danced two programmes, one founded on "Iphigenie in Aulide," by Glück, a series which forms a complete evening performance; and
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the second an interpretation of Beethoven’s Symphonie in F, which takes half an evening, and is followed by Valses, Mazurkas and Preludes of Chopin. One programme is pagan, the other modern, but each manifests the most perfect expression of the relation of music and dancing. It has been Miss Duncan’s good fortune in America to work with an orchestra of rare musical attainment under a leader, Gustav Saenger, who is a musician of unusual sensitiveness and intelligence.

For five years Miss Duncan studied Beethoven’s Symphonie in F before venturing to present it to the public. It is an interesting coincidence that Wagner in his “Art-work of the Future” has said of this Symphonie of Beethoven that it is “the apotheosis of dance,” and that Miss Duncan should have danced this Symphonie for the first time before Frau Cosima Wagner. So thrilling, so penetrating is the pulse of this dance that it is not difficult to understand how, one night when Miss Duncan was dancing in London, Ellen Terry, who was watching the performance for the first time, suddenly sprang to her feet, tall and beautiful, turned around to the audience, and exclaimed with dramatic earnestness: “Do you realize what you are looking at? Do you understand that this is the most incomparably beautiful dancing in the world? Do you appreciate what this woman is doing for you—bringing back the lost beauty of the old world of art?” It was thus that these two great artists met and that a sincere, lasting friendship began.

And it was even thus that one felt in New York, when, during the first week of this “incomparable dancing,” the audience yawned and sneered and mourned for ladies in spangles calling for decapitated lovers. That it was possible for an artist to dance through such a wall of artificial standards and vulgar feeling is a high tribute to the quality of Miss Duncan’s courage and intention. Of course, such a situation would not have been possible in New York in midwinter, when our poets, painters, sculptors and writers are in town at work and play. But fancy the righteous indignation of the person who went forth on a warm evening in a Broadway-comic-opera frame of mind to be greeted with Gluck and Beethoven and a presentation of beauty so simple that it somehow seemed to become quite subtle. Later, toward the end of the engagement, it seemed like a personal triumph to the writer when Miss Duncan finally secured an ovation from this very audience who, with tears in their eyes, would not leave the theatre without encore after encore, more Chopin, more Beethoven, more, again and again, of great music allied to the greatest dancing New York has ever known.