ALS IK KAN
THE RELATION OF DANCING TO A COMMERCIAL AGE

We are becoming an over-commercialized age, we are thinking only of business success, business efficiency; we boast that we are 100 per cent. efficient, while we are only zero emotionally. And the worst of it is we are not seeking to do business and to succeed in business because that is a good thing or because the business itself is worth establishing and of value to the race, but solely to be great business men and rich. We are getting together elaborate business machinery—telephones, typewriting machines, dictographs, counting machines. For every detail of business there has been some machine developed that would add to human power of productivity and that would produce in a given amount of time more money—not more money to be used beautifully and happily or in developing the welfare of the race, but just more money to spend, with scarcely any object in spending it.

What would have become of us, if this had gone on indefinitely? We were getting more and more machine-made not only in our effort to make money-getting easier but in commercializing all the arts. We have been putting our music (the great means of liberating the soul) into a tin can; our drama (the great opportunity for reforming the world) through moving machines; we are rapidly approaching a point where our books will not be read, but rung out of an instrument. And as the presentation of all these things will be accomplished without the slightest effort on our part, we shall in turn cease to create them, to grow through developing them, even cease to enjoy them.

Then suddenly in the midst of this money-getting, machine-made age we throw all our caution to the wind; we give up some of our business hours, we forget the fact that we must be rich to-morrow morning and begin to dance. We not only dance in the evening, but in the afternoon and in the morning. We are told that it is shocking and disastrous and immoral. And the commercial side of life says this will ruin business, our young people are not sitting in front of their machines all the while. We hear sermons against dancing and lectures against it, but the craze grows and the sound of music is all over the land and young people are forgetting that they ought to think only of money and are looking at each other again and the old people are mourning that youth is past, and they too are dancing.

It is all very remarkable and would seem miraculous if one did not stop to think that after all Nature is very logical and very wise. And while she did not control the commercial age for a long time, but let it resolve itself into an enormous machine, using human energy to produce money, she has now suddenly in the most wilful humorous fashion brought about this wonderful reaction toward gaiety. And in spite of all the maxims in American copybooks and all the books on efficiency and all the machines to amuse us or to make us work we are dancing as though there were few other purposes in life. Perhaps too much, because all reactions swing too far before they strike a reasonable balance; but still from the reaction undoubtedly much will be gained that pure commercial activity was rapidly destroying. It is not as though merely the idle, thoughtless or vicious were dancing; perhaps they are, it may do them good. But what is really happening is that very young people are dancing and that middle-aged and elderly people are getting together evenings and practicing difficult steps and becoming more graceful, more interested in life and more cheerful.

It was a reaction that had to come in some form. Nature might have supplied several ways of freshening up this commercial age, but she chose dancing and dancing will continue until we have reacted sufficiently far back into gaiety and mirth and joyousness to satisfy her sense of race balance. Nature always provides her own remedy for her own difficulties. Man is frequently astonished at what she considers a remedy, but in the course of generations we discover that she makes no mistakes. It is not that Nature has objected to business activity in this nation. That too was essential.

Our early days in America were spent in finding the land for our homes and building our homes, in acquiring a government, in other words we were a nation in the processes of making itself. Then it was necessary for us to support ourselves and we became too interested in this. We found many ways of supporting ourselves more showily than any people who had ever
lived, and more easily. Suddenly Nature said, "Enough of this, we are thinking of nothing but money, we are not gaining the right amount of good in earning our living, we are not working for the benefit of the race, the means of gaining a livelihood has been perverted." We have really ceased to understand the value of work; we labor in order to be idle, and when we have labored so long that we have the time and the money to be idle we have forgotten how to be joyous. It is impossible to live our lives forgetting that we have emotions, ignoring the wonderful thing called romance until we come to maturity and then suddenly reach out our hands for it. If men were to go through life using only one arm, never lifting the other, at middle age the unused arm would be atrophied and useless. It is just the same with our emotions. If we live only for gain, not for romance and joy and cheer when then we have enough money we find our emotions atrophied and withered. And whether we will or no Nature does not intend that we shall become an unemotional people. She knows better than we do that if once our capacity for emotion dies, our ability to create and enjoy art vanishes also, our interest in and understanding of romance will pass away with art and that life will suddenly be left without memories, without imagination. It is a serious matter for us to go on training our young men only to seek wealth, to get rich quick, our young girls only to find some easy, dexterous way to capture the young man with money; for such youth as this must bring old age without capacity for joy, age that is desolate and unproductive.

That the dance today has been able to take such a tremendous hold on the public is a matter of profound psychological interest. It is not because the dance is bad or because the dance appeals to evil instincts. Nothing with solely an evil impulse has ever in the world captured and held a nation. When an entire people are swept off their feet with interest in some overwhelming new joy it is because there is need for that expression, it is because Nature has willed the people to live through this reaction in order to strike a balance. Today our young people are largely without mental and spiritual occupation. They have needed just what the dance has brought them, otherwise they would not have accepted it. A nation adequately occupied, profoundly interested has never accepted a fad of the moment. If in this generation we had been a people absorbed in our homes, our gardens, the development and instruction of our children, the progress of art, we should have had but little time for such a craze as the present dance has created. But on the other hand, we were a nation grown weary in its mad haste to become rich, a nation of young people almost devoid of romance, of homes without hearthstones and the fact that we have responded to the gaiety of the dance today has meant that we needed it and that it came to idle feet and frequently to empty hearts. No amusement could ever capture a nation sincerely interested in its own development, but it can absorb a melancholy commercial people and bring about a greater spirit of comradeship among those who have grown sad with their successes.

Of one thing we may be sure—that we shall have a nation in better physical condition from this dancing, we shall see about us more graceful young people with better appetites, more supple old people, less stoutness and possibly a greater enjoyment of music. I am not sure but what it will effect beneficially the question of dress. I can see plainly that it is not easy for people to dance overweighted with clothes or in fussy heavy garments, that on the other hand, after dancing warm comfortable wraps are essential, so that possibly our young people will begin to devise the sort of clothes which they like, which are suited to this merry-making and we shall not only have better bodies to clothe, but greater wisdom in clothing them.

In any case we have profoundly needed in America a greater spirit of fraternity. We not only had ceased to play cheerfully, but practically to play at all, we were overwhelmed with the burden of money. We had youth without romance, maturity without achievement and age without memories, our young people no longer thrilled in the moonlight, our old people no longer sat by the fireside. As Mr. Coningsby Dawson has recently most convincingly said in the New York Sun: "Young people seem afraid of romance and old people seek it vainly because they are afraid of death." We seemed as a nation to be in the midst of spiritual tragedy, and young or old we looked at each other with dull eyes, brightening only at the clink of gold. If this spirit of dancing has come upon us to lessen our greed, to refresh our interest in
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Each other, to bring “old men and maidsens, young men and children together,” then let us accept from it what we can, let us help Nature to strike the balance which she is seeking.

I have been interested here at The Craftsman in watching our little evening parties and in studying just what the dance has meant in this one environment, and I find in a single evening on our clubroom floor where we dance, bankers and painters and sculptors, business men and editors, art students and young men from their daily employment, schoolgirls and even children all dancing side by side; the elder men largely with their elderly wives, looking younger and happier than I remember them a few years ago, lighter on their feet, chatting cheerfully between the dances, interested in what the young folks are doing, and the young folks in turn with the comradeship for their elders that has not been found in this country for a generation past.

I do not mean that perhaps there is not too much dancing, that there may be those who are not dancing in the most beautiful way, that some of the dancing may not interfere with employment that could reasonably be expected to take precedence. These details I am not considering for the moment; Nature has not considered them. I am only interested in watching this wonderful reaction of Nature’s today by which she is struggling to save the nation from the atrophy of over-commercialization. I am keenly interested to see her effort to save comradeship for the older people, a fresh spirit for the mature and romance for the young. And in this widespread and profoundly necessary effort, although I may not actively cooperate, I feel myself possessing a never-ending interest.

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DOWN AMONG MEN: BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

The Craftsman has become very much interested in the stories of Mr. Will Levington Comfort not merely as stories, although as pure fiction, in which romance is handled with fearlessness, beauty and passion, they rank among the greatest of the day; but as a philosopher we feel that he has presented in all his works the point of view of a man who sees life very sanely, intensely, yet scientifically, who is at once an artist, a traveler, a lover, and greatest of all a friend of humanity.

We have had the pleasure of presenting several of Mr. Comfort’s so-called essays in the magazine. They are not really essays in the usual expression of the word at all; they are really talks abounding with life, full of feeling, keen with love of the world, profoundly sympathetic, with tenderness for the old and young, with eagerness for joy, written by a man accepting sorrow as an elemental and necessary phase of development. One of the essays relates very closely to Mr. Comfort’s book “Down Among Men.” This book is one of the strongest because one of the most sympathetic. There is modern warfare in it, the triumph of physical endurance, wonderful idealism of womanhood, but above all the reiterated purpose of service down among men. And John Morning, the hero, found it necessary in order to understand men and to be of service for them, on one hand to live and work among them and on the other hand to have his quiet hours of thought and silence in his little cabin built on the “lifted corner of a broad meadow.” It is a story of tremendous heroism on both the part of the man and the woman, a story that it seems to us no other man but Mr. Comfort could have made seem real, because at the end the woman is sacrificed to the man’s greater development, and yet reading and loving the book you do not resent this sacrifice any more than the woman herself did. (Published by George H. Doran Company, New York. 287 pages. Price, $1.25 net.)

THE PRINCIPLES OF GREEK ART: BY PERCY GARDNER

This book is an enlargement of Mr. Gardner’s “A Grammar of Greek Art,” a volume which while widely read was somewhat misunderstood owing to the limitations of its title. For the “Principles of Greek Art” several of the chapters were rewritten, revised or corrected, and others were added along with twenty-five entirely new illustrations. These, as all others in the book, were not chosen merely that they might provide a pictorial text, but because they might illustrate some essential Hellenic principle.

Mr. Gardner writes with the ardent desire of one strong in the belief that a lower plane of civilization will be apt to follow should the modern educational curriculum abolish Greek studies; and that the debt