

Dancing for Strength and Beauty



Edward Scott, who was born in 1852 and died in 1937, was one of the last of those figures who had quietly dominated fashionable European dance culture from the mediaeval period to the early twentieth century, the dancing master. For the whole of this period, dancing masters had played a pivotal role in linking the worlds of theatre, court and the wider social sphere, disseminating and sometimes creating new dance fashions while acting as advocates for the social, artistic and historical value of the art of dancing. Scott, who possessed the traditional dancing masters skills as writer, theoretician, artist, musician, dance inventor and historian of his art, had a very successful career as a teacher of social dance, but differed from many of his contemporaries and predecessors in his interest in attempting to reconstruct dancing for performance from past treatises. He sought to counter theatricalised renditions of the earlier dances through serious study, spending time in the British Museum studying primary sources. *Dancing for Strength and Beauty* was published in 1921. The primary purpose of the book is to commend dance not only as an art form but as a form of exercise which will confer both physical and moral benefits on its practitioners. Scott's text ranges from aesthetic considerations of dances to practical instructions for dance exercises to be performed, and on to a discussion of how early dances were originally performed, as opposed to the bowdlerised theatrical versions popular in the 19th century. He devotes particular space to the waltz and minuet: the latter was still used as a means of teaching deportment as late as the 1870s, and Scott seeks to re-establish it as a manly, chivalrous dance. His book ends with a discussion of Classic Dancing - the Greek Ideal in which he pours scorn on some of its early 20th century proponents, commenting that the

only art which survives is that which is founded on the eternal principles of Nature. Whatever was beautiful two thousand years ago is beautiful today, and will be two thousand years hence ... for Nature is the mother of art.

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