CAUSE OF PRESENT TANGO CRAZE? ASTRONOMERS BLAME IT ON THE SUN!

Explanation of the New Dances and of the Waltz, Which Aroused the Same Protests a Century Ago—Tango Is Likely to Be Standarized Soon and Then There Will Be No More Cause for Complaint

Rude sailors of the Brest waltzing very correctly.

ASTRONOMERS say that the tango will last till 1924. Which does not mean that the Archbishop of New York, the Kaiser of Berlin and the Duchess of Norfolk in London will not triumph in their views upon the subject.

The tango of the astronomers is the tango type, the poetry of motion, the maxixe also and perhaps the Very Mustard—all those dances of graceful attitudes and syncopated measure, chefs d'œuvre of rhythm and gesture, the negation of romp and the whirling dervish movement.

But we may even see folks waltz, for we are in a dancing period. It is the sun's fault.

Everybody knows that sun spots regulate dancing; and as it is a critical period of solar activity none may hope—and few would desire—to keep folks from being charmed by rhythmic movement. You imagine that you dance because it is the tango, when it is the tango because you dance!

Which comes to this, there is a time to dance and a time to tire of dancing. The sun's periods of eleven years, its maximums of thirty-three years and grand maximum of once a century correspond very perfectly to the waltz of 1812, the gallop of 1824 (which also ushered in the schottische), the mazurka of 1836, the polka of 1845, the quadrille of 1852, the lancers of 1861, the cancan of 1869, the pas de quatre of 1882, the Boston of 1893, the cakewalk of 1902 and the tango of 1913.

An astronomer could even point out the grand minimum of nothing doing after 1870, and the thirty-three year maximums which gave, just thirty-three years apart, the notable dances of the mazurka, quadrille and Boston.

It is on this principle of grand rerudescence that the tango type ought to last till 1924. Given the present tango anarchy—worse than a certain brand of pickles, there are 120 varieties—it may well require some time to straighten out the new dances.

Because they are new. The quadrille was new, though nothing but the contre danse revived. What matters that I saw "Don Padilla" tangoed at Cadiz in 1892? I saw the cakewalk done at Philadelphia in 1897. Both were brand new to the world when their time came.

Regina Badet in Paris calls the Boston "a waltz for pale persons." Infighting tango—which is surely new—she defines as "a Boston for paler persons." Truly its clutches and wriggles have nothing of the free grace which made Marthe Urbain call the tango "the minuet of the twentieth century." It is all right; the waltz went through similar adventures just a hundred years ago.

A hundred years ago the armies of Napoleon found the peasants of Thuringia dancing a new dance. It was so gay and audacious, so heart melting and fascinating in its music, so novel in step and tempo that the soldiers of the Grande Armee all but stopped fighting to learn it.

It was danced by couples. The man took his partner by the waist, while she clung to his shoulder. The remaining arms were held outstretched, hand clasping hands. And round and round the copies whirled, round and round to music of a new lilt which brought tears to the eyes, a measure at once languorous and agitated, soothing and exciting, sentimental, diabolical.

"Now, that is some dancing!" said the soldiers of Napoleon.

They took the dance with them, taught it to the conquered nations as full compensation and somewhere around 1812 the waltz came to Paris and London.

Imagine a waltz bringing tears to your eyes!

Yet Debucourt called it "the folly of the day." Simultaneously in Paris they waltzed in 1,800 public balls! You might think it the tango. Young folks could not eat ices on the terraces of Bagatelle without jumping up every ten minutes to waltz on the lawn. They waltzed everywhere, in public, in private, in all classes, "from Countesses to Queens" and "maids and valets waltzed behind the scenes."

In the midst of it a great protest similar to that of the present Kaiser, the King of Italy, certain Bishops in France, the Duchess of Norfolk in England and the Mayor of Pittsfield, Mass., arose against the popular new dance. In Paris two famous society leaders—not to mention a very famous Emperor—Mme. de Genlis and Mme. de Stael, proclaimed themselves respectively against it and for it.

The Countess de Genlis, who was also the Marquise de Sillery—of the first great champagne mark—obtained her immense influence by her genius as a writer and her early position as governess in the royal family. At that moment Napoleon was paying her $6,000 a year to write him weekly letters on literature and morals. Mme. de Stael, daughter of the famous Necker, Minister of Louis XVI., was charming as a woman and a notable writer, who with Chateaubriand opened the modern age in all kinds of thought. Napoleon did not like her—and he did not much like waltzing.

Napoleon requested Mme. de Genlis to give earnest meditation to the tango—pardon, I mean the waltz—and to please to write it out for him. They were agreed—against.

Mme. de Stael was for. To-day she would be in favor of the tango. And all three were right and would be right to-day. "Inconvenient" waltzing of 1812 was as objectionable as infighting tango. For months the fate of the waltz trembled in the balance, when

Gentle Genlis, in her strife with Stael
Would e'en proscribe it from a Paris ball!

But, unlike the Kaiser, Napoleon hesitated to move decisively against "the folly of the day." Lord Byron joined the fray and in his celebrated "Ode" expressed his disapproval of taking your partner by the waist, while to keep a grip on her unengaged hand—"To press that hand so pressed by none but thine" appeared to him the limit. So he summed it up:

Can aught from cold Kamschatka to Cape Horn
With Waltz compare, or after Waltz be born?

Evidently, yes, the tango. And now it is all the same thing over again. Progress is an eternal advance—around a circle.

To understand the strife that divided society and animated Lord Byron's "Ode to the Waltz," one has but to glance at the dance prints of the period. There were twenty ways of waltzing, when the waltz was new, just as to-day the tango—but I said that. Half of them were good and half of them were bad. There is an old twopenny colored print—to-day worth $40—of rude sailors of the Brest waltzing very correctly. The man does not touch his partner. With elbows crooked, very saucy, he rests his two hands on his two hips and lets the girl cling to his shoulders.

Cruikshank depicted modest London waltzing. The couples kept far apart. Sometimes the man clasped his hands gingerly behind his partner's waist while she gripped his shoulders. Or he just touched her waist with open palms. A daring couple whirled with his arm around her waist, her right arm leaning on his left shoulder.

The other extreme was a "wild waltz" of Paris—the man held his partner so snugly in his right arm that she could luxuriously repose on his shoulder. As Washington Lopp said to the King of Spain while teaching him the Boston: "It's a touchstone of refinement." And the same might be said of jig, cakewalk and tango. Little by little good taste prevailed and the waltz arrived at veritable heights of delicacy in Paris. The zenith, around 1830, was the "valse roule," the partners going side by side, with their hands clasped behind their backs.

The present danger of the tango is, of course, its infinite variety. When I saw Alexander Kahn, late of Boston, dance the tango with Marthe Urbain, presently of the Paris Opera, in Kahn's offices of the rue Tronchet in Paris to the simple music of a piano, I received the impression of a veritable sweep of gracious movements and noble attitudes. Back and forth and in and out they went very much as I had seen "Don Padilla" danced at Cadiz. It looked a subtler, suppler minuet.

As to the position of the partners, the modern idea in waltzing is perfectly accustomed to your having your arm round the girl's waist. And to lead her you must keep her close. In the tango of Kahn and Urbain, and that of correct Paris society to-day, it is less amazing.

While the position of the man's right arm and the left arm of the girl are the same as in all modern waltzing, the tango step itself demands that the dancers keep apart from each other. One of the prettiest figures seemed to me a so-called backward movement, when the left arm of the man and the right hand of the girl were wedged in between the two partners.

But when I see paid dancers at the tango tea of the Grand Cafe in Paris it is not that at all. It is quite different. It is something like wrestling at a fair—"every grip permitted"—and a gallant man helping a poor girl to pick her way out of a messy place.

There are now 120 figures, they say, of the tango.

It was so easy in the beginning, and now you know why it is so difficult at present. So few knew the beautiful old dance in the beginning that whoever dubbed himself a teacher might add something that was all his own. Doubtless, also, it got tangled in the Argentine.

One great danger comes from all this. It is the tendency to pair off and dance continually together. A couple who are used to the same figures dance well together. On the other hand a pair who do not know or do not like each other's tendencies or cannot readily feel or guess what the other is going to do find it very difficult to tango together. Even more, the very conception of the tango differs with the person.

So much so that in Paris it is pretty well agreed that this really grand dance will have to be standardized by way of returns to the original simplicity which made it at first the easiest of dances.

I do not say "a return," but "returns." That early tango, welcomed as the easiest of dances, which any one could learn and which stout matrons of 60 rejoiced in, would be tango A. And half a dozen other models—every one will come to know them—will bring order out of chaos and preserve the first great modern dance of unhaste from a bad name.

How otherwise has it an excellent reputation here and a less excellent there? Why does the King of Italy rule it out and the Czar of Russia recommend it? Why do certain French bishops brand it as a "powerful dissolvent of French morality," while the remainder observe benignant neutrality? Evidently there must be something more than individual good taste. There are two tango tendencies!

So much so, I repeat, that already in some of the highest Paris circles the tango is danced under another name!

The alias is the maxixe, the "Brazilian maxixe." This "charming dance," whose attitudes are "infinitely graceful," will not shock the prejudices against which the tango struggles. As an aristocratic American matron said to a French duchess, "Thank goodness, it cannot cause the least offence to the most delicate!" Its character is "essentially different."

And, note you, all this is true in a way. While the tango is becoming more and more a wilfully and intentionally slow dance, the maxixe is a dance of movement, and its attitudes are gayer, franker and more varied. And here is another good thing. While the figures of the maxixe are far less numerous than those of the tango, yet the positions of the couples change continually!

Finally the essential step of the maxixe is a lengthened polka step, very gliding. You will therefore be surprised to learn that the music is so similar that it is possible to dance the maxixe to the tango and the tango to the maxixe! To step from one to the other and back again is a favorite amusement of the young in the beginning of 1914! Some call it the maxixe tango. Others call it the tango maxixe.

Still others call it just the maxixe, the Brazilian maxixe. In truth it is simply standardizing tango. In some of the stricter public dancing teas, they don't dance any other. I have watched them at the Sans-Souci in Paris and it resembles very perfectly the dance of Kahn and Urbain. It resembles also "Don Padilla."

Slipping back and forth from maxixe to tango stops those sleeping sickness tango wriggles, while the music alone would keep the couples going in a sweeping dance of dignity and beauty.

In standardized tango they will go back to ancient music. Modern tango music has done great harm. Fortunately the maxixe is danced chiefly to old "Brazilian" music of real value and a rare and taking rhythm. Certain of them are old popular airs, like "Don Padilla," and must be described as pure chefs d'œuvre of rhythm. So the tango when it comes to its own again. Of course, you know, it is not really Argentine, and in a recent symposium of London society leaders Lady Helmsley struck the true note.

"It is a pity," said Lady Helmsley, "that the old Spanish dance, the tango, quite graceful in its original form, should in the course of its indirect introduction into our country have acquired so many of the objectionable characteristics now associated with it."

And finally Lady Byron has just called it a "romp."

Unfortunate tango! I would back English girls to romp through almost anything; but the tango, whatever be its faults, is the negation of romp!

And here is its charm, its reason for being. Repose, ah, repose! Previously when any but sixteen-year-old girls waltzed or quadrilled they got tired. Men, especially after 24, had no desire to whirl and get winded. Quite young men had come to say, "I don't dance." Hostesses were so hard up for dancing men that they founded a play on it, "The Man From Whiteley's."

But they dance the tango! Why? Because the tango eliminated the jump and brought in an easy plastic movement. Why, the primitive tango, which we all learned was the easiest of dances, as the waltz is the hardest. It will become as easy again, as easy as the minuet and as precious for developing grace.

I speak of tango type, the tango of the astronomers.

I speak of standardized tango, ancient Spanish tango, tango maxixe, or whatever healthy forms are bound to come. In any case it is the first dance since the minuet and the gavotte to do away with the "whirling dervish movement" which captured the world with the waltz.

A hundred years is a long time to whirl.

Craze of the day, by Debucourt.

"Wild Waltz" in Paris 100 years ago. Napoleon considered it as bad as the Kaiser considers the tango.

Height of waltz delicacy in Paris around 1830. It is the "valse roule."

Specimen of Dancing by Cruikshank.

Listening to the Busy Idler

How various his employments whom the world
Calls idle, and who justly in return
Esteems that busy world an idler too.
—WILLIAM COWPER.

THROUGH the little narrow street crawled a funeral procession dragging its sombre way northward toward the Williamsburg Bridge. On either side of the street rickety houses reared their shabby fronts toward the gray sky. Draggled women and plaintive babies crouched on dilapidated doorsteps, frowsy men and grimy children slouched on the sidewalk. And through this gloomy quarter the tiny white hearse with its retinue of black carriages rumbled and rattled its way.

The hearse was drawn by a pair of gaunt gray horses, skinny to emaciation, miserable brutes, seemingly predordained to just such dismal tasks. The driver, despite his tall hat and rusty frock coat, displayed no remnant of dignity, for his red eyes and dropping, scrubby jowl betrayed his weakness. The little white vehicle itself was fearfully and wonderfully made, its thin white paint was scratched off in many places, its soiled glass scarcely revealed the tiny casket within, the tawdry painted figures of kneeling angels, perched tremulously on the four corners, were almost ridiculous in their raw crudity; the swaying tassels, once white, were now frayed into limp threads and stained a dirty yellow.

But the spectators saw none of these things; indeed the common feeling was voiced by the lips of a blowsy woman, who peered nearsightedly after the procession, as she rasped to her curious neighbors:

"Sure, dears, it is a grand funeral the Giordanis be havin'."

IT was between three and four of a beautiful afternoon. Up and down Fifth avenue the wonderful traffic of the town rolled like a broad belt drawn forever over an invisible flywheel. Motors, carriages, ponderous clattering buses surged on and on in endless succession, save where at the street corners the white gloved hand of the traffic policeman checked and held for a moment.

In the middle of Forty-second street, where the bustle was most dense, stood a tall, superbly erect policeman, gray mustached and gray haired, a man who might well have been the object of Arnold Bennett's famous query: "Who is that in the blue uniform? A grand duke?" Perfectly calm, wonderfully efficient, this single man noiselessly and surely stopped and started, swerved and switched, the humming tangle of vehicles.

Over on the eastern sidewalk a mass of people teetered and craned forward, waiting for an opportunity to cross. The policeman, turning to them, shook his head, beckoning them to wait for a moment; but even as he forbade passage there skipped out from the crowd an elderly, much overdressed, more overpowdered woman. By no less than a miracle she dodged a speeding limousine, slithered under a horse's nose and reached the centre of the driveway determined to push her way across. In that rush of traffic it seemed that she must be struck and hurled down beneath the grinding wheels; but just at the very instant that she passed the policeman there came a shrill blast from the police whistle, blown directly in her ear.

The shock seemed fairly to hoist the woman two feet into the air, and as she came down the officer, with a quick forward step, seized her arm. Then, with hand lifted in warning, he escorted the woman to the curb with the exquisite courtesy of an ambassador, bowed gravely, and returned to his post.

Again the traffic shot forward, and the officer, turning toward the interested crowd, slowly and solemnly winked one eye.

BEFORE a certain shop window adjacent to Greeley Square was gathered a large group of people. Nor was the group composed exclusively of men, for through the shoving mass jostled many women, young and old, chic and shabby, all craning to peer through the plate glass.

Impelled by the inevitable metropolitan curiosity that stampedes a crowd at the wail of a fire engine or clots it before a steam riveter, even though an engine passes every day and a riveter plies its deafening clatter every hour, the Busy Idler sifted through the jam and saw: a wax figure!

But such a figure! Resplendent in rose paint and white enamel, effulgent in taupe silk and crystalline rhinestones, the lovely lady sat, hypnotizing her admirers with a saccharine smile that Circe herself might have envied. But it was neither the face nor the smile that held the throng. Not at all. Indeed, be it said truly, the waxen lady owed her attractive qualities to the cut of her skirt, if a yawning gap from hem to waist may be described as a cut, and through the revealing charm there appearing almost a yard of sheerest brown hosiery clasped just above the knee by an unbelievably scintillating band of jewelry.

But the tenets of morality are irrefragable and vice can never be so flaunted in the face of virtue, for the next morning found the lovely lady veiled and enshrouded in lovely taupe drapery, so discreetly cemented together that but the merest tip of a brown slipper ventured to the gaze of Broadway.

IT is not the purpose of the Busy Idler to enlarge upon racial distinctions nor to indulge in invidious or uncomplimentary comparisons between white and black. However, a little incident that occurred recently on a Columbus avenue car seems worthy of note and may induce a more charitable view toward the black brother.

It was in one of those rickety and antediluvian street cars that still exist in New York that the incident took place. This car, introduced into the service long before the era of the cross-seat, was jammed as usual with a throng of homegoers. The parallel seats were jammed, and several men were standing; but when an old woman tottered down the car a gray haired old darky, dressed in careful black, rose and with a respectful bow offered his seat next to a motherly negro mammy, who was evidently his wife.

But before the feeble old woman could reach the vacant place a much besotten white man had lurched into the gap. The darky said nothing, did not even alter the expression on his face, until presently the interloper began to address insulting remarks to the colored mammy. The old negro endured this for a block or two, but finally as his wife looked at him appealingly he leaned over quietly, picked up his bag, and, beckoning his wife to follow, got off the car.

The white man looked after them soddenly, then quickly dozed off to sleep, murmuring something about "them fresh niggers."