

The Art of Gesture.

The charge that Englishwomen are too stolid and undemonstrative is one that has often been brought against them, but perhaps rarely with more force and pleasantry than in the following article by Mme. Carmen Turia, the famous Spanish Court dancer. In her rejoinder, Miss Lily Elsie denies that gesticulation, as it is practised on the Continent, is necessary for grace or complete expression. Our readers will decide for themselves which of the fair exponents has the best of the argument.

I.—The Continental View. By Carmen Turia.



"Ah, what lovely flowers!"



"My breath was fairly taken away!"



"Sweet wasn't the word!"

IN the eyes of their Continental sisters Englishwomen have made many strides in recent years in the art of being attractive. They look better, they dress better, they walk better, they talk better. And yet, in spite of their beauty and their clothes

woman and a Spaniard, or a Frenchwoman, or an Italian? I will tell you. It is a question of life, or, rather, of liveliness. Vivacity is the word. We on the Continent are alive; an Englishwoman seems to think it is "bad form" to be alive. That is the only explana-



"Weren't you just a little bit jealous?"



"Oh, what a plight I was in!"

and their health, they—oh, how can I bring myself to say it?—they do not charm. Why? What is the difference between an English-

tion I can give for her apathy, her listlessness, her plentiful lack of *verve* and gesture and facial expression.

Mind you, I don't say that your fair compatriots are not really alive, that they are not full of emotions and passions and impulses as other women, but they do not in society or on the stage reveal that they are alive. They want to appear like dressed-up dolls, and the reason of this is that they have never properly been shown how to live.

What is the great overwhelming, outstanding fact of Nature?—Life. What is the one great manifestation of Life?—Motion. If you do not move, how are people to know that you are alive? How are you different from a dressed-up waxen mannequin?



"Well, of course, there you are!"

of an Englishwoman, is only one of the instruments of speech. And that is why the talk of an Englishwoman is so ineffective. That is why her thoughts might just as well be conveyed by a printed book or a phonograph. She tells you that she loves "madly, passionately," in the same tone and with the same manner that she orders a leg of mutton at the butcher's. On meeting you she protests that she is delighted to see you with the same air that she announces that it is likely to rain. A dreadful calamity

has occurred—someone has been run over; her husband has failed on the Stock



"Do you really, really mean it?"



"Don't speak of it!"

Nothing so amuses, and occasionally astounds, foreigners—even Americans—as the phlegmatic manner in which an Englishwoman converses. Of the art of gesture she seems to know and care absolutely nothing. Her talk lacks all the accompaniment of rhythmic appropriate movement, for she talks only with her tongue. You cannot express yourself only with your tongue—that is to say, you cannot if you wish to convey your thoughts effectively; for the tongue, even



"My dear, I was perfectly astounded!"

Exchange; her child has broken his leg; her new ball-dress has been spattered with ink; her *inamorato* has just married somebody else—and she communicates the fact with a wealth of gesture that would be adequate if one's soup or coffee were cold or one's coiffure were deranged:

Of course, there are exceptions even among Englishwomen. During my stay in England I happened upon a group of young ladies having tea on the lawn. I was struck by the

beautiful animation in their faces and by their rapid and graceful gestures. There was no lack of life here—no want of fresh and wholesome vivacity. I was delighted at what I saw, just as you would be. I had got so weary of apathy, of listlessness, of phlegm. To behold those bright girls, with their sensitive, mobile faces, across which each thought, each sentiment, chased each other like the glittering of wings—the wings of the soul—in a clear and sunny sky, was a rare pleasure. Even at a distance one entered into the spirit of their communion. But a doubt assailed me. Were these really Englishwomen? Could they be Englishwomen? If so, then the art of gesture had advanced indeed, and there was a chance that the ranks of its disciples would soon penetrate all over the kingdom. And



"He was off like a flash!"

became the prey of her emotions. Fear, love, hate, despair struggled for mastery. She flung out her arms, her body swayed, her bosom heaved, and then the torrent burst forth, and, with much graceful gesticulation, she told her story." That was written by one of your great writers.

If gesticulation were really unnatural or unwelcome, it would not be so much admired as it is when practised by some graceful

exponent. Gesticulation is half the art of acting. When a stage lover makes a declaration of his love, he places his hand on his heart, and every spectator, male and female, in the house knows that that is just where his hand—in fact, both his hands—should be, and not toying with a cigarette or jingling the small change in his pocket. When a person is distressed the



"Oh, what was I to do?"



"Won't you, please—for me?"

then came the shock. "Oh, yes; they are English. But they are *deaf and dumb!*"

The art of gesture! That is it. Why is it not taught in your homes—in your schools? Why are Englishwomen stolid? Is it not worth teaching? Or is it a lost art in England? For if we are to believe your novelists, English girls once had as much grace of facial and manual expression as they were rich in vocal attributes. "She raised her beautiful eyes, and her whole face

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hand flies to the brow. When a repellent thought occurs, we dismiss it with a wave of the hand. All these actions are thought theatrical, and yet has not your Darwin shown that they are natural—that people who feel deeply express their emotions with their hands and features? But the English, man and woman, try to hide their feelings, as if they were ashamed of them. And then you wonder why they have no charm; how it often comes about that a plain-featured

foreigner manages to interest — nay, to fascinate—the insular man or woman! The secret is really simple. He or she has “charm”—in other words, vivacity; in other words, gesture. So is not the art of gesture worth being cultivated? Think of what your theatres would be without gesture. How could your actors or actresses do without it? Your famous Sir Henry Irving showed you what could be done with gesture and facial play in “The Bells”; and you applauded him to the echo, because you knew that a person in such a situation ought to act in just such a way. Yet off the stage people are so gauche that a mere shrug of the shoulders is called “Frenchy.” Can it be that musical comedy is responsible for some of what I can only call gestural stupidity? You should see what some foreign critics say of the ladies in your musical comedy.

There is, for instance, Mr. Alan Dale, the American critic, who writes:—

“You watch these lovely, languorous English girls with afternoon tea voices and you are bored. You don’t want to go again. Every one of these ‘gells’ looks like a perfect lady brought up to say, ‘I’ll take a lump of sugar in my tea and a little cream. Thank you so much.’ Her attitudes are full of gaucherie. She has, as the French say, two left hands.”



“Oh, what was I to do?”

Such a creature is too awkward even to shrug. And yet what eloquence of suggestion there is in a shrug! Then the quick raising of a hand or an eyebrow—a nod, or shake of the head—a suggestion of *empressement*—an indication of feeling in the movement of the torso.

Ah, believe me, gesture makes all the difference between brightness and stupidity. I can say, “My dear, I was perfectly astounded,” just as if I were declining a second lemon ice, or I can utter it as I feel it and my auditor knows exactly what I mean. A phrase like that is capable of fifty modes of expression. It may be tragic or comic, indignant, satirical, or mildly humorous. It is only in England that “Won’t you, please?” or “Weren’t you just a wee, wee bit jealous, dear?” can be uttered as if one were asking for a piece of cake.

With all my admiration for Englishwomen, I contend that they can no more do without grace and ornament in their talk than they can do without these accessories in their dress. By dint of patient effort and study of the women of the Continent they have become well-dressed. By similar endeavour and similar example they may become well-spoken.

II.—The English View. By Miss Lily Elsie.

From Photographs by Foulsham & Banfield.

IF I were asked what is the real charm of the Englishwoman—how does she differ from the Frenchwoman, the Spaniard, or the American?—I would say it is in her repose. She does not find it necessary, in order

to be expressive, that she should agitate her features, beat the air with her hands, and perform curious and not always pleasant motions with her head and shoulders. Between ourselves and the women of the



"Won't you, please—for me?"



"Weren't you just a little bit jealous?"



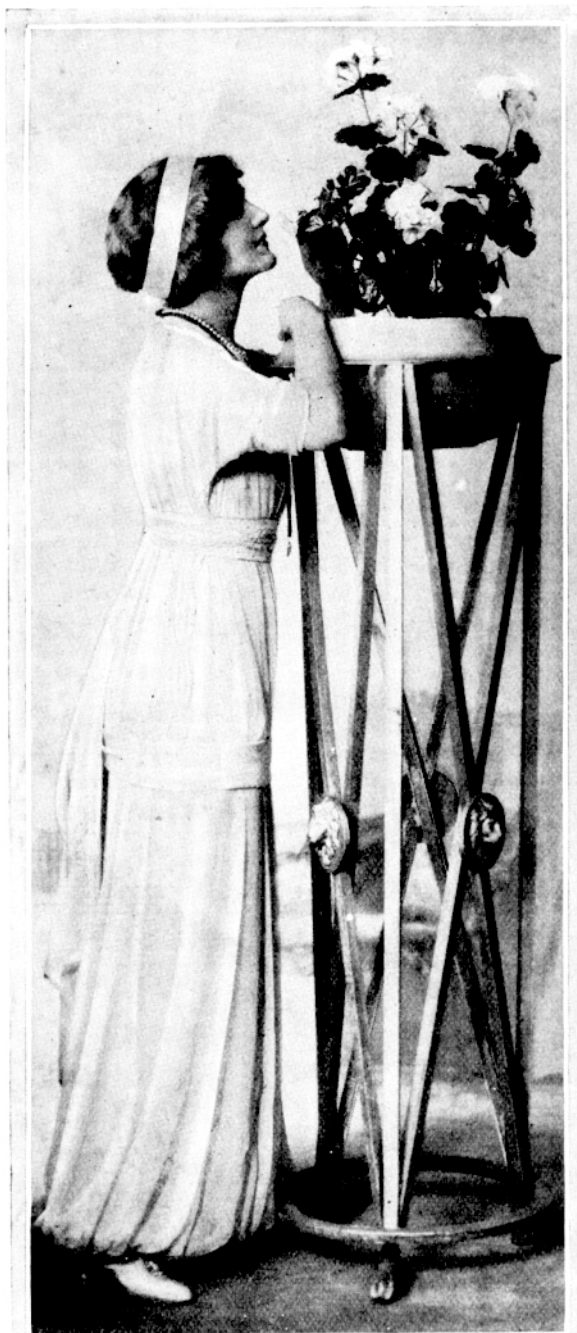
"Sweet wasn't the word!"



"My dear, I was perfectly astounded!"

Continent it is not only a question of temperament; it is a question also of the adequacy of our language — of our personal vocabulary — to express our thoughts, however intense they may be. For, if you will notice, the more cultured and refined French and Italian ladies do not find it so necessary to gesticulate. In fact, I have noticed that many of the *haut ton* hardly gesticulate more than we do. But amongst those whose vocabulary is limited there is a natural struggle for expression, which is more easily produced by gesture. If a person cannot find a proper word and is impatient, a shrug or a wave of the arms will do.

Then, I hope I may be allowed to utter a word in favour of gentleness and reticence. I suppose these are growing old-fashioned, but I cannot believe they will die out altogether amongst



"Ah, what lovely flowers!"

Englishwomen. I think many Englishwomen would be sorry if all of our sex grew fiery and tumultuous and exchanged a soft and winning grace for the somewhat alarmingly *empressée* manners of our Continental sisters and rivals. Personally, I do not at all think it necessary to grow excited because my tea is brought to me cold instead of hot, or because I am discussing a friend or the weather. It is not stolidity because we prefer to be placid; and our lack of vivacity in private is no indication that we are incapable of enjoying life. It is by no means necessary that we should be exuberant in order to be attractive, and I think, too, that the English modulation of voice is often far more expressive than if we indulged without stint in

pantomime, which is generally not the friend but the enemy of true feminine grace.