

V A N I T Y F A I R

May, 1915

THE TRUTH ABOUT ISADORA DUNCAN

By Arthur Hazlitt Perry



A YOUTHFUL DUNCAN PUPIL
From a photograph by Arnold Genthe

MISS DUNCAN is always being misunderstood. It is apparently her fate in life. Looking back over her adventurous career there have been so many times when the harsh world misunderstood her that it is a matter for open-minded discussion if she is ever likely to be properly understood at all.

She is a truly remarkable woman. She never dances, acts, dresses, or thinks like anybody else. She is essentially the child of another age, a twentieth century exponent of a by-gone civilization. She missed her cue to come on, by twenty-three hundred years.

But her passion for classical methods of life is naturally a little at variance with the sordid, workaday ideals of our own time, and so, inevitably, she clashes with them—and still remains misunderstood.

Miss Duncan began life in California, where, as a little girl, she was taught dancing by her mother, who had organized a successful dancing school in San Francisco. When only eight years old she was helping her mother to instruct the younger of the pupils in the school.

HER public life began at the age of sixteen when she came to New York and joined Augustin Daly's company. It was then that she made her début as the "First Fairy" in Mr. Daly's production of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream." But it was not long before she broke with Mr. Daly and went to England. From there she went for a long visit to Greece, and with that visit her true artistic life, and her zeal and ardor as a teacher, really began. From that visit she has lived the life of a dweller in the age of Pericles.

ISADORA DUNCAN

She has carried the ideals of the Greeks, and their manner of dressing and dancing, triumphantly into four great countries.

In Germany she appeared at Bayreuth. She also founded and equipped there two successful schools for young girls, one at Darmstadt, and one at Grünewald, near Berlin.

In France her vogue and her influence have been wide. Her school there, at Meudon, has been in a measure the cause of a great French revival of Greek, or rhythmic, dancing.

All of her European schools, Darmstadt, Grünewald and Meudon, are now being used as hospitals for soldiers wounded in the War.

In England she has always met with success, both as a teacher and as a professional dancer.

Her career in America is fairly well known.

TWO years ago, after the tragical death of her children in Paris, she decided altogether to give up her professional life, and returned to Greece—where she somehow felt that she wished to end her days. But she was persuaded to return to Europe and once again take up her work as a teacher of the young.

Since her arrival, last fall, in New York, she has appeared with her pupils at Carnegie Hall; at the Metropolitan Opera; and last of all, at the Century Opera House.

The world's misunderstanding of Miss Duncan is a matter simple enough to those who are at all familiar with her life and teachings. We are forever thinking of her merely as a dancer and as an exponent of dancing, whereas her avowed mission is not only to teach dancing, but, in a far broader sense, to teach *life*.

By "teaching life," she means, first of all, health; and then beauty, and then freedom, and poise, and courage, and idealism, and music, and, finally, self-expression.

"Self-Expression!" Yes, that is the term most frequently used by Miss Duncan in describing her work in life. Her theory—and it seems a reasonable one—is that the emotions, especially such of them as are aroused by music, or by the contemplation of anything spiritual or beautiful, may be more or less directly and spontaneously expressed *physically*: and that this physical self-expression leads, in turn, to new forms of beauty, because of the gradual acquisition by the pupil of increased grace, strength, control, and poise.

