

Rameau's "Nouvelle Methode" (Part 1)

Translated by Ellis A. Rogers

ABBREGE
*DE LA NOUVELLE METHODE DANS
L'ART D'ECRIRE ou DE TRACER
TOUTES SORTES DE
DANSES DE VILLE*
Dedié à
Son Altesse Serenissime
Mademoiselle de Bayaulois
et Mise au jour Par le S^r RAMEAU Maître
à Danser Ordinaire de la Maison de
sa Majesté Catholique, la Reine seconde
Douairriere d'Espagne.
Et seul privilegié du Roy pour la corection
et augmentation de la Choregraphie
Ouvrage
tres utile pour toutes Personnes qui ont sçu
ou qui apprennent à Danser, puis que par le
Secour de ce livre, on peut se remettre facile-
ment dans toutes les Danses que l'on a appris
On trouve *Se vend 5.^{te} broché* *dans les*
mêmes *et 6.^{te} reliez en vau* *endroits*
le livre *du*
Maître *de*
Paris
L'auteur faubourg mont marthe
à la Vilette a la Croix d'or rue s^{te} jacques
Jacque Josse rue s^{te} jacques a la cloplombroye
le s^r Boivin rue s^{te} Honore a la regle d'or
le s^r des-hayes rue charlot au marais Renou sculpteur

This article appeared in Issue 8 of the Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society Journal, 1978. In 1980, the journal title became Historical Dance, starting with Volume 2 Issue 1. The original layout did not have a title on this page, so it has been added.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

The 'Abbrégé de la Nouvelle Methode dans l'Art d'Ecrire ou de Tracer toutes sortes de Danses de Ville' was first published in 1725 in Paris. It was, as Rameau says himself, a sequel to his book 'Le Maître à Danser' published earlier in the same year and an attempt to assist the readers of his earlier book to grasp the essentials of the individual dance steps.

The 'New Method' is based on the old 'Feuillet' notation, modified or augmented by Rameau, to give the reader a far more detailed and accurate picture of the steps. Unfortunately the new system was not adopted by others and authors of books on dancing chose subsequently to revert to the earlier notation, probably because it was so much easier to draw.

The author, Rameau, was dancing master at the Court of the Queen of Spain, Elizabeth Farnese (1692-1766), the second wife of Philip V of Spain.

His earlier work 'The Dancing Master' was first translated into English in 1728 by John Essex and the later (1931) version by Cyril W. Beaumont is well known. As far as I know the 'New Method' has not previously been given in English. Throughout the book I have followed the general practice of all English Dancing Masters of the 18th Century in translating 'plier' as 'sink' rather than as 'bend the knees'. I personally find that the instruction 'sink', when used in teaching these dances, has the more desired effect on the carriage of the students. In the original it is not always clear whether a jump is to be made from one foot to another or onto the same foot (i.e. a hop). I have, therefore, translated 'Sauter' as 'to hop' where I thought it would help the reader. All the words in brackets and the footnotes are additions of my own.

It was not thought advisable to reproduce the original illustrations as age has caused fading and despite the use of electronic contrast enhancement techniques, the results were disappointing. I have therefore re-drawn all the diagrams directly referred to in the text and, at the same time, taken the opportunity to correct the most obvious errors (and to, no doubt, add some of my own).

My original draft of the translation might have gained me 3/10 for effort but the final version seen here is, in no small way, due to the time and effort expended on corrections to my version by Nathalie Dolmetsch, Peggy Ellis, Peggy Dixon and Anne Daye.

My thanks to them all.

- ELLIS A. ROGERS

A CONCISE VERSION
OF THE NEW METHOD IN THE
ART OF DESCRIBING OR DRAWING
ALL TYPES OF
TOWN DANCES

Dedicated to
Her Serene Highness

Mademoiselle de Baujaulois

And presented now by Mr Rameau Dancing Master
in ordinary to the Court
of her Catholic Majesty
the second Dowager Queen of Spain.

Exclusively licenced by The King
for the improvement and augmentation of choreography
Such a work

being most useful for everyone who has learned
or is learning to dance, since by the aid
of this book one may readily call to mind
all those dances one has learned.

For Sale at
addresses
THE
MASTER.

at the
lodging
of

Sold at 5th Paperback
6th Calfbound

the same
the book
DANCING

IN PARIS

The Author, Faubourg Mont Marthe.
I. Villette at The Golden Cross. Rue St. Jacques.
Jacque Josse at The Royal Dovecote. Rue St. Jacques.
Mr. Boivin at The Golden Measure. Rue St. Honore
Mr. Des-Hayes Rue Charlot in the Marais

Eng. Renou.

To
Her Serene Highness
Mademoiselle de Beaujollois

Mademoiselle,

The respect with which I present to Your Serene Highness this new treatise on Choreography, is a natural tribute to the protection you afford the fine arts and to the perfection

One is, in fact, overcome with respect and pleasure at seeing Your Serene Highness demonstrate with such accuracy and ease the various characteristics of the dance you wish to show.

The very Graces seem to move as you step and the noble and majestic air which accompanies all your movements gives rise to no less admiration than pleasure. If your simple pastimes, Mademoiselle, inspire such high esteem, then what idea we have of the elevated sentiments, Y.S.H., only the most sublime spirits amongst us are worthy to evaluate.

I would be overcome with happiness, Mademoiselle, if you would deign to approve my work, of which the noblest use shall be to set down correctly those dances which will have been most pleasing to Y.S.H. and perhaps to transmit to posterity those compositions which it has pleased Y.S.H. to give us.

This is the ambition of he who will remain all his life with a most profound respect, Mademoiselle, of Your Serene Highness, the very humble and most obedient servant,

RAMEAU.

PREFACE

AFTER having worked as hard as I could to make known the usefulness of the dance, as much for its own sake as with regard to the code of behaviour in polite society; as can be seen in my book 'The Dancing Master', I thought it would not prove sufficient for these movements to be grasped accurately and for the performance of all these steps according to the rules of the art. I have therefore thought myself obliged to add here this treatise on choreography, to facilitate and shorten the time of study.

It is likewise a recognition of the gratitude which I owe the public for the favourable reception they gave my first work. There are a good number of people who, after having learnt all the dances, forget the way to do them because their practises are interrupted. This treatise will remind them of all that they are beginning to forget and, without having the trouble of sending for new (Dancing) Masters, they will be able to recover for themselves all the various steps and the correct way to perform them. Which will be undoubtedly a very agreeable re-creation them. I say further that the Dancing Masters will not disdain using it themselves. I flatter myself that they will find here a sure method with which to make rules for their dances and, at the same time, so easy that they will not have to hark back to it more than ten times before they completely understand it. Those who have learned the old method will wish to make careful comparisons with those equivalents that I have made in the new. I am confident that they will agree that my additions are justified and that there is no step which I have not marked according to the rules. (of my new system)

RECOMMENDATION

I have examined, by the order of Monseigneur the Keeper of the Seals, 'An Addition to the Old Tables of Choreography' which has seemed to me to be most useful after having it explained to me by the author: I believe that those who long since have wanted help in this method will here find additional information of great accuracy and an easy method of drawing, with greater accuracy, those dance steps which are in the old table.

Given in Paris
20th October 1725

PECOURT.

THE KING'S LICENCE

LOUIS, by the Grace of God, King of France and Navarre:
To our friends and loyal councillors, the gentlemen of Parliament, Comptrollers in ordinary of our Household, Grand Council, Provost of Paris, Bailiffs, Senators, their civil Lieutenants and those others of our Justices it concerns, Greetings. Our good friend Mr. RAMEAU, Dancing Master in ordinary to the House of our very dear and very much loved sister The Queen of Spain, has shown us once again that he has carried out many years application and labour during which time he has drawn up and composed these works for the perfection of Dancing, as he gave us previously, and which he will give in continuation, designed and engraved by himself, of his own composition and invention, and which being as successful as one would wish it to be; and desiring but to engrave or have engraved and have printed a 'New method for teaching how to write or draw on paper all types of dances which at the same time gives instructions on how to make all the steps according to its rules'. In order for it to be made public in all its perfections he has needed our Letters of Privilege which, in response to his most humble request to us, We have given and present the same to the engraver, to be engraved and printed on good paper and in good typecast, conforming to the page printed, and attached as a sample under the counterseal of this Licence. Further to this purpose, wishing to treat favourably the said petitioner and to give him those marks of distinction that his work and talents merit, We have allowed and allow him, by this Licence, to have printed and illustrated, by such illustrators, printers and booksellers he chooses, the said New Method for teaching how to write or draw on paper all kinds of Dances, which at the same time gives instructions on how to make all the steps according to its rules, in one or several volumes, conjunctly or separately and in such quantities as pleases him, on good paper and in good typecast conforming to the page printed, and attached as a sample under the counterseal of the said Licence, and to sell it, cause it to be sold and retailed throughout our Kingdom for the term of eight years consecutively to be recorded from the date of the Licence. We forbid all sorts of persons of whatever quality and position they may be to introduce a spurious printing or engraving of it, in any part of our realm. This also applies to those engravers, printers, booksellers, copper plate engravers, and others who copy, cause to be copied, print, cause to be printed or engraved, write or cause to be written, sell or cause to be sold, retail or counterfeit the said New Method as before expounded, either complete or in part, neither must there be made any extract on any pretext whatsoever, nor addition, correction, changes of title whether on individual pages or otherwise, without the express and written permission of the said petitioner or his executors; On pain of confiscation of these copies, articles, designs, writings, drawings or counterfeits and such instruments as have been used in the said counterfeiting. These we intend to be seized, where-soever they be found, together with 6 thousand Livres fine against

any who thus contravene, a third portion to be given to us, a third to the Hospital of Paris and the other third to the petitioner and his dependants with damages and interest. We charge that this Licence, be sealed and registered in its entirety on the Register of the Society of Booksellers and Printers of Paris within three months from the date of this document, and that the engraving and printing of the said New Method be made in our Kingdom and nowhere else and that the Licensee shall conform entirely to the regulations of the Booksellers and especially to those of the 10th April last; and before offering it for sale the manuscript, illustrated or printed, shall be given, in the same version, for approval into the hand of our very dear and loyal Knight Keeper of the Seals of France, Sir Fleuriau d'Armenonville, Commander of Our Orders; and there will be given in due course two copies to the public records office in the Chateau du Louvre and one to our aforesaid very dear and loyal Knight Keeper of the Seals of France, Sir Fleuriau d'Armenonville, Commander of our Orders. All this on pain of nullifying the Licence. As herein contained you are ordered and enjoined to see that the petitioner or his executors shall enjoy his rights, plainly and peaceably, without suffering that there be to them any trouble or impediment. It is our will that a copy of the said Licence be printed in full at the beginning or the end of the said book, making it known that it is a certified copy of the original. It is our command that first our Bailiff or Sergeant is to make ready for execution all those acts required and necessary, without applying for further permission and notwithstanding hue and cry, special privilege and letters to the contrary; for such is our pleasure, GIVEN in Paris on the 8th of November this year of grace seventeen hundred and twenty five and the eleventh year of our reign.
By the King and his Council.

CARPOT

Entered in the Register No. VI of the Chamber Royal and Society of Booksellers and Printers of Paris N.225-fol.261, conforming to the regulations of 1723 which protect Art IV from all known persons of any station, other than the Booksellers and publishers, from distributing and advertising any books in their own name, whether they claim to be the authors or otherwise; and the cost of furnishing the specimen copy as prescribed by Article CVIII of the same regulations.

At Paris 4th December 1725
Signed
BRUNET
Sindic.

A CONCISE DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW METHOD IN THE ART OF SETTING DOWN OR DRAWING ALL TYPES OF TOWN DANCES

Chapter I

THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF CHOREOGRAPHY

AS this little treatise is only to be a brief description of choreography and is solely concerned with a number of the steps practised in town dances, I have searched for the easiest method by which one could, without much trouble, understand it.

I begin by giving three general principles; one must have a conscious awareness of the space available for dancing, a knowledge of the use one must make of various geometrical lines and also a knowledge of the signs which explain the way the body faces.

I intend, for the dancing space, to assume that every diagram one looks at represents the room or the floor, on which are drawn the steps and figures that one must observe. Following this layout, the top of the room is the top of the page where is placed the music and that part must not contain more bars (of music) than there are (bars) of steps drawn on the various lines.

The two sides; one is the right and the other is the left.

The bottom of the page represents the bottom of the room where one places oneself in order to begin.

In the open space between these boundaries one draws such various figures as the dance requires.

These various figures are formed with the aid of geometrical lines which lead from one spot to another and consequently trace a reliable path guiding your dancer.

The straight line guides one from the bottom of the room towards the top but, if it is necessary for one to return backwards and in consequence be on the same track, then it is necessary to insert a dotted line leading to another line and thereby make it known that one retires back on oneself; this being common practice wherever necessary with other lines.

In order to show which way the body is facing, there is a semicircle upside down and cut off by a line above it, with these distinguishing characteristics, that the cutting line is the front of the body and the rounded part the back; the two sides, one is the right and the other the left, just as it is drawn.

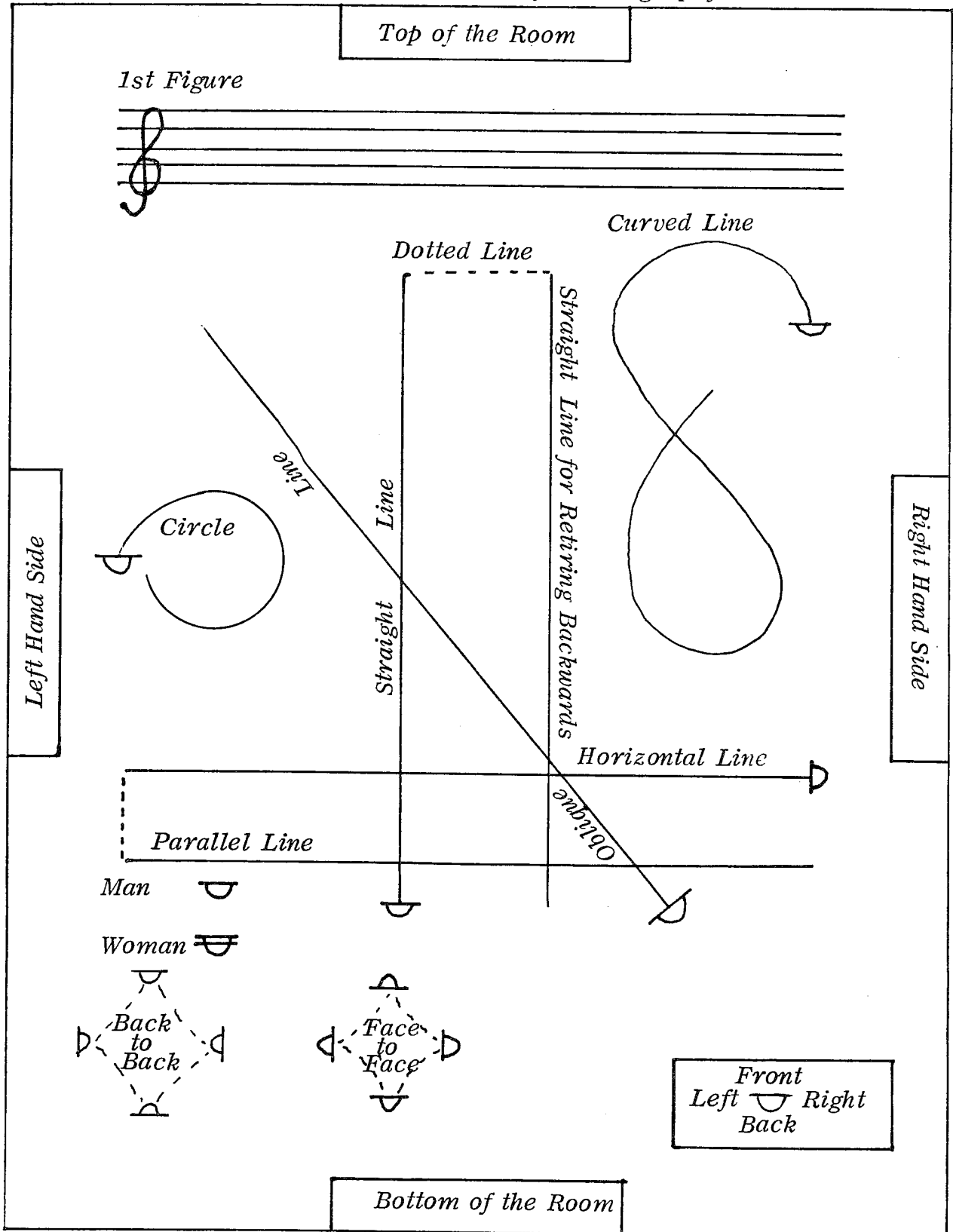
The front of a woman's body is indicated by a double line 2, in order to distinguish it from that of a man.

To give a practical example, I have placed four people back to back 3; and 4 shows four people each one facing the others.

These three principles seeming to me clear enough for there to be no misunderstanding, I pass to the following chapter which treats of the positions and the shape of the hieroglyphics which indicate the steps.

* * * *

Examples of the First Principles of Choreography



Chapter 2

THE POSITIONS AND SIMPLE STEPS

THE POSITIONS are only invented in order to give measurable proportions to steps, either forward, or backward, or to the side, and crossed either in front or behind, these holding the body in an advantageous position for keeping one's balance and enabling the legs to make the steps with more regularity.

The half position, shown in the first square, is called half because it only represents one foot, which is the left, being itself placed on the left of the line.

Explanation of the Foot: Its head is in the shape of an 0, the heel is at 1, the beginning of the stalk coming from the 0; 2 is the instep, the top 3 represents the toe.

The second, is the half position for the right foot, placed for the same reason on the right of the line.

The third, is a whole position, which is the first, the two heels are close together and the toes turned out.

The fourth, is the second position, the two feet separated one from the other by the length of a foot and in line with each other.

The fifth, is the third position which is, having one foot in front of the other, but not more crossed, than to bring the heel of the front foot right up to the instep of the foot which is behind, and the one close to the other.

The sixth, is the fourth position, which is to have the feet in line one in front of the other with the length of a foot between the two. A proportion that one keeps to for steps going forward and going backward.

The seventh, which is the fifth position, is to have the feet crossed one in front of the other, the heel of the foot in front in line with the toe of the foot behind. This position and the second are used for travelling sideways.

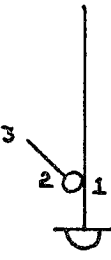

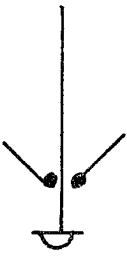
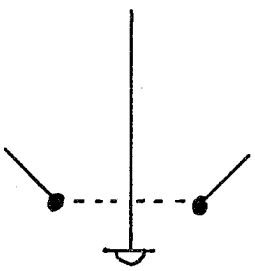
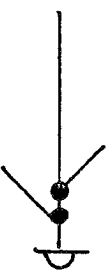
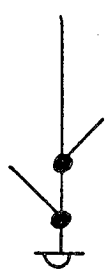
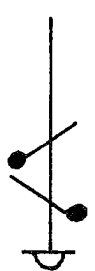
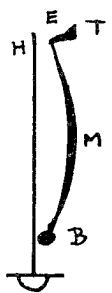
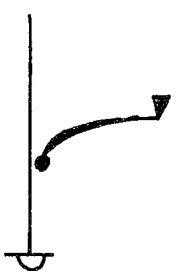



Following from these positions, you must come to understand the steps.

The Step, as a term for moving, is only another word for carrying the foot from one position to another, now forward, now backward, or to the side, crossing it in front of the other, as in the fifth position; or behind, according to the requirements of the step, as shown in the last squares, but it will suffice only to give an explanation of the eighth square, which is a step forward, and this will serve to explain all the others. It is a step forward on the right foot. Which will be recognised in the following manner. It will be seen that the beginning of the step is marked by a black head B in the same way as a note (of music), the shape of the step extends forward up to E, which marks its completion. The sloping line at the end represents the foot, the angle of the line H is the heel and the end of the line T the toe. The middle of the steps M, this indicating that when the foot is raised from behind to be carried forward, the middle of the step is when the two heels are close together. Thus this step has been drawn and explained in all its parts and it will serve to explain the rest of the simple steps in the squares 9, 10, 11 and 12.

All these steps are characterised by hieroglyphics and their meaning explained by the signs marked on them at certain distances, these indicating

TABLE No. 1.

The Positions & Steps.

<p><i>Half-Position of the Left Foot</i></p>  <p>1</p>	<p><i>Half-Position of the Right Foot</i></p>  <p>2</p>	<p><i>First Position</i></p>  <p>3</p>
<p><i>Second</i></p>  <p>4</p>	<p><i>Third</i></p>  <p>5</p>	<p><i>Fourth</i></p>  <p>6</p>
<p><i>Fifth</i></p>  <p>7</p>	<p><i>A Step Forward</i></p>  <p>8</p>	<p><i>A Step Sideways</i></p>  <p>9</p>
<p><i>A Step Backward</i></p>  <p>10</p>	<p><i>Crossed Before</i></p>  <p>11</p>	<p><i>Crossed Behind</i></p>  <p>12</p>

all the different movements and all the actions the leg must make. Thus it is necessary for those people who become interested in this type of drawing to regularly place these signs in the correct places, for unless this is done the steps will not be representative of those that one must make.

I will not speak of the false positions because it would only serve to confuse you, I say only that the true (positions) are also used to show the beats that are found in entre-chats and other beats made in the air; because when you find many positions which are marked by a line crossing the tail, this signifies that the feet are in the air and that these changes of position are only provided to explain the beats that are made when the two legs are off the ground, for those which follow, which are not marked with any sign, they represent where the feet are to be placed when they land, either on one or on both feet.

* * * *

Chapter 3

THE WAY TO HOLD THE BOOK

AS IS SAID in the first chapter, one is to consider any diagram as representing a room or floor, on which the steps are drawn. A convenient way which portrays this well is to hold the book in front of one, open on the palm of the left hand, holding it with the other straight out in front of you so that the top of the diagram, which is the top of the room, is in its correct place.

The book being thus fixed, it only remains to perform the steps that one sees indicated, only they must not be other than forward or backward.

But for those that are made in turning, there is an easy way that I have found by experience. For example, having to turn a quarter turn to the right, the right hand, which follows this movement, moves the book until the left side of it is towards the body. In the same way, if one turns to the left it will be the right side of the book which is to be found towards the body.

With regard to the half turn, the right hand moves the book at the same time, the top of the diagram which corresponds to the top of the room ends up upside-down and in consequence the book is reversed.

One must constantly see that the book is always pointing in the same direction during all the turns one makes, for otherwise one never finds oneself conveniently placed to make the steps which follow those used in turning.

This is why it seemed to me that nothing could better contribute to your understanding, than the following diagrams, which show the manner of travelling on different tracks and to all sides. Thus I beg the interested reader to pay the closest possible attention and miss none of the points until he has understood the use of the various progressive walks.

* * * *

The following erratum appeared in issue 9.

RAMEAU'S 'NOUVELLE METHODE'

Ellis Rogers has asked us to publish the following additions and corrections to Part I of his translation of Rameau's Nouvelle Methode printed in the Journal for 1978 :-

1. THE DEDICATION

- (a) The first paragraph is incomplete. After the word 'perfection' should be added:

' . . . you bring to that one of them that is my own profession'

- (b) In the third paragraph, delete the word 'then' between 'esteem' and 'what idea . . . '

2. THE PREFACE

Line 17. Insert 'for' between 're-creation' and 'them'.