

**THE MUSICAL EDUCATOR; A  
LIBRARY OF MUSICAL  
INSTRUCTION BY EMINENT  
SPECIALISTS. IN FIVE VOLUMES.  
VOLUME THE SECOND**

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The musical educator; a library of musical instruction by eminent specialists. In five volumes.  
Volume the second by John Greig

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**JOHN GREIG**

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BY EMINENT SPECIALISTS

EDITED BY

JOHN GREIG, M.A., MUS. DOC.

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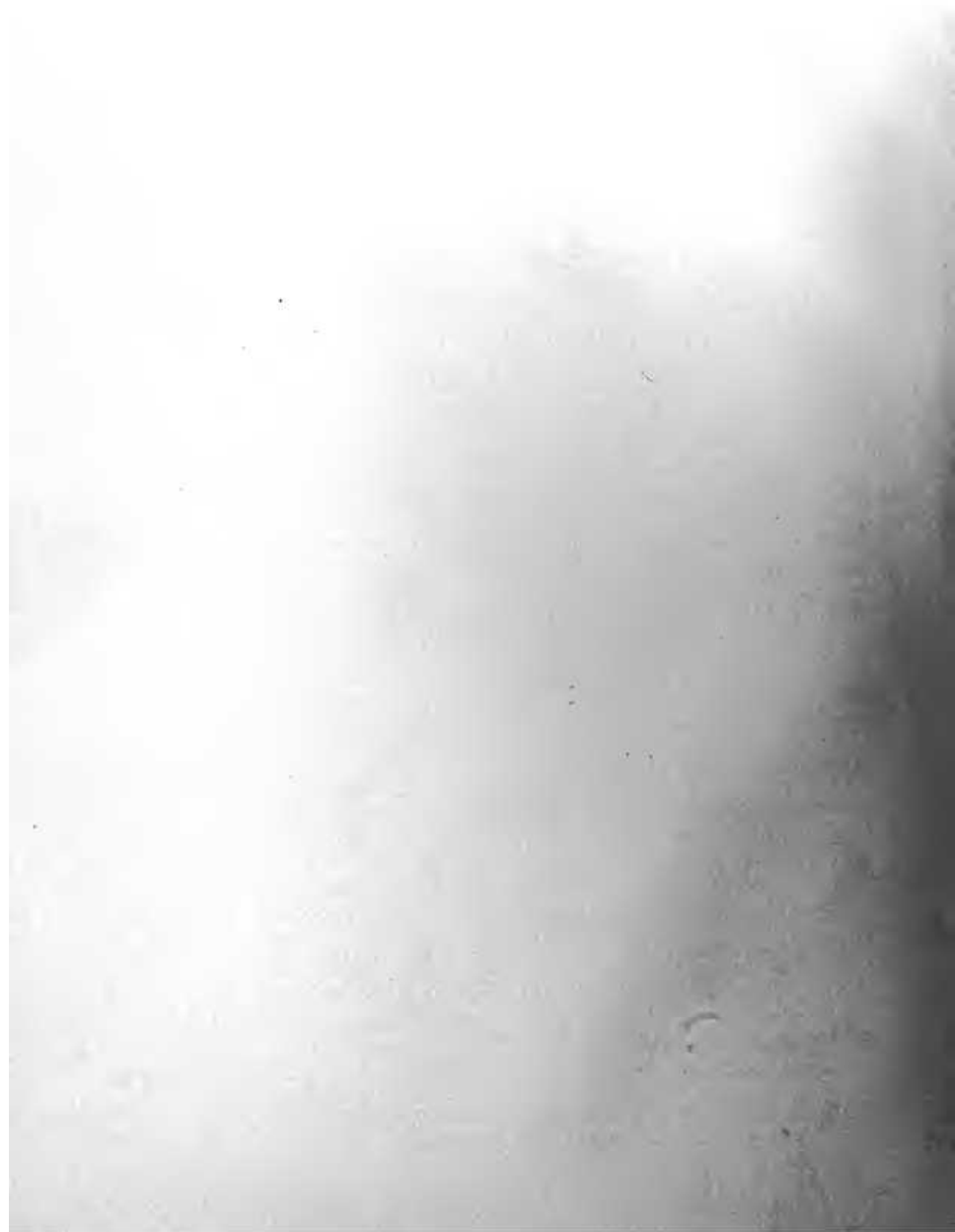
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## THE PIANO AND HOW TO PLAY IT.

BY MARK HAMBOURG.

WE are all so familiar with the modern pianoforte that the fact of its being an entirely modern instrument is apt to be overlooked. Yet, whereas musical instruments of one kind or another have existed from the very earliest times, the inventions that gradually led up to the piano as we know it to-day were not made until about 1720, and no very material advance was made till considerably later than that date. Although it is true to say of the piano that its advance has called into the world the great virtuosi of present times, it is equally true to say that these virtuosi have called into the world the present-day piano, for the improvements in the instrument and in the technique of its players have advanced side by side until it is impossible to say which owes the other the more.

The most familiar forms of early stringed instruments played with keys like the piano were the spinet and the harpsichord. The spinet was known in England as long ago as 1668; but it was not till about 1740 that the first hammer harpsichord made its appearance in this country. This instrument was made by one Father Wood, an English monk at Rome, for a certain Mr. Samuel Crisp of Chessington, and, in writing about it, the contemporary chronicler says: "The tone of this instrument was superior to that produced by quills, with the added power of the shades of piano and forte, so that although the touch and mechanism were so imperfect that nothing quick could be executed upon it, yet in a slow movement, such as 'The Dead March in Saul,' it excited wonder and delight."

The world's first pianoforte was invented and produced by Bartolomeo Cristofori, a Paduan harpsichord maker. His invention of the escapement and check action early in the eighteenth century opened up such wonderful possibilities for the instrument that from that day harpsichord makers and inventors everywhere brought their attention to bear on the subject, and pianos of various kinds were manufactured with varying success by a number of different makers. Of the names known in the pianoforte world to-day the two earliest to attract notice were Broadwood and Erard; but for a long time the attention of these and other firms was directed entirely to the manufacture of grand pianos, and it was not till about the year 1800 that John Isaac Hawkins, an English civil engineer living in Philadelphia, invented and produced the cottage piano, or upright grand. In his original instrument he anticipated almost every discovery that has since been introduced as "novel," and the whole history of pianoforte manufacture began to undergo a complete change from that time.



Without its being necessary to enlarge beyond this upon the development of the instrument, it will at once be apparent to all readers how enormously the possibilities of execution have altered during the last century, and upon what an entirely different instrument than that for which they were written do we now play the works of such men as Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and the rest of the old masters. What, I wonder, would they say if they could see and play on the piano as it is to-day?

Having spoken of the development of the instrument, it may now be as well to speak shortly of the development of its players and the music that was written for it. From the time of Palestrina to that of Bach and Handel instrumental music was written chiefly for the organ. From then till the time of Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart, instrumental music quickly developed; the piano took a predominant place, and there rapidly grew up a romantic school of musicians, among whom may be mentioned Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Chopin. The last named, I venture to say, represents the climax of the development of pianoforte literature; for while, it is true, all the great musicians from Bach up to Chopin contributed their best ideas and creative power, yet Chopin was undoubtedly the bard, the tone-poet, the soul of the instrument. In his music we find all that is best and most full of meaning, his works containing all those varying contrasts that make piano music so fascinating. Tragedy and romance, heroism and fanaticism, lyricism and dramaticism, grandness and simplicity, brilliancy and restfulness, all are there, and his changing moods follow each other in such quick succession that his music exercises a peculiar charm upon every one who listens to it.

As regards performers, the old school, up to Clementi, gave their entire attention to precise and correct execution. If they played the notes and the time correctly, and were able to execute the work in hand more or less smoothly, that quite satisfied them—and the public. Clementi was the first of a school of virtuosi, among whom may be mentioned Steibelt, Dussek, Hummel, Field, Kalkbrenner, Hertz, and, more recently, Dreyschock, Schulhoff, &c., who were virtuosi of the dry order. Although some of them used their virtuosity in a powerful way and others in a delicate way, they all used it as an end instead of as a means to an end, and all of them played, as a general rule, compositions that gave them an opportunity to show off their brilliant technique and their ability to conquer the greatest difficulties. Liszt and Anton Rubinstein were the giants who combined great virtuosity with intellect, feeling, and imagination, and it is through them and their followers that pianoforte playing has reached the highest standard.

It will be obvious to every reader of this article that although brilliant technique may be very interesting as a display pure and simple, yet by its aid alone it is not possible to bring out all that is best in any given work. It is safe to say that until Liszt's day the works of such composers as Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Chopin were never properly understood; nay, it is

even possible that these writers themselves failed to appreciate the meaning and the beauties of many of the passages they penned, the full significance of which was first brought out by Liszt and Rubinstein, who used their virtuosity as a means which enabled them to emphasise the chief beauties of every work, and to drag out from every phrase the fulness of its meaning. Since their day it has been made clear to all but mediocre musicians that the very essence of interpretation is to render all works attempted in such a way that their beauties are at once apparent.

In just the same way that almost every one has a different voice, so has almost every one who plays the piano a different touch; and just as the voice can be improved by training and practice, so can the touch be altered. It is towards the matter of touch that the earliest lessons of the pianist should be directed; for the piano is such a sensitive instrument that the improper use of a single finger may alter the tone-colour of a whole passage, and since tone-colour is such an important factor in musical expression, it is of the utmost importance that the student should have perfect command of the keyboard in this respect.

Of course, the first thing a student has to do is to acquire precision, equality, dexterity, and power. The capacity to modulate the tone will follow. The very name of "piano-forte" indicates that it is an instrument of contrasts, and contrasts are of just as much importance in music as they are in speech. Listen to the great public speaker and you will note how sometimes he emphasises certain passages by uttering them loudly, others by voicing them softly; how he introduces dramatic effect by sudden pauses, and how he accentuates certain words in order to drive home to his hearers the meaning of a whole sentence. The pianist may well take a leaf from his book; for it must be remembered that music at the hands of a capable player is a language of sounds, the meaning of which can be brought home to his listeners every whit as clearly as the speech of a great politician. Indeed, in order to express himself most clearly and to make himself best understood, the pianist must not rely upon his own art alone, but must borrow all that is best from the kindred arts of the speaker, the actor, and the singer, gleaned declamation from the first, dramatism from the second, and resonance from the third. Without these qualities a player's rendering of any composition is bound to be tame and monotonous, and will appear only a lifeless and uninteresting skeleton. Professor Leschetitzky once said: "To make a beautiful composition sound dull and uninteresting is no hard matter, but to make a composition that is itself dull and uninteresting appear beautiful and full of meaning—that is the consummation of the pianist's art!"

Now it will be obvious that, in addition to the ordinary study and practice that are necessary for the acquisition of technical facility, study and practice of an entirely different kind are essential for the cultivation of what may be termed the musical ear, the possession of which is absolutely indispensable. The student must be able to distinguish intervals and chords with discrimination, as well as pitch and all the shades and qualities of sounds, and must train his ear until he

can unhesitatingly distinguish every degree of power, beauty, metre, and rhythm. In very many cases it will be found that, while the ear can easily be trained to distinguish intervals and chords, it cannot be so easily trained in other ways; indeed those who have a perfect ear for pitch are frequently quite deaf to qualities of tone, and *vice versâ*. The fact is that the ear is a delicate organ which has to be very carefully treated if it is to do its work to perfection. It is an interesting fact, for instance, that in cases where the ear has to constantly convey certain sounds to the brain, its use is liable to become impaired. It is no very rare thing for the player, say, of a piccolo to eventually become quite insensible, so far as the particular register of his own instrument is concerned, as to when he is playing in tune. He can readily appreciate any mistake made by the player of a double bass or some instrument with a lower register than his own, but, so far as his own register is concerned, his ear may become worn out, so to speak. In the same way the double bass player may be able to distinguish every difference of tone in the piccolo and be quite insensible to differences of tone in the register of his own instrument. It is thus with the ear just as it is with the palate, which frequently becomes so familiar with certain tastes as to grow, after long and constant use, insensible to certain subtle differences once easily distinguishable. I have diverged to this extent simply to impress upon students the importance of carefully cultivating the ear in all departments equally, and I will now proceed to speak of various technical points which require special study.

I have already referred to the importance of touch. In no branch of piano playing is this more emphasised than in staccato and legato passages. Good staccato and legato is very difficult to attain, and it therefore requires a great deal of study and attention on the part of the student. In legato playing the wrist must be kept steady to such a degree that a coin balanced upon it remains in position throughout the playing of the passage. One finger must not be raised until the next descends. For practising it may be found useful to play scales and exercises in the following manner :



In staccato playing, the best is what is known as "finger staccato," the fingers being made to spring up from the keys as quickly as possible, as though they were touching molten metal, or, in other words, "like a cat walking on hot bricks." There are various kinds of staccato playing (wrist staccato, wrist and finger staccato, &c.), but special attention and work should be devoted to finger staccato, since this is the kind most used, besides that it develops and strengthens the muscles of the hands and fingers to a very remarkable degree. In staccato as well as in legato playing precision and equality are most important, and the equality must be not only in touch but also in time.

Speaking of equality in touch and time, I may here mention the great im-