

COUNTRY PIANO TUNER: HIS STUPID SONG

by

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## FOREWORD

Today's commonplace becomes tomorrow's subject for research. When Robert Frost wrote his "Two Tramps in Mud Time" and mentioned water standing in the wheel ruts and hoof prints, perhaps he did not realize how soon this might need to be interpreted to a generation familiar only with hauling everything with trucks and tractors. Or, more likely, he could foresee the changes and wanted to record the norm of his own period.

Just so with any of the older skills: they are accepted with little thought by people familiar with the craftsman and his product, the serviceman and the mechanism he keeps functioning satisfactorily. Then, some day, the public blinks its eyes open and looks around, amazed that there is no one to do these things any more. The craftsman's product goes from a commodity to a collector's item; the mechanism is subject to planned obsolescence and periodic replacement. Hence it may be of some value to record bits of one tradesman's life and times, in case someone in the next century might wonder just how the thing was done before the trade became completely mechanized.

## WHY IS A PIANO TUNER?

You may have wondered casually how a piano tuner comes into being -- why anyone should wish to spend his working days in solitude but not in silence, listening for sounds that other people do not recognize, flitting about the countryside working a day here and there, never punching a time clock nor getting into line for paid vacations and fringe benefits. In my case it stems from having lived my early years on land now classified as sub-marginal and wresting a living from it so zestfully that I came rather tardily to realize that we were on the losing side as our small agriculture and its prospects dwindled. Except on the economic side, this was as good as being unencumbered by a classification. Agriculture is an ordered way of life, as unhurried as the coming of the seasons -- especially spring -- but hereabouts it has had to give way to patterns of living yielding a more adequate cash income in return for one's efforts.

So come with me for an occasional day; find out what makes me tick; come home with me at the end of the day and find out in just what sort of igloo I doff my mukluks.

In southwestern New Hampshire there is an area bounded by Mount Monadnock on the west, and following somewhat the northerly windings of the Contoocook River, in which I ply my trade. If there is a mile of straight road therein, or at least a mile that is both straight and level, I haven't found it. The sudden turns, revealing outlooks towards mountains, lakes, villages, and farmsteads, point to the ingenuity of early roadbuilders in adapting their efforts to a stubborn terrain. Perched boulders, so common in this area of glacial drift, and outcrops of ledge where the backbone of New Hampshire shows through the thin hide, often determined the course of the older roads and gave them the charm of unexpectedness that is so regrettably lacking in this fill-in-blast-through era.

The country is here; we may as we'll enjoy it. Once largely cleared for agriculture, it has mostly reverted to woodland. Hayfield, where I clipped around the rocks with a scythe, and raked after the loads of hay with a bullrake to glean the scatterings, now supports a growth of trees big enough for timber. So I have a store of things to muse on as I drive through the countryside, see boundary walls in deep woods, and know that this was once pasture or hayfield where neighbors paused at the end of a furrow or a mown swath to visit over the wall, exchange the latest hearsay, and speculate about the weather. I remember distinctly the gnarled neighbor who "worked out" for his livelihood. He would straighten up from his labors from time to time and opine, "Workin' aout for three dollars a day is a slow way t' git rich."

It was in this locale that I reached the conclusion that laboring in New Hampshire farming and orcharding offered little but callouses, also that the more rangy individuals have a huge mechanical advantage in doing physical labor, so I set about finding a way to make my head save my heels, and hit upon piano tuning.

Although not formally trained in music, I had always felt a response to it. There were few resident tuners for some distance around, and those who came into the vicinity to work were mostly mature men. In 1935 a friend, Barton Bachelder, introduced me to Edgar M. Quint of Concord, New Hampshire. Bart told me beforehand, "If Quint likes you, he'll do anything for you, but if not, you'll want to keep out of his way." He accepted me as a pupil, started me off on an autoharp, then graduated me to a piano after a few sessions. Sparing of praise like the typical New England Yankee, Quint did allow that I must have practiced at home what he gave me at each lesson, as he observed that I came back next time with the point pretty well learned.

In any form of instruction one may take, whatever one makes his own is modified by his acuteness or lack of the same, and bettered or worsened by the grade of ideals he tries to adhere to, whether in the quality of workmanship he applies to his job, or in dealing with people, which is part of everyone's job. I often think of a story told by my old friend John G. Herrick, long one of New Hampshire's leading craftsmen: There was a self-made man who got prosperous enough to send his son to college. When the son entered the business world he went right ahead, and a friend remarked to the father, "Your son is getting to be a bigger man than you are." "Why shouldn't he be?" the father replied. "He's standing on my shoulders." Mr. Herrick told me this as an admonition against trying foolish experiments in violin-making which had been tried before, summarizing his advice by adding: "So start in where someone else left off; don't go over the same ground again."

After Quint turned me loose to do commercial work, I did some free jobs for my neighbors, then worked at half price for a while. It was my innocent assumption that people who owned pianos would want to have them tuned. I was in for a jolt. Upon approaching one house where I knew there was a musician in the family, I met a severe-looking man in the yard, and asked, "Do you have a piano in the house, and if so would you care to have it tuned?" He glared at me as if I had uttered some unpardonable insult or had desecrated the tomb of his ancestors and replied savagely, "No, I am glad to say we have not. We are free from that nuisance!" I mumbled a weak "Thank you" and retreated. Later, I learned that the man was a lawyer who specialized in bill collecting, and had the reputation of being the most obnoxious collector in the city where he plied his trade. A natural.

There is also the lifelong influence of one's parents which has a tempering effect on any kind of instruction. My mother had adroit ways of dealing with people, always directed toward improving the object of her ministrations. When young and impudent, full of untested theories, I would openly criticize the judgment or deeds of my parents. Mother would say placidly, "If your parents have not always done as well or as wisely as they might have done, then it is your privilege to do better. Each generation should be an improvement upon the preceding one, otherwise there would be no progress for the race." This reply, couched in wisdom and forbearance, has outlasted the effect of several applications of "oil of birch" by the paternal hand, however well deserved the latter may have been at the time. This sort of precept and example laid the foundations for an attitude of mind indispensable to the independent tradesman -- that of being responsible for one's acts, and of looking first within one's own thinking when things go awry.

## II

### YOU ARE AND YOU AREN'T

Many people assume that a piano tuner must be a musician, or at least an amateur pianist: neither is necessarily true. Probably it helps to have some musical tendency and interest, as this would further an incentive for learning the trade, but it can be learned from a mainly mechanical approach, and the tuner who is not super-sensitive musically is apt to stand up better than the highly sensitive one. A degree of hard-shelled insensitivity is an asset in this work, coupled with a greater awareness of the exacting requirements of correct tuning than may be possessed by even some skilled performers on the piano.

So, once you become a tuner, you are not a universal admirer of pianos -- except as to the idea of a piano -- but neither are you a condemner of them, except in specific instances. There are, in fact, few pianos that I would play on for pleasure. Having tuned hundreds of makes, and many individual instruments of some makes, I could scarcely give an unqualified endorsement of any particular name. But despite my dim view of piano merit, I seldom find one that lacks any redeeming features. We must bear in mind that some pianos had little pedigree at their outset. An old gentleman in a customer's family gave me this informative account:

"There used to be a fellow in New York who made what he called a piano -- we called it a tin pan -- which he sold wholesale for \$1000 a dozen. Then there was a dealer in Boston who used to peddle them out for around \$350 apiece, mostly to poor people, of course. When, after some years, this same dealer was taken for \$20,000 on an investment swindle, I, for one, was not sorry."

So some pianos never had much "family pride" to "be denied, and set aside, and mortified," and when called upon to do my best on some old crate with a green-painted harp, warped, cross-grained action parts, a snarly treble that resists any effort to bring out a blend, and a bass that is a masterpiece of graduated thuds, I award a none-too-respectful salute to the arch-conspirators mentioned above. I can also see why Quint didn't believe in spending much over 45 minutes at tuning a piano; many of them are incapable of responding to more than cursory treatment.

A piano tuner is an accessory before the fact of music, bearing about the same relation to the performance of music that a kitchen helper bears to attending a banquet. So, as I go about the country peeling musical potatoes, sauteeing octaves and fifths, hoping that this or that old specimen may simmer a long time in its own non-existent gravy before I see it again, I often think as I pocket my fee, "You've got the best of it, boy; be thankful that you don't have to live with it and listen to it right along."

Chameleon-like, I agree with the householder who inquires, "Isn't this still a pretty good old piano?", knowing that she will not likely ever get another one anyway. Or I give a little nudge to the person of means who is teetering on the brink of buying a better piano by stating, "Certainly, as good a pianist as you are deserves a better piano." And I mean it in both cases.

You are

a skilled mechanic;

an assuager of musical grief;

a diplomat and euphemist who can soften the blow of bad news.

You are not

a miracle worker;

invariably a yes-man;

a rejuvenator of the definitely passee.

You are variously viewed as

a slick operator who obtains easy money from gullible householders for no substantial reason or service;

a scavenger who flits around the edges of music picking up a living like a sea-gull;

an ever-available minute-man who can come on a moment's notice before a dance to correct a neglected piano;

a fiendish stickler who pounds a single note to drive unwilling listeners to distraction.

So, yes and no; you are and you aren't, by turns.

### III

#### WORKING INTO THE TRADE

For some years I believed I could tune only two or three days a week. This was probably true at that early stage of experience. I helped Brother Steve at mason work, did general carpentry, cut firewood and logs, tended my garden, repaired and refinished furniture, made and repaired violins, to fill in between tuning jobs.

When I got stuck with a trade problem I would go back to Quint for advice. He would set me straight most generously. At one of these visits he amused himself by pawing over my meager kit of tools -- most of them obtained from my mother's kitchen drawer or from the workbench in the shed -- and commented, "Your stuff looks more like an old tuner's kit than a beginner's, Chase. The beginner gen'ally gets loaded up with a lot of stuff he doesn't need, but the old tuner doesn't have any tools that are worth much, and you haven't." He also told me, "You'll need some key ivories. You can get 'em off some old piano somebody has dumped."

"Why, don't people save the ones that come off?"

"Not very often. I was tunin' in a house one time where there was a kid who had made a cribbage board inlaid with piano ivory. I asked him where he got it, and he said, 'Off different pianos around where I've been,' so that's where some of it went."

It took a while to skim off enough odd dollars to build up a normal kit, but it is knowing how to get results with the equipment at hand that counts, rather than owning a lot of boughten gadgets.

In time, the number of piano tuners who came into the area to work decreased, so by the simple process of survival more work came my way. When World War II was over and I had a car of my own again, I could work at nothing else on any regular basis. Auctioneer Chet Dutton used me for general work at his sales for several seasons, a day or two each week. The folksly atmosphere of auctions was a good switch from my solitary trade, but this could not go on for long, as the demand for tuning increased, so that by the early 1950's I had to quit all part-time work.

Adaptability and resourcefulness, developed through these varied occupations, have stood me in good stead ever since. A service trade such as mine requires an automobile, which makes it possible to cover a larger territory than was ever possible for a tuner at an earlier period. I found time between pianos to build a frame house on land I owned in Hancock, starting with a 14' x 20' building bought in Bennington, and moved onto my land. It had served by turns as barber shop, express office, and dwelling, in its former location. Using lumber cut during several winters, and windows and doors bought at auctions, I added to this structure. So, "Kozyhome" came into existence.



My mother had departed peacefully from this scene in 1942. Daisy and I joined forces in 1946. After locating at "Kozyhome" in '48, it was Daisy who served as my buffer in dealing with the piano-owning public, waited supper many times, and went tuning with me for a day now and then. This led to my getting into a six-year part-time project, of which more will follow.

## IV

### BALANCE

There may be some who like their job so well, or are so good at it, that they never feel the need of a change, but most of us find a change refreshing and necessary, and in that case it behooves us to see that we have the means to balance an exacting occupation with a relaxing hobby, a busy, complicated public life with simplicity in our home life. Daisy and I have taken this into account since first moving to "Kozyhome," just within the borders of Hancock. For a good while we took pride in a lawn and perennial borders, but these did not prove as relaxing as we could have wished, so we were being prepared for the next move. We hit upon the working vacation: I would start out for a day's work, in mild weather, with Daisy and a picnic lunch, when the work agreed upon promised to be at an attractive place, and in this way we saw some choice spots.

In this locality with its goodly share of people with artistic talent and wealth there are many premises of distinction. One quest led along a lane beside an apple orchard and into woods where the roadway terminated in a gravelled parking spot, then along a footpath and bridge that spanned the outlet of a tiny pond to a log cabin scarcely visible among the trees. I was admitted to the rustic living room containing the piano. Two trees had been left growing, the floor and roof having been built around them. The maple had died, but the spruce continued to grow, so the roof boards and floor boards had to be cut away from time to time, and the rubber watershed adjusted accordingly. A writer-composer. People around Temple called it "the shack in the woods with a Fifth Avenue bathroom."

Another call led me up the "east mountain road" from Peterborough, which reaches a good elevation along Pack Monadnock Mountain, then a gravel driveway led up another mile or so by switchbacks to a brow affording a splendid prospect, where a roomy modern dwelling stood out in the best spot for view. My objective, however, was a stone lodge back among the trees. Of native rock, and with a roof framed of peeled spruce logs from the surrounding growth, this massive structure had been built for a member of the Bass family some fifty years earlier. The large main room, furnished for comfort, was a lesson in restraint. Over the piano a wild boar's head, a real old tusker, glowered and bristled at me. Several carved masks from far away places hung in the plain wall spaces. Windows were deeply recessed, making ample window seats. At one end of the room was a fireplace of suitable proportions; at the opposite end a tastefully designed stairway led to a balcony and an arched doorway, giving access to living quarters in a wing. Across the back a screened porch overlooked a blue lake, a pure gem, unlike the sky color which any body of clear water assumes on a fair day. Over most of its area of three or four acres the tree-clad slopes of the mountain were reflected, the varied greens of the mixed growth combining with the blue cast of the water to bring out a feeling of enchantment. The owner told me, "Fish starve in this water. We learned that the lake could be fertilized to make food for fish, but that would spoil the blue color, so we decided to keep it this way, and buy our fish."

A farmstead atop a ridge in Webster afforded sweeping views in several directions -- a quiet, peaceful spot where one could love to live, away from most noises except those originating on the place. Here the emphasis was on dairy cattle: some were being trucked away to be exhibited at Hopkinton Fair the day I was there. The house had once been painted, but had been subjected to much weathering. I was conducted through the kitchen, a meandering, filled-up room that served for cooking, eating, washing and, at the moment, as a center for various food processing and pickling operations. On through the lengthy living room to the room beyond, where the ruddy housewife, Mrs. Phelps, helped me clear off the piano, then returned to her preserving.

You don't find a place like this very often. Old or home-made pictures on the walls, class and graduation photos on the mantel, an open fireplace, also a wood-burning stove -- shoved back into a corner for the summer -- braided rugs (one not finished, with a tail of unsewed braid), furniture that had been long lived with. I got busy with some repairs while absorbing the atmosphere. The aroma of an old New Hampshire farmhouse is unmistakable: pleasant cooking fragrances blend with an old chimney smell and a dash of the barn and dairy to produce something I remember from childhood.

After a while Mrs. Phelps came through and inquired, "How is it? It hasn't been tuned for nine years."

"Not in frightfully bad tune, for one that has stood so long. The fact that you have just stove heat would favor its staying in tune; central heat dries out a piano so it goes out faster."

"Thank goodness there's some use in our freezin' to death!"

As I was leaving, I mentioned enjoying the views. It does no harm to appreciate something at a customer's home, and to say so. At this, Mrs. Phelps was pleased, and said, "You can keep right down this road and get back into town another way. My old home where I was brought up is out at the end of this ridge. The buildings are gone, just a camp there now, but we keep the land. Go that way if you want to see a good view." I did so, and the view was delightful.

How many people do you find today living in the same neighborhood where they grew up, and obviously liking it? Little could anyone foresee that before many years that old house would get one final grim warming in a fire that would prove fatal to this grand, capable woman.

\* \* \* \* \*

On some of these jaunts Daisy came in for kindly attention; people took pity on her as she sat in the car reading. One hot day in Weare she was treated to sherbert and cookies while I worked, a gesture that was not extended to me, but then, I was hired, while Daisy was dooryard company, sort of.

I would caution any beginning piano tuner not to take his wife to the more charming spots: women get ideas that way, and the next thing you know the working vacation will occur at home, working out ideas picked up here and there, and you will still be doing the work. The difference between the outlook of

husband and wife is one of the fascinating aspects of human behavior which merits a lifetime of close attention. After Daisy and I had been married for a couple of months, we made a move in the same neighborhood, and Jim Dechert, who had been married for some years, was the good neighbor with a suitable vehicle who helped me move our furnishings. I remarked, "When a couple move into a different house, the man looks at the condition of the sills and the storm sash, while the woman thinks first of the drapes and the color scheme." Jim smiled knowingly and said, "You'll find it that way throughout life."

## PEOPLE

I didn't work at my trade very long before I found that human interest furnished the principal variety of its several aspects. You don't have to agree with everybody, but that is no reason for disagreeing disagreeably. Some people do not strike me as admirable, but most of those can furnish some interest, even if they are remarkable only for cantankerousness. I don't have to live with the ornery ones, and my casual encounters furnish a bit of wry humor. It evens up. How do I know just what impression I make on other people?

Some months after tuning for Mrs. Frederick S. Converse, the widow of a Boston composer, who was then living in Hancock, I received a card in her strong handwriting, inviting me to call on her, as she was getting ready to move, and she wished to give me some of the violin maker's equipment her husband had used as a hobby. I did so, and the interview turned into a luncheon engagement and a talk of substantial content. Mature, undeniably testy on some issues, this grand woman nevertheless radiated general benevolence and good humor. Things came out on a wide range of subjects.

"When my husband decided to become a composer, we went to Germany with two children, and had another while we were there. I knew no German, so I had quite a time to get along and make my wants known. I thought the Bavarian cow might not be very clean, so I thought it would be a good idea to boil the milk for the baby. So I took an English-German dictionary, found a word for 'boil,' and tried to get the point across to the woman who worked for us, but without success. Later, after I had learned a little German, I discovered that I had used the German word for the kind of 'boil' one might have on the neck. No wonder the woman didn't understand!

"My husband composed many beautiful things. They will be rediscovered sometime. A certain conductor would never play any of them. Someone we knew used to put up money every time this conductor used his things, but my husband wouldn't do that, although he could easily have done so. He used to say to me, 'Oh Emma, I can't endure that couple; they are so Hebraic.' But he had been commissioned to arrange 'The Star-Spangled Banner' for Symphony during an earlier conductorship, so that conductor used some of my husband's music every time Symphony played the anthem, as that arrangement is still used.

"Mr. Converse was a big, hearty man, as you can see from his portrait, and his students loved him. Mason and Hamlin used to supply him with a new piano to use every year, as they said his playing improved it so much. Toward the end of his lifetime his left hand became paralyzed, and during that period he wrote a beautiful piano piece for the left hand alone.

"We lost our only son in early childhood. After his death, I had a great desire to sculpture his head, so I started in. I decided to work it up to life

size; it is easier to model that way than at reduced size. My daughter was studying at the Museum School at the time, so every once in a while I would say to her, 'Bring me another pound of plasticene when you come home tonight.' At last the day came when I stood back and said, 'There it is.' I had kept a little cap the child had worn, so I thought to try it on the head. It just fitted."

She showed me this significant piece of work, a sensitive, lovely thing -- a sweet-looking little boy with a half-smiling expression. "I had it cast in bronze, but that is not so good; the highlights come in the wrong places." I agreed to this, seeing the two compared.

"I also did some sculpture for our Episcopal National Cathedral in Washington. Here is my conception of St. Paul teaching the Corinthians." This small figure, seated on a simple bench, had a hand raised as if he were expounding a text, and conveyed a great sense of authority. She brought out another figure, an aged man starting up from a sitting position with an expression of rapt wonderment. "This is my conception of St. John receiving the Revelation. My little granddaughter gave me the best compliment I ever received on this work. She looked at it a little while, then said, 'I like him, Grammy, he's nice -- but Grammy, that man looks as if he had been seeing things!'"

"I am going to present you with a copy of my book on wine making. Some years ago a hospital needed to raise some money, and I tried to think what I could do that would earn anything for the purpose. I was reminded that I could make good wine. My husband did not care for hard liquor, but he had come to like the wines while we were in Europe, so I learned how they were made. We grew a lot of grapes on our place in Westwood. So I wrote this book, and its sale brought in over a thousand dollars for the hospital."

I accepted the thin volume with thanks. This has amused people who know me, but the bunch of grapes pictured on the cover is attractive, and I appreciated her work for a humane cause.

During the luncheon we talked of music and musical people. Some mention was made of Ethelbert Nevin.

"My husband used to be nauseated at the mere mention of Nevin's music." I greenly asked why. She fairly spat "Saccharine!" by way of reply.

Luncheon over, she directed the chauffeur to take me home with the violin things of considerable value that she had given me, despite gasoline rationing that was in force at the time.

## VI

### SOUR NOTES

"Music, when soft voices die,  
Vibrates in the memory..."

So wrote Shelley. I have heard a lot that I prefer to forget; the voices were not soft, and memory is happier without them. After Quint had me pretty well along in my course of lessons, he remarked, "I'll tell you one thing now that I wouldn't have told you at the start, Chase. There are a good many pianos you used to enjoy that you won't enjoy any longer." True. The tuner hears what other people do not, and the other people should know when they are well off.

The accomplished composer-pianist John LaMontaine told me that he once started to learn tuning, but that he got to listening for the "beat" while playing the piano, and it confused him seriously until he left off the tuning effort.

In talking on violin making, I contrast the violin with the guitar, which is equipped with frets along its neck which largely determine pitch and positions, while the violinist must do his fretting mentally. The piano tuner works with a temperament, but must not be temperamental.

The man of the house, a mechanic in another field, looked on while I was tuning the family piano and remarked scornfully, "Aw, it's nothin' but a harp in a box." Add a mechanism to strike the strings, and you just about have it. Its pitch and tuning alter minutely or conspicuously in response to changes in temperature and humidity, its sounding board is subject to unwise cracks, it is the lying-in ward of the moth family, furnishes snug harbor for sundry rodents, receives as great a variety of junk as a town dump, and is the repository for a motley array of chattels.

Often the old upright piano is the only high place in the room, so it catches everything that should be out of reach of small children: the clock (that usually doesn't run), vases and bric-a-brac, piggy banks, jewelry, pill boxes and souvenirs from fairs and Niagara, besides the photos, metronome, and music that are standard equipment. Special monies and valentines are often slid under the scarf.

I recommend one thing to people who are looking for an upright piano: get one with a single-board top, not a top hinged in the center, then when you spill a vase of flowers or a bottle of pop, it will run off the edges instead of leaking through the hinge to drip on the action and loosen the glue.

Now I'm going to let you in on a trade secret, a list of things that can be dropped or dripped into pianos and still have (most of) the keys work:

blankets of linty dirt, which keep the keys from clattering  
after the felt has been eaten away;

chocolate ice cream (dries to a tacky brown puddle);  
pink candle wax -- drizzled between keys, it hardens  
into pink wafers like wintergreen mints;  
family pictures not seen by owner for 20 years;  
roll of Life Savers and other dusty candies;  
books and sheet music;  
circles and cards from game of lotto;  
chocolates that deliquesced and stuck keys together;  
coins and toy money; \$1 bill;  
lottery tickets; firecrackers;  
always thumb tacks, pencils, bobby pins;  
Ceres' wheat, in Grange piano (moved in by mice,  
which left only the chaff);  
food crumbs, sandwich crusts, candy papers, apple  
cores -- a sort of clandestine litterbugging;  
letters, picture post cards;  
mouse nests, sometimes occupied;  
clarinet mouthpiece cap, reeds, joint wax;  
mica, Christmas "snow", tree ornaments;  
alphabet building blocks;  
OPA red-and-blue-point tokens;  
dog bone;  
toy balloons;  
dried laurel and other bouquet material;  
ash tray rubbish, spilled tobacco, new wrapped cigars;  
sand, garden soil, cherry stones, peach pits;  
keys, knitting needles, crochet hooks, needles, pins;  
dog biscuits, moved in by mice;



feathers moulted by parakeet;  
paring & table knives, salt & pepper shakers;  
crucifixes, charms, costume jewelry;  
marbles (wonderfully effective on sounding boards  
of grands and squares);  
five bottles of beer;  
an immense clipping from someone's big toe.

Elizabeth Cilley informed me upon my arrival, "There is gravel inside my grand piano. I was potting bulbs on it, and some got spilled." I could not remove the gravel until I could pull out the action, and I couldn't pull out the action until the gravel was removed. I was reminded of a law that was passed in the early days of the American West to the effect that where parallel railroad tracks existed, when two trains approached each other travelling in opposite directions, both were to come to a stop, and neither was to start until the other had gone. In this piano, some of the hammers were blocked up against the strings, and it took some probing to wiggle things around and correct the trouble. Up to now, the owner has potted her bulbs elsewhere.

There is also the collection behind the average upright, seldom disturbed by the tuner unless something rattles against the sounding board. I lost a tool behind one piano, and the man of the house helped me pull out the piano and recover the tool, so we also picked up books, papers, and the dried palms from several Palm Sundays. Then he said, "Never mind the dirt," and we shoved the piano back to the wall.

A fastidious woman was so shocked at the (normal) dirt inside her piano that she insisted upon having it vacuum-cleaned. She said my clothes were too good for such a job, so she brought in a choice of two pairs of bib overalls. I chose the pair nearer my size, and started the cleaning. Just then the customer's daughter came home, and I learned that I was wearing her overalls.

When something rattled behind a piano, I told the woman I would have to pull it out and investigate. Her husband spoke from upstairs, where he was ill in bed. In a moment she came down laughing and explained, "He has a bag of old coins hidden in back of the piano. He would never tell the rest of us where he kept them, but now he can't help himself." I moved the piano out from the wall, she took a heavy little sack from against the sounding board, and the rattle was eliminated.

Many people, intending to compliment a pianist, say, "He sure can make that old pianner TALK!" To my mind this is as poor a compliment as to say of a smart dog, "He knows more'n half the men." Mere people can talk. Why not leave the piano to its own special field of sounding like a piano?

There must be something that appeals to people about the idea of a piano, for, despite the thoughtless abuse they heap on the poor old things, people still like pianos, use them, and have them tuned once in a while.

## VII

### AT THE MACDOWELL COLONY

My introduction to the MacDowell Colony occurred in the late 1930's when Mrs. MacDowell was still active as the manager of that remarkable institution. I had heard that she was in need of a tuner, and applied for a tryout. She directed me, by letter, to correct certain studio pianos, which I did, and came out of the encounter with confidence somewhat shaken. With only three or four years of intermittent tuning behind me, I was still having trouble with the top octave, and those old studio pianos had been "composed on too long by too many people," as a Colonist put it; they were tough enough to challenge the skill of a more seasoned tuner.

Later, Mrs. MacDowell gave me an appointment, and we discussed the tuning. I felt immediately that I was in the presence of a very distinguished person, but an approachable and understanding one. She encouraged me to keep on, to do the very best work of which I was capable, and especially to practice on the top octave, assuring me that years of experience may be required to gain proficiency in that area. I came away from her presence feeling that I certainly should keep trying. A short time after this, she arranged to have me work on a piano that had been willed to the Colony by a Mrs. Souther, described by Mary Beider, Mrs. MacDowell's cook, as "a beautiful player." As Mrs. MacDowell and I rode to the Kirby Studio in my Model A Ford, she told me of some of her garden flowers. At the Star Studio, she had me stop so that she could greet some visitors, then as we started along, she resumed the conversation at the very point where she had broken it off. She saw to it that we came to an agreement on a price for the work, explaining in her most ingratiating manner, "I should never question the matter of price if we had plenty of money, but you see this is an altruistic thing, and we're always in debt."

She told me of her working day, a very full schedule, with time set aside for correspondence, for interviews, for the affairs of the Colony and of the Association -- "Too much for an old woman, but then, I do it."

"This Colony, for the most part, was not built up by people of great wealth," she said. "It has been the working people who have built it up. Here I am living in Peterborough every summer, and I haven't been inside a Dublin house for ten years."

Point is added to her remark by a story told by an old Peterborough resident. When Mrs. MacDowell was founding the Colony as a memorial to her husband, she secured an appointment with a noted New York financier whom she had met socially, and told him of her plan, apparently hoping to secure some backing for the effort. He heard of her dream, told her that he had always admired her and her late husband, whose work he appreciated, and stated that he would set up a fund of \$1,000,000 from which she could have the income for life if she would give up that crazy idea. She backed away with the composure of a true lady, and

went out to found her Colony single-handed.

Years after my first encounter, I was called to the Colony when a change of tuners was needed. Being by then more experienced, and much thicker-skinned, I was able to do acceptable work. I was shown around by George Hemphill, who had worked around the Colony a long time. If I had any feeling of awe about the place or the people, George's comments dispelled it. In showing me the locations of the several piano studios, and most of the seven miles of roads within the Colony grounds, he chatted amiably about former occupants of the studios.

"The joker who was in here last year used to adjust the chain on his bike, then come in and play the piano." Evidence of this remained on the keys...."The jasper who had this one last year used to flog the piano. He would dash across the room and come down on those keys with a great haymaker swing. We had to do some work in here, so we moved him to another studio where there is a concert grand in a small room to see if it wouldn't cure him. After a week of it he came out punch-drunk, but still flogging the piano. But they're not all that way. Some of 'em are the moony type -- they sit there and barely stroke the keys, and you can hardly hear 'em."

A friend of my neighbor's was touring the Colony with a small party, seeing the few parts of it that are open to visitors. As the dinner hour approached, the party reached Colony Hall, which houses the dining room. They asked a kitchen worker if they could buy a dinner there. "Oh, no," she replied, motioning toward the dining room, "these is all geniuses." One might assent to this with some reservations. Once when I was looking for George Hemphill, I saw him talking with a Colonist in front of the women's dormitory; he often did errands for these people. She handed him some folding money, and he came down the walk grinning broadly. Then the Colonist called after him, "I think it's called 'Johnny Walker.'"

I mentioned this incident to George years afterward, and he told me, "When I tried to give her back her change she said, 'Be off with you, or I'll tear the arm off of you and beat you to death with the stump.'" So there are manifestly ways, short of arduous labor, of working up a perspiration, and this, according to Thomas A. Edison, constitutes ninety-eight per cent of genius.

\* \* \* \* \*

The rather austere Watson Studio was used for some portion of almost every season, from 1921 until shortly before her passing, by Mrs. H. H. A. Beach. Here she composed during the mornings, being one of the earliest of the Colonists to have breakfast and get to work. She might invite a friend from another studio to come and visit over their basket lunches, "Then she would play just one piece for you and turn you out," as playwright Esther Willard Bates later recalled. During the afternoons, Mrs. Beach practiced, but she would not waste time just practicing on the piano. She propped a book up on the music rack and read while practicing Bach and the technical studies she had learned during girlhood. In this way she read all the novels of Henry James, and much else. In this same studio she wrote charming descriptive pieces about the birch trees that swayed in the wind just outside the windows, and about a Peterborough chipmunk.

For many years an old black Steinway stood in the Watson Studio, wherein occurred a little tragedy which Mrs. Beach might have memorialized in a piano piece, had she known of it, but the matter is left to my prosy pen. I had noticed mouse nibblings on the end keys and on the inner edge of the lid. When I had occasion to pull out the action, I found, in back of the treble hammers, about two quarts of flossy material, laboriously filched from some pillow or mattress, and in the midst of it, the desiccated remains of a mouse. He had enjoyed during a summer the run of the studio and the pick of crumbs left from lunches, but when the piano was closed for the winter he was shut inside, and had starved and expired. From his tragic demise I deduce two conclusions:

- (1) That an appetite for the aesthetic does not provide sufficient sustenance to sustain animate existence, and,
- (2) That an instrument built to withstand the onslaughts of concert pianists will not surrender to the application of one mousepower.

\* \* \* \* \*

At various times I asked George Hemphill about some former Colonist. Upon mentioning the name of a pianist whose recordings I had enjoyed, he told me, "He sort of got washed out of this place. He is rated pretty well around New York. I guess he made too much of a social thing of it here -- took too much of the other Colonists' time -- one of those smart fellows like some we have had here. Most of these composers plug away all day long. Not all of them are talented the way Copland is; he composes just two hours a day -- has a system and keeps to it."

In the serious purposes of the Colony there is little room for the sightseer and casual caller, but occasionally some Colonist is kind enough to show his studio to visitors. I was working in a piano studio when the occupant brought in a party of guests. A woman asked, "What do you do?" He replied, "I am a composer -- the most modern music." "Oh," she said, "in other woids, you do music."

After his working day was over, George Barati, then conductor of the Honolulu Symphony, who was working at composition in the Sprague-Smith Studio, graciously invited our party into the studio when Daisy and I were showing a friend a little of the Colony. Our friend had travelled rather widely, and she and Mr. Barati conversed about places in Germany that they both knew. He told us he had been in several cities in Germany, since the close of World War II, conducting concerts, Darmstadt and Coblenz being two of the places, and at those concerts many of the younger generation of Germans heard Mendelssohn's music for the first time. One of the blights fostered by the Nazi cultural purge.

At various times Mrs. MacDowell had work to discuss with me, and on each occasion she said something memorable. At one such call, she came downstairs without assistance, except that a woman went ahead of her. She greeted me in her usual hearty voice. "Good morning, Mr. Chase. Don't you think I do pretty well for a woman ninety years old who had a broken hip last year?" I agreed. She inquired about the condition of the studio pianos, and asked for a list of recom-

mendations for their upkeep, explaining, "This modern music is hard on a piano. The piano in the Kirby Studio was pretty good, but we have had composers in there who have beaten it down, young Foss, for one. In scoring their music they get onto an instrumental part of a few notes and just pound it over and over."

A few years later, when I had another interview with this remarkable woman, she opened the conversation by saying, "You will excuse me for not recognizing you. I can make out the outlines of a person's face, but just as if I were seeing them through a whole tub of water." She spoke of discussing repair of pianos with Mrs. Howe. "She is one of our directors, and a very fine person. She is also a very good musician. Well, I used to be a pretty good musician myself, if I do say so. Mrs. Howe will be able to decide what the pianos need; she is not like most of the people who come here; she is wealthy and influential."

I mentioned that the pianos had rusted more in the studios with ceilings than in those without, the latter having a better circulation of air. "I know that," she said, "I never favored having ceilings in the studios I had to do with building, but some of the later ones have ceilings, as some thought they would be cooler in summer. Perhaps I was stupid."

"I don't believe you were ever stupid."

"We talked with Mr. Steinway about leaving the pianos in the unheated studios. He said any amount of cold wouldn't hurt them, but that it is a sudden change from cold to hot that is bad for them."

\* \* \* \* \*

The time came when Mrs. MacDowell had to give up her post as Colony manager, and everyone was glad that she could have a few summers at Hillcrest free from the cares of that demanding work.

A Colony manager for a short time was a former Colonist whose qualifications for the job were that, "She understands artistic people." This was the standard explanation; I heard it on all sides. Anyone holding that position following Mrs. MacDowell was bound to be overshadowed by her stature, but this person was of a type that caused practical people in the locality to grin and shake their heads. She usually appeared in classical-looking robes, her hair drawn into a little bun over each ear, and with a manner suggesting extreme boredom. I once had a necessary interview with this manager, and felt that I was being scarcely tolerated throughout. A lady Colonist appeared at the door, whereupon the manager rushed forward to deliver a theatrical kiss. After seating the caller in the adjoining room she returned, but not to resume our talk, for, like Emily Dickinson's soul, she had closed

"...the valves of her attention  
Like stone."

That was one time I did not have to be hit over the head with a baseball bat. I walked out.

## VIII

### WE BUILD AGAIN

As I said earlier, a wife gets ideas by seeing the more attractive homes and locations around the country. Never underestimate the power of a wife, the principal polishing agent in that gentle but ceaseless process of attrition by which the rough corners of a man are rounded off and he is shaped into a husband. As Daisy and I took a working vacation at the MacDowell Colony occasionally over a period of years, she grew to admire the several substantial stone studios which stand in woodland glades in that large tract set aside for the use of producing workers in the arts. This did not result in any decrees, but just in wishfulness that came out in such seemingly mild statements as, "It would be nice if we could have a stone house sometime." This is the gentle part. The repetition of this or a similar softly voiced desire -- never uttered often enough to alert one to rear his defenses against it -- is part of the ceaseless process of attrition. Now I couldn't imagine that an undesigning and devoted wife would bide her time and voice her wish only when communication between us was particularly cordial and the mood expansive; it just happened that way. Getting a new idea accepted involves a technique somewhat like changing a horse's feed. You mix a handful of the new grain with his regular ration, next time two handfuls, reducing the old kind by the same amount. After a while he is converted to the new feed altogether, and by then he likes it. An abrupt change would have resulted, like as not, in rejection or some sort of upset. There was no upset at "Kozyhome." After the idea of a stone house had been made sufficiently familiar, I just walked willingly into the stall and was halted before I knew it. The day came when I said in the most casual manner, "We've got that knoll up in the woods with the makings of a good view, and plenty of stones nearby. Let's start in." By that offhand remark I got myself into an engrossing six-year project.

A couple of years after we had moved into "Kozyhome," I bought an adjoining tract of woodland from a neighbor's widow -- "78 acres, more or less" -- which had some road frontage, extended along the railroad for a plump half mile, and bounded my original 12-acre tract along one side and across one end, an ell-shaped piece that included three knolls, an overgrown meadow, trout brook, three small swales, deer and rabbit swamp.

Between the "Kozyhome" lot and this adjoining tract was a double stone wall. The early farmers, hauling stones off their fields year after year, often built such walls, facing up the sides with fairly good laying stone, and filling in between with small cobbles and odd-shaped pieces, to a considerable width and height, so it served as both rockpile and boundary, and in our day makes an excellent source of material for stone work.

Daisy and I walked the short distance to the top of the knoll and looked over the spot. The cutting of timber had opened up a partial view of Crotched Mt. and the pond that is part of the Contoocook River. We knew that further cutting would improve the outlook. Working at odd moments, we cleared away gray

birch scrub and brush, then, after laying out our ground plan, I started digging trenches and laying footings. By hiring a truck for short periods we got rocks and sand hauled, dumping these materials within the area measured off, so that the surface around the outside was not disturbed. After raking the surface and digging away leaf mould and a thin layer of loam, which we used to fill hollows nearby, the subsoil proved to be gravelly, most of it suitable for mixing mortar, so it was not necessary to haul in much except stones that first summer. I just kept digging a trench about 2 feet wide and of a suitable depth around the marked area, and filling it with stone and mortar until the footing extended all the way around. Stonework is best done at a leisurely rate; I got our house up to the surface of the ground that summer. It required small quantities of cement and water at any one time, and these I got up to the site by hand or wheelbarrow.

What is a vacation? To us it is something we do that we enjoy, a change from our regular occupations, something that balances the very controlled motions of an exacting trade with a freer use of the larger muscles and motions. If it is laborious, all the better. People do their hardest work in the name of sport. My brother Steve used to tell his helpers at mason work, "Make a game of it." Daisy and I did just that. After a day of tuning it was more relaxing to stroll out after supper and utilize the long daylight to work on that project than to drive away in the car and do something conventional. Daisy would appear, along toward dusk, maybe with a glass of lemonade and a cookie, but chiefly to pick up mortar scraps and stone chips that fell on the outside. She was the zealous picker-up all through the job, and the only woman I know who started housekeeping before the foundation was completed.

Our site slopes away in all directions, is partially shaded by pines and mixed growth, and we observed early in the effort that it was a delightful spot at any time of day, and one that could be improved by our own efforts at small expense. The pageant of growth unfolded before us with day-to-day change, from the first cheery red bloom on the maples in early spring to the last golden leaves twinkling on the poplars in the wan sunlight of late autumn. The more intimate changes in the foreground and undergrowth were also a delight. A few warm days in May would bring the Canadian Mayflower foliage spearing its way up through the carpet of needles in tightly rolled points that spread into tender green leaves, soon to bear foamy blooms. Ferns and bracken pushed up their scrolls. We observed a different variety of birdlife in the grove than we had seen at "Kozyhome" a short distance away. Towhees and wood thrushes were plentiful, and, over the river, fish hawks and great blue herons.

We were in the grasp of something that fascinated us -- which was being loved into existence.

## TO TUNE OR NOT TO TUNE

There is nothing harder to come by in any field of work than good judgment, and nothing more needed. In passing judgment on pianos, their value, and whether they are worth tuning or not, one has to consider many factors not bearing directly on their musical merit. Would it be feasible to move one piano out and move another in? Sometimes the house has been remodelled so that the piano will not go around the existing corners. Not everyone is as fortunate in such a case as the people whose apartment opened onto a barn scaffold: they just rolled the piano out onto the scaffold, rigged a rope sling, and let it down two stories with the hayfork mechanism. Didn't hurt it a bit.

Sometimes the people need to be sized up rather than the piano. If they are not conspicuously musical, and the piano will be used mainly for recreational strumming, a specimen that would not gladden a musician's heart may serve the purpose.

Let me rant a bit against the notion that anything is good enough for a child to start lessons on. Mechanically and financially, this may hold true, but not musically. Somewhere I acquired a fixed idea that the development of musical talent is the principal reason for starting piano lessons. The piano ought at least to be in recognizable tune, so I have struggled with some stubborn hand-me-downs because I knew that if I didn't put them into a semblance of good tune, little Susie or Willie would have to thump on them just the same.

I know one couple who threaten faithfully to have their piano tuned if their child ever starts lessons. This is a right idea, but they are thinking of tuning as a long-term investment, like adding a fireplace or having a well drilled, rather than as a matter of upkeep. I sat through several chorus rehearsals in the residence of these good folks and listened philosophically to the pleasant jangle of that piano, reflecting that at least I knew how it could be fixed, which does not hold true of people who sing out of tune. There is no known tool that can sharpen the tones from the human throat or wrench up the mental processes that determine pitch, but who knows how many people sing off pitch through having adjusted unconsciously to a piano badly out of tune?

Mrs. Mildred Porter of Hillsboro used to give me a list of her pupils' families where tuning was needed. At one house I came across as chaotic-sounding a piano as ever came under my hammer. Mrs. Porter told me later that the next time the girl who used the piano came for her lesson, she was almost in tears and said, "It doesn't sound like my piano any more." That was years ago, so probably by now it has returned to her established norm. Tragic. She must have had a musical sense, for she noticed the difference, but it had been turned awry before I could save the situation. I seriously believe this sort of wrong start could lead to frustration later in life.



Take 1.1 for 1, 1.9 for 2,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  for 3, and so on, setting up a whole set of falsified values, then use them in working out problems, calling the process arithmetic, and you will not be any farther from mathematical truth than you are from musical truth when you try to make music on a piano badly out of tune.

It is, however, a tribute to persistence to see how some children keep on with lessons despite pianistic handicaps. One little girl practiced faithfully for over a year on a piano that had a silent note in the middle octave. Then, her parents decided that she really meant business, and had the piano tuned and the note repaired.

While tuning a piano that had needed it for a long time, the young lad who played on it came in, so I asked him, "How many years have you been taking lessons?" "Five," he replied. "What! On this piano?" I queried, not concealing my shock. "Why," said the boy, completely unaware, "was it out of tune?"

"Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu."

After completing one tuning that was greatly needed, my efforts drew forth a most gratifying comment. The trained musician who used the piano came in, struck some chords, and said, "Ah, now the dissonances are harmonic."

## TRADESMAN'S DELIGHT -- AND DIGNITY

The hunter setting forth for the day tests the tension of his bow with a surge of energy and a tingle of expectation; the woodchopper gingerly runs his thumb along the edge of his axe and feels its keenness with satisfaction; the carpenter starting his job looks over approvingly the tools in his chest, which he has made keen and bright to accomplish their purpose; the piano tuner, starting out, reaches behind the car seat and touches his tool kit. Everyone with a skill feels a sense of exhilaration in the fact that he can do his particular job creditably, that it is in demand, that he is trained and equipped for it. Maybe this feeling of gladness and adequacy is on the wane in human experience; if so, I'm glad to live while its afterglow lingers. It supplies an incentive to carry on, over and above the dollars earned, and which is likely to last a lot longer.

Coupled with the tradesman's delight and a just estimate of one's worth is a sense of the dignity of one's occupation. My late friend and neighbor Leonard S. Rankin, a craftsman and enamelist of distinction, told me, "I left my former location and came to New Hampshire because here I find more appreciation of the individual craftsman and his product. Where I used to live, if you had a product that was selling well, people thought you were crazy if you didn't hire twenty men and make it by the thousand, but the kind of thing I like to make is too individual to be mass-produced, and too distinctive to find a wholesale market."

A just estimate of one's worth should be constant, but there are highly variable factors involved in the reaction of others. A surprisingly large number of my customers have assumed that a tuner is one who settled on mechanics after flunking out at the keyboard. I can only say that if you think tuning is a pushover or a second-rate skill, try it. Some people have a gadfly genius; after some harmless buzzing about, they implant the barb. A professional in the music field once told me, "Howard, I've often thought you ought to be doing something better than tuning pianos. Most of the piano tuners I've known worked in a machine shop, and did tuning on the side to earn extra money." Upon hearing me quote this remark, a perceptive boy offered this soothing balm: "He's that way, but you have carved out your own unique life."

Another unwarranted assumption, usually on the part of someone who has a job for me once in several years, is that I am just sitting at home waiting for their job to come along. It fairly burns Daisy up when someone telephones right in the middle of a working day and is amazed to find that I am not right there ready to jump at their beck and call.

Then there are those who marvel that anyone can work at tuning full time; they are rating everyone else by their own casual interest in the piano. So a tuner has to know where his feet are placed, and why, and not get either elated or depressed over the views of people who have never given the subject any serious thought.

In the parish hall of the Deering Center Church I had to tune an 1886 upright that had not been tuned for five years. The minister's wife, who played quite well, ran over the piano later in the day and found one note high in the treble that had gone flat, and told me about it in a nice way. I was glad to go back and yank it up again, informing her during our conversation, "The same thing could be said of a job of piano tuning that has been said of literary style, namely, that it is not a total absence of faults, but the presence of conspicuous virtues, that makes the effort commendable."

\* \* \* \* \*

I find it easy to tolerate youngsters, whose lack of conventional perspective is refreshing, as is also the bluntness resulting from it. A pert pre-school boy, Kevin Pettee, supplied me with a ready-made sub-title for this opus. As I was tuning his mother's piano, every little while he would ask, with growing impatience, "How long are you going to play that song?" I could give him only half-answers, so unsatisfactory to a child, until he reached a point of foot-stamping exasperation and exclaimed, "You play a stupid song!"

XI

COLONY ROSTERS

The names of creative workers who have been benefited by the MacDowell Colony's nearly ideal working conditions make a long list which includes a noteworthy share of the important producing writers, composers, poets, sculptors, and painters in America. Reading the names of occupants of each studio through the years is fascinating and revealing. A pine board is provided for this purpose, and each worker records his name, usually his occupation, and the year. Some studios date back to the early 'teens and 'twenties, and several boards full of names bear significant testimony to the value of this unique institution in our cultural life.

In addition to the better known arts represented, a number of less common occupations are to be noted: theologian, historian, music historian, folk musician, wood carver, "wood chopper," "a crashing amateur" (a composer), translator, "pretzel bender," "Fraud," and even "a weaver of garlands," whether poetic or floral not stated.

Certain studios are suited to having pianos. A writer who was put into such a studio complained after a few days that the piano dominated the studio and hindered his work. The working force removed the piano for the remainder of his stay. Some studios are adapted to the needs of "mud-flingers -- sculptors and casters," as George Hemphill put it, or specially suitable for painters. There are twenty-odd studios, all have certain features in common, most are separated enough to be quiet, each is individual in some respects.

Here is a list copied from the Monday Music Club Studio boards as faithfully as possible in view of present legibility:

Monday Music Club Studio

1914

Agnes Crimmins	Playwright	1914
Henry F. Gilbert	Composer	1915
Arthur Nevin	"	1916
Carl Venth	"	1916
Lewis Mikaars	"	1918
Rossetter Cole	"	1918
Ethel Glenn Hier	"	1918
Charles S. Skilton	"	1919
Wintter Watts	"	1920
Arthur Nevin		1916
" "		1917
" "		1921
Mabel W. Daniels	"	1921

Rossetter G. Cole	Composer	1922
Ethel Glenn Hier	"	1922
" " "	"	23
Arthur Nevin	"	23
Margaret Starr McLain	"	1924
Lazar Saminsky	"	1924
Ethel M. Kelley	Writer	1924
Helen W. Dyckman	Composer	1924
Roy Harris	"	1925
Margaret Starr McLain	"	1925
Louise Ayres Garnett	Composer & Writer	1925
Powell Weaver	Composer	1926
Frances Marion Ralston	Composer & Writer	26
Rossetter Cole	Composer	27
Powell Weaver	"	27
Edith Merrielees	Writer	27
Mabel W. Daniels	Composer	28
Raymond Vickers	"	28
Mary Howe	"	28
Ethel Glenn Hier	"	28
Carl Buchman	"	29
Robert W. Manton	"	29
Charles Haubiel	"	29
Susannah W. Armstrong	"	30
Henry Woodward		
Dorothy James		
Jacques Pi Rois		
Charles Wakefield Cadman		
Sol Cohen		
Marion Bauer		
Spencer Norton		
Walter Jenkins		
Harold Morris		
Susannah Armstrong Coleman		40
Edwin J. Stringham		
Edith Orr	Writer	41
Katherine Dunlap	"	
Hazel Gertrude Kinscella	Composer	
Felix Roderick Labunski	"	44
Louise Talma	"	44
Esther Willard Bates	Writer	45
Lukas Foss		1945
Gardner Read		1946
Laura Williams	Writer	1946
Bentz Plagemann	"	1947
Roland Sleich	Composer	1947
George Barati	"	1948
Alice Dixon Bond	Writer	1948
Alfred Kreymborg	Poet	1948
Clara Greuning Stillman	Writer	1948
J----- Clarke	"	1949
Boris Todrin	"	1949

Jane Mayhall	Writer	1949
Mary Colum	"	1950
Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant	"	1950
Elizabeth (Etnier H-11---	"	1950
Madeleine Goss	"	1950
Vladimir Ussachevsky	Composer	1951
Elaine Gottlieb	Writer	1951
Amy Bonner	"	1951
Jean Gould	"	1952
Doris Davis	"	1952
Madeleine Goss	"	1952
Norman Vogel	Composer	1953
Howard Moss	Writer	1953
Neil Weiss	Poet	1953
Esther Williamson Ballou	Composer	1954
Mark Bucci	"	1954
Russell Smith	"	1955
Lester Trimble	"	1955
Henrietta Buckmaster	Writer	1955
Robert Campbell	Song Writer	1955
Margaret Mackay	Writer	1955-56
Ruth Anderson	Composer-flutist	1956
Violet Archer	Composer	1956
Lachlan MacDonald	Writer	1956
Madeleine Goss	"	1956
Ernst Toch	Composer	1956
Marjorie Fischer	Writer	1956-7
Adria Locke Langley	"	1957
August Kadow	Poet	1957
Michiko Toyama	Composer	1957
Ralph Shapey	"	1957
Tom Doremus (signed in paint)		1957
John Berry	Writer	1958
Adria Locke Langley	"	1958

This is a representative studio. The Colony adapted this and some other studios for year-round use about 1955. The boards at the Watson Studio contain such names as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, Ernst Bacon, and Gail Kubik among composers. Elinor Wylie and Lizette Woodworth Reese among the poets, Modest Altschuler, conductor, and many others.

In one studio I saw the signature of Robert Haven Schauffler, whose writings contain a gem to the effect that although the instrument is properly the piano-forte, fortists are more plentiful than pianists.

In the Sorosis Studio, a talented young woman signed herself as "composer and musicologist." The next occupant was a mature man, well established in the field of musical composition, who signed himself as "composer only." Later, another composer, who knew the young woman's family, told me that this follow-up had caused her endless embarrassment. I mentioned the matter, up to this point, to still another composer, who explained, "There is a traditional antagonism between the composer and the musicologist or critic. The composer is apt to regard

the musicologist as a sort of musical eunuch -- one who talks about music, but can't do."

In the Wood Studio, built in 1913, the first Colonist to sign his name was Fred Ballard, Playwright, 1914, placed a respectful distance below the heading. Through the years, the board got filled with names all the way to the bottom, then along came Oscar Williams in June, 1943, who squeezed his name in between that of Fred Ballard and the heading, with the parenthetical comment "30 years later there is still room at the top," which will no doubt hold equally true after sixty years, or ninety.

## THE WALLS APPEAR

Come spring, 1955, it didn't take much nudging by Daisy to get me to start building up the principal walls. A real stone mason prefers not to work against a form; his work should stand on its own merit. Being essentially artistic rather than mechanical, a better result is obtainable by developing a feeling for the character of each stone. One with a true flat surface can be laid to a line, but one with a rounded contour looks better when laid to crowd the line a little, averaging the effect of the roundness. Finding enough squarish stones to lay up the outside corners and window and door openings is something of a challenge, as so many of our native rocks are roundish, or are nondescript, with no commendable shape. Normally, you use the best stones to face up the outside surface that will show, and use up the rough and odd pieces laying up the back. Turning the stones over from time to time reveals surfaces and shapes that you can use, which you never knew existed from the first viewing. Avoiding stones that will streak iron rust down the finished wall is a study; some are rust-stained that do not have an iron content, but add pleasing variety of color to the general result.

Another aspect of stone work that requires foresight is to maintain a build, always leaving a top surface that can be added to successfully and kept uniform in width. Keeping the corners a little higher than the middle of a wall area, and the face higher than the back, is helpful. Anyone might wonder where enough suitable corners could be found. We picked them up gradually, brought a few choice ones from public beaches we visited on the New Hampshire seacoast, found a few where road construction was being carried on, kept a sharp eye for discarded gravel rock cast up on the banks of country roads. I knew where there were two handsome square corners tumbled down in a worked-out gravel pit on the roadside. The trouble was that every time I stopped the car there and admired them, a pack of mongrel dogs came yapping from a tarpaper camp nearby, affronting my dignity. But patience pays off; a day came when both people and dogs were away, and those rocks were elevated from the status of roadside rubble to that of building material in a unique effort.

Daisy took a great fancy to a stone on the beach that sparkled in the sun, so we brought it home early in our operation; it was a prime illustration of the difference in the man's and the woman's viewpoints -- the woman likes a stone that is pretty, the man, one that is good to build with. So on her inspection tours the question often was, "When are you going to use my stone?" This went on until the front wall was half built, then in a fit of desperation I propped up the roly-poly thing with some stone chips, threw a little mortar around the base, and backed away, scarcely daring to breathe for a couple of days. It is still in place.

Through the years, we had saved odd-colored stones on the wall at "Kozyhome" for no planned purpose, but now we looked them over critically for building material. Daisy showed good judgment in picking specimens for the facade. Stone



work never progresses at a spectacular rate, so I had time that summer to pick up useful material as I drove around the country. I would often bring home a few stones of some merit, push them up the knoll in the wheelbarrow, then go up after supper, mix a little mortar, and lay them. Some ledge containing flecks of salmon-colored mineral was blasted out in making the spillway for the MacDowell Dam. I worked in several of these fragments, also a flat green stone I found in the road ditch near Hillsboro Upper Village one rainy day.

By early fall the longest parallel walls of the structure had been built up full height, with bolts set along the top for securing the plate.

After working much of your time on things that will have to be done over again sometime, there is deep satisfaction in turning to work of a permanent nature. I found out just how durable stone work can be when I had to make holes in the wall or footing for electric cables and water pipe. I did not have a clear idea of this need or of its location when the wall was laid; it would have been so much easier to leave openings when the walls were being laid. Hindsight costs dear.

My brother Stephen, who did mason work as a business, did not admit for a long time that he had noticed my building effort. At the end of the year after I had built the two longest walls, he presented me with a calendar advertising his trade, and I said, "That's a pretty good calendar for anyone to get who does his own mason work." He looked a trifle foxy, but said nothing. The following spring, when he came to see me about another matter, I asked him to walk up and look over my stone job, so he trudged up the knoll with me, looked at the stonework approvingly, then admitted, "I've been watchin' all winter t' see if 'twas goin' t' stay up."

When the Hancock selectmen were making their rounds to assess property on April 1st after my effort had risen above ground level, Ernest Adams, a very practical man, asked me, "What d'ye want to build a stone house for, anyway, Chase?" "Well, I'll tell ye, Ern, it won't need paintin'." He put on a look of incredulous pity for anyone who would go to all that work just to save a paint job.

About this time, when the new domicile was at an early but sturdy stage of growth, Daisy and I started thinking about a name for it. We thought of and discarded a variety of names that were somewhat descriptive of the location, the view, or the surrounding woodland, most of which could be seen on name signs all around the country. We wanted something unique or at least unusual, but descriptive and applicable. Not so easy. Over several years, we almost reached a stalemate of proposal and reaction. I would put on a bright, expectant look upon arriving home from work and say, "I've thought of just the right name." Daisy would show mild interest, and I would announce "GATHERED ROCKS." Then she would wear a deprecating expression, best managed as a wifely reaction, which said plainer than words, "You can't be serious."

XIII

COLONY TIDBITS

Miss Fannie Charles Dillon, composer-pianist, a lady of the old school, told of an encounter with another Colonist:

"At a gathering of Colonists I was seated next to a young composer, and he started in with, 'What kind of stuff do you write?' I was a little taken aback, and replied, 'I am not sure that I am capable of evaluating my own work. What kind of stuff do you write?' He went on, 'My teacher says no woman can write any music worth listening to. As for myself, the whole field of musical composition was in a chaotic state from the time of Johann Sebastian Bach until I took over.'

"At another gathering, this same young man played the piano for us; he played some classical sonatas, played them well, and we enjoyed hearing them. Then he started playing his own stuff -- cacophony -- they don't like the word, but that's what it is, and people began to leave, a few at a time. Now shouldn't you think that he would have suspected something?"

\* \* \* \* \*

While working on the piano in the Colony library, I overheard two music professors chatting about Bach's manuscripts. One gem came out, delivered in mincing exact diction: "One thing I especially admire in his work is that despite all his apparent complexity, he still maintains an essential strophic simplicity." I wanted to sit gaping in the sun after that.

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Two lesser Colony sparrows were twittering around the edges of preparations for Marian MacDowell Day in 1952, much like hopeful but frustrated mosquitoes outside a screened window. There was some talk of Thornton Wilder, who was to introduce the evening program. "Just think of it," one said in a completely italicized tone of voice tinged with exasperation, "that man has written only six books, and he's world famous!" Mr. Wilder's stature among Colonists is monumental, not only because of his outstanding work, but also on account of apt sallies such as this: A seasoned Colonist told me that a very assured young person, a newcomer, asked Mr. Wilder a question that was not a good question on the subject in hand, or not well put. Mr. W. smiled and replied, "I'll see you in class."

\* \* \* \* \*

A Colonist of many summers who was serving as librarian one season told me that a course of indoctrination for newcomers might well be instituted. Toward the close of that season, a man who had been in residence all summer came to this librarian and inquired, "Say, just what did MacDowell do? What was his line?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Composer-pianist James Reistrup made this comment on performances: "I go out and play for an audience, and they applaud me, but I feel I should share the applause with Chopin, or whoever wrote the music, with the people who built the piano, and with the man who tuned it."

\* \* \* \* \*

A composer long known to me, Richard Winslow, the father of an active family, ran across me on the Colony grounds during his first stay there. I asked how he liked the place. "Oh, wonderful, after you get used to the eternal solitude."

\* \* \* \* \*

While doing some repairs on a studio piano, the affable musician who was using the place was glad to engage in a bit of conversation. We mentioned several contemporary and recent composers, and this man's comments on them were stimulating. I chanced to refer to Enesco, and his reaction was, "Oh, I know his works are popular orchestral pieces -- the Roumanian Rhapsody and all that, but he is a derivative composer." This was delivered in a tone that should have withered Enesco or anyone else who got within range. I thought to myself that there might be some slight lack of originality on the part of parrots who strut along in the half-steps of Schonberg or plain Berg.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lee Hoiby, working at opera composition, told me, "I find that I have to be cautious about mentioning my teacher, Menotti, around here, as these fellows dismiss him by saying he is 'traditional,' but it is not so easy to dismiss the fact that an all-Menotti program was performed recently at Lewisohn Stadium." Mr. Hoiby went on to say, "A great many people misjudge what goes on here at the Colony because they do not understand how a creative talent works. They see someone just lying around thinking and reading for most of his stay here, and conclude that he is loafing. After completing a work, one is likely to feel drained for a while. He may have worked intensely up to the point of completion, then he feels the need of relaxing; he needs a period of storing up ideas before his next creative effort, but this is an aspect of creative work that most people outside the artistic fields do not understand."

## THE SISTERS AT GREENVILLE

At Sacred Heart School in Greenville, I worked during the tenure of several sisters who taught the piano to the children of the parish, beginning with a sweet-faced little nun who did not hold up very well under the rigors of the contemplative life. It was a neatly organized system. I would be given a list of families whose pianos needed tuning, a child would ride along with me at the close of the school session to point out where the parties lived. The sister would occasionally coach me in regard to some family: "Dey haven' got much, so be as reas'-nable as you can." But I observed that even these "poor" families had a television before Daisy and I had one, and a fair show of other features of modernity.

The sisters varied in the degree to which they had been able to shut the world out of their lives. One who was generally crisp and businesslike did relax the Rule long enough to sit and visit with me about music for half an hour after I had finished the tuning, obviously enjoyed doing so, and probably obtained a supply of fresh thoughts to fill in the spaces between rosaries.

The ultimate in benevolence was manifested by kindly, mature Sister St. Jeanne D'Arc, a teaching nun for over fifty years, who showed me how much two of her beginners had learned of the fundamentals of musical notation in a few weeks. These little girls, grinning shyly, answered every question correctly. "At first they were just bebbies -- they would cry when the sister looked at them, but now they don't cry any more." She beamed upon them and patted them affectionately. I could see how they had blossomed in the warmth of her love. After the children had been dismissed she said, "Teaching the children is my life. When I get too old to teach, I want to die and go to heaven." I felt she had already experienced much of heaven.

At another time this sister told me, "I was questioning the children about the catechism, and when I asked, 'What state must I be in, in order to enter heaven?' (correct answer: A state of grace) one child replied 'The state of Massachusetts.' When the mother of our order comes to visit, I shall tell her of this, then I shall ask, 'How do you think I shall ever get to heaven up here in New Hampshire?'"

The last time I saw Sister St. Jeanne she told me, "I think I may be transferred next fall. Several times when our mother has visited she has made little remarks, such as that there is a certain parish where there is no music program, and at another time that it is better to have an experienced nun to start a music program, and that she would not put a young nun in charge of teaching the music in a school where music was to be taught for the first time."

"Sister," I said, "you have become very skillful at reading between the lines." She smiled in pleased agreement. After she had paid me, she said, a little wistfully, "I hope we may meet again."

## RECEIVED, DECLINED, REMEMBERED

Although a friend who had lived in Japan observed that a Japanese is likely to select one of his choicest possessions to give to a friend, while an American looks over his things to see what he doesn't need, when making a gift, I have found that most people like to share, even when the recipient is as casual an acquaintance as a piano tuner.

A young girl, stirring something in a mixing bowl and looking very domestic in her cute little apron, came in to watch me work. She was making gingerbread. Later, as I was leaving, she presented me with a foil-wrapped package, explaining, "Some hot gingerbread for you and your wife." It stayed warm, too, and we enjoyed it.

Customers have shared thinnings of iris and other perennials, even an offset of a choice lilac, and thriving clumps of these remain as a reminder of their giving. A woman in Hillsboro, responding to my interest in her garden, asked, "Do you have any arabis?" I did not, so she opened a new packet of seed and shared generously. For years after her passing, areas of this low-growing plant straggled among my haphazard borders and sent up, in early spring, their many stems of bloom which, like all white flowers, are especially lovely in moonlight.

Countess de Pierrefeu, essentially a mystic, presented me with a slim volume of her privately printed verse, in which I found several things that I admire very much.

Glasses of jelly or jam have come our way, and now and then a squash or other garden produce. Besides things to take home, spontaneous offers of snacks have often been welcome. A tall, friendly boy, Tommy Sargent, came in to watch me tune. He was gnawing a large drumstick. "Want some -- cold turkey?" he asked, between bites, "Can have -- a san'wich." I showed interest, and his mother proceeded to produce the item, with extras. I recall Charlotte Derby's ginger-nut sundae that was delectable.....also Beekman Pool's angel cake with thick butter frosting -- veritably, a culinary gilded lily.

Several hot-day treats in the form of lemonade and the like have cooled the tuner's gullet. One sizzling August day the son of a writer came forward with an offer of "rum and anything, anything at all, to cool you down." I replied, "No, thank you, but some cold water would be very welcome." "Oh, water," he said absently, as if I had mentioned something as far from his experience as the valleys of the moon. Just then some guests arrived for dinner, an opera singer, her mama, sister and husband, a retired service officer. The young man got busy supplying their preferences for rum-and-whatever, and I never did get the water.

I cannot begin to recall how many pets I have declined to accept -- cats, kittens, puppies. My standard reply to such offers is, "We've been through all

that with pets and livestock. As it is now, we can lock the door and go, but pets are a care." Nobody seems to have any surplus fat capons, turkeys, spring lambs, or anything else our taboos would not bar our gobbling up.

When tuning for the wife of the noted artist, C.W. Anderson, at their summer home in Mason, I always enjoy such of his works as are displayed about the house, as well as Mrs. Anderson's sculpture. During a stay in Florida, she had arranged some sea shells, corals, bits of coconut husk and other flotsam on the beach, then told her husband, "Now all you have to do is to paint them." He did so, his first effort in still life, and the results were exquisite, delicate and subtle in coloring. Two of these paintings, of different groupings of subject matter, were hung in their home. I admired them frankly. "Do you know," Mr. A. said, "some people walk through this house without even seeing those pictures." As I was leaving, Mrs. Anderson asked her husband, "Don't you suppose Mr. Chase would like one of your prints?" He soon brought in a lithograph of a New England lane with overarching elms, explaining, "I made the drawing 30 years ago, but put it onto stone only recently. One of the trees has been removed." I rate this print as the most distinguished item acquired in the line of duty.

In addition to the tangible things I have taken away with me, inside or out, many intangibles are indelibly recorded in memory, especially ideas gleaned from books and pictures, also remarks. Taking a tip from Mrs. H.H.A. Beach and her reading-practicing habit, and from Tallarico, who has been observed practicing on the mute clavier, reading a detective story, and listening to a ball game on the radio simultaneously, I have found it possible to do a bit of reading in the many good books that are within reach of some pianos. In this way I read a smattering of "Aristocrats of the Garden" and "More Aristocrats of the Garden" by Ernest H. ("Chinese") Wilson, one of which volumes contains, along with its main subject, the best brief description of autumn foliage in New England that has come to my attention; it succeeds in being both scientific and rhapsodic.

Above each of two successive pianos I worked on, in two towns, was a picture of just ocean, moderately agitated, in daylight; one was a pastel, the other an oil, and nothing had been done to the sky in either to divert attention from the elemental force represented in the sea. This I regard as one of my most memorable observations, in the great strength of the subject, in simplicity of treatment, in the sequence in which I saw these pictures, and in the fact that I have scarcely seen the like at any time since.

Professor Elting E. Morison, who edited the Theodore Roosevelt letters, was a customer of mine shortly after Sagamore Hill at Oyster Bay, Long Island, was opened to the public. I asked him if it were worth seeing. He replied in the affirmative, adding, "It's a good period piece; it gives an insight into the way those people thought and lived. Every man of wealth of that period who was really a man hunted big game, and the Roosevelts were conspicuously men. The place is full of heads and hides and horns of critters....The house had only one bathroom. With adults, children, and servants in the house, I can't imagine how they got up in the morning."

## JOHN KIRKPATRICK

When arrangements were being made for Marian MacDowell Day in August, 1952, John Kirkpatrick was Mrs. MacDowell's choice among pianists as a performer of some of her husband's works. He came to the Colony to talk with her, and to express his preference among the available pianos, about a week before the occasion. Tall, spare, and kindly, he proved to be one of the most helpful people who have entered my experience. He decided to use the seven-foot Steinway then in the Colony library, and directed me in voicing it to his liking. "The tone is now pinched, but I want a mouldable tone," was his comment. I set about reshaping and needling the hammers while he moved about the premises, coming in from time to time to test the results, always with pleasant comments. The thing to avoid in a job of this sort is overdoing it, so I proceeded with caution. He would try the tone for blend, and at one trial sketched a staff and indicated on it the notes he would have a little softer. After we had reached satisfaction in this matter, he threw the sketch into the fireplace, saying with a sly smile, "I had better dispose of this before some composer takes it for a new scale."

Shortly before noon, a basket lunch was brought for Mr. K., which evoked his ready appreciation. At a good point in our operations, we took a break, I produced my rations, and we repaired to the garden at the rear.

In some instances eating is a social function; in others primarily a physiological necessity. Here, it was a convenient peg on which to hang a basket of talk. I learned a lot. Not that Mr. K. was consciously instructing, but as mint gives out a fragrance upon being lightly brushed, or the sun emits rays by its very nature, some people who are full of a subject share ideas.

I asked if he played the harpsichord.

"Just enough so that I am frequently mistaken for Ralph Kirkpatrick, who is the harpsichordist. I have been complimented on his marriage, and he on my editions. We get together once in a while and exchange the latest confusions."

By commenting on things I had observed at the Colony, I touched off some comments about composers: "Composers have always been inclined to use the piano like an anvil. Beethoven's neighbors complained about the noise he made.... Someone has said, 'There has arisen among us in the last fifty years a distressing musical phenomenon, namely, the composer who is incapable of performing his own works.' I wish I could quote chapter and verse on that one; I could use it in my classes."

All this was interspersed with appreciative comments on the basket lunch -- "Tomato soup, bless their hearts," and the like, but always back to music.

"We talk about the history of music, but what we actually know of the

subject is only the near edge of it." His remarks revealed an especially rich philosophy, as well as knowledge.

Later, Mr. Kirkpatrick came in while I was tuning, and remarked, "I see you listen for the beats, while my listening is trained in a different direction, the relation of notes to other notes."

On Marian MacDowell Day, August 15, 1952, the piano was moved to an outdoor platform adjoining the porch at Hillcrest. I corrected it there, and at Mrs. MacDowell's request, Mr. Kirkpatrick played the "A. D. MDCXX" so that Olin Downes might hear it. Mr. Downes commented on the richness of the MacDowell harmonies. Mrs. MacDowell then told of the circumstances that led Herman Hagedorn to write the words of the hymn that was made from a portion of this piano piece.

I by-passed the afternoon program at Hillcrest, and the piano was moved to the Peterborough Golf Club for the evening program. I corrected it during the progress of a banquet, in order to finish on time.

Thornton Wilder introduced Mr. Kirkpatrick, who then played a substantial MacDowell program with devotion and artistry. His selections included the Sonata Eroica, all of the Woodland Sketches, and three each of the Sea Pieces and New England Idylls. It was a distinct privilege to hear these meritorious works performed by a recording artist of such rank, and with such sensitive musicianship. The audience was enthusiastic; for many of those present, this was no doubt an introduction to some of the less frequently heard MacDowell works. Afterward, I asked Mrs. Kirkpatrick to convey my thanks to her husband, both for the music and for being so appreciative of my efforts. She smiled charmingly and said, "He's always that way."



## ABSOLUTE PITCH: A MECHANIC'S VIEW

That which is termed absolute pitch -- the ability to recognize and name a note upon hearing it played, or to identify the key-signature of a musical composition -- is often more variable than the term would indicate. Concert pianist Theodore Lettvin told me, "Absolute pitch is the pitch of the living room piano."

An excellent pianist and teacher called me to work on two pianos that were previously unfamiliar to me; one she had had for years; the other, somewhat out of condition, she had just obtained in order to be equipped for playing duos. "I have perfect pitch," she said, "and my McPhail is tuned to 440. I should like to have this Knabe brought up to agree with it." I was able to get the Knabe up to standard pitch by exercising reasonable care. When I began to work on the McPhail, I found that although some previous tuner had written "440" on the harp near the tuning pins, the piano was pitched at the old 435 International Pitch. Upon starting to raise it to 440, which it resisted stubbornly, I snapped a wire in the middle octave, which indicated to me that it had not been above the 435 pitch for a long time, so I decided to leave it there, for safety's sake. After replacing the wire and completing the tuning, I had to go back and let the Knabe down to 435, for fun, to pay for my rashness. Since then I have relied more closely on tuning forks. This customer, however, can invariably name the note I am working on as I tune, but one's sense of pitch needs only to be accurate within less than a quarter-tone in order to recognize C from C#, or the like. The difference of five cycles per second at A had not been detected in this instance.

In order to demonstrate absolute or perfect pitch in the strict sense, one ought to be able independently to tune a string or reed to A440, or to some other note in the same relative scale. The ability to pitch a song unaccompanied is highly useful and admirable, but the vibrato of most human voices, wavering well nigh a half tone on a given pitch, especially when singing *fortissimo*, would rule this out as an accurate method of proving the possession of the talent.

The MacDowell Colony called me back in midsummer to correct a piano that was being used by an able composer. The piano had been kept for years in heated rooms, and after being moved into an unheated stone studio, it underwent a process of sharpening in pitch, due to swelling of its wooden parts with atmospheric dampness, which lasted for five years. I had lowered the pitch to 440 by a quarter-tone on two occasions, and by smaller amounts at other tunings. The composer asked me, "Wasn't the pitch above 440?" I replied that it was, and explained the cause. "I couldn't believe that my ear had dropped that much just in coming up here from New York," she remarked. Bravo! I thought, here is a musician who really hears the pitch. Still, a year or two later when I returned to correct the same piano for the same composer, her question about the status of the pitch indicated that even she could be mistaken.

Most orchestras in the U.S.A. use the 440 A. Boston Symphony, however,

uses a 444 A, said to have been adopted during the conductorship of Karl Muck. If absolute pitch, possessed by many outstanding performers, were all that the term implies, why do not the many noted soloists who perform on variable-pitch instruments with this orchestra adhere doggedly to the 440 pitch they more frequently use? When Joseph Szigeti appeared as soloist with the Boston Symphony at the December 31st, 1954, and January 1st, 1955, pair of concerts, the broadcast of the performance reached the hinterlands, and his playing sounded in perfect tune with the orchestra. This artist conformed to the higher pitch, and other performers do so continually.

A classic example of uncompromising correctness was the playing of the great chamber music performer, Dr. Joseph Joachim. In playing works with piano accompaniment, he would not accommodate his pitch to the temperament of the piano, but played the perfect scales and intervals which are possible on the violin. He was criticised for playing out of tune, by those who did not understand the purity of his style, while actually the piano, to the extent of the acoustical falsehood involved in its temperament, was out of tune with Dr. Joachim's playing.

A sense of perfect pitch may be a doubtful asset in a child. A fine violinist of my acquaintance has a son who refused to take up instrumental study because his natural musical sense was so sensitive that he could not endure unskilled playing, even his own. This parent wanted the lad to take a violin and sit in with the school orchestra, but he said, "Mother, I wouldn't be found dead in that orchestra. Those kids don't play in tune." A correct sense of pitch which develops along with music study is a safer asset.

From these observations I conclude that a sense of relative pitch is of greater value than the so-called absolute pitch. I have heard of a singer who possessed absolute pitch to such an extent that if she were called upon to sing at a pitch slightly different from the prevailing standard, she would feel frustrated and could not perform. She never became famous. The ordinary musician has to adjust his pitch to a number of non-standard pitches -- pianos which have been allowed to settle far below any standard, organs built for the 435 A, and even organs built for an old concert pitch that was nearly a quarter-tone above the present standard. This is why a good sense of relative pitch is indispensable, even when it necessitates, from an absolute point of view, what a customer of mine calls "singing in the cracks" (between the piano keys).

When John Kirkpatrick of the Cornell University Music Department played two programs of MacDowell's works at Peterborough in August, 1952, he mentioned that he had been brought up on the 435 pitch, hence the 440 pitch, to use his own words, "always seems to me a bit strained," but he did not refer to this as a drawback in performing.

Composer John LaMontaine told me he considers absolute pitch a matter of musical memory, and this I consider a just definition.

In "Violin Making As It Is and Was" by the English writer Ed. Heron-Allen, there is a comment to the effect that the pitch has been raised about a half-tone from the time of Stradivari to our day. If this be accurate information, then all musical compositions of that period are now being played at a higher pitch than the original, although the key designations remain the same. Presuming

that Johann Sebastian Bach possessed "absolute pitch," imagine his consternation if he could hear his G minor prelude played in what would sound to him like G# minor, and so on throughout his monumental volume of works.

## XVIII

### STOCK ANSWERS

It may indicate laziness, but it is convenient to have in stock some standard answers to questions that are frequently asked.

"You must have good hearing. Do you tune by ear?"

"Just normal hearing, but trained in this special direction. The ear is a necessary link in the chain of coordinated effort required. It is essential to recognize what is heard, to know the meaning of it, and to be able to do what is necessary about it."

"Do you have to take a course to learn this work?"

"One has to be taught by someone. It's like arithmetic; one learns the easy rules first, applies them to working out problems, then goes on to the more advanced rules and their application."

"Do you play as well as tune the piano?"

"I hope I tune it better than I play it, otherwise I doubt that anyone would hire me."

"How many pianos do you tune a day?" (This, from the mathematically minded.)

"That depends on how long the jobs are, how far I travel, and how late I work." (No satisfaction.)

"How often should a piano be tuned?"

"As often as it needs tuning, which varies with the mechanical condition, the demands or awareness of the player, and the atmosphere in which the piano is kept. Changes in humidity and temperature affect the tuning. I may as well admit that, for the average listener, a greater margin of tolerance exists between correct tune and what he recognizes as out-of-tune, than is the case with the tuner. Apparently some tuners lean rather heavily on this margin of tolerance in order to shorten their working time per piano. Miss Augusta Schwenker of Henniker remarked to me, 'I like to hear you tune. You go at it systematically, just the way my old tuner in New York used to do. I have had tuners who just skipped around, and I was not pleased with their work.' This points to the fact that a great many people feel a sense of rightness about a piano in tune who are unable to analyze the situation. Performing musicians are not always sensitive to the condition of the tuning, while some non-performers are acutely aware of even a single note that is wrong. In general, people without any particular musical training are more responsive to tone quality than to the condition of the tuning, hence a piano with a hard, metallic tone, but in tune, does not please such people

as much as one with a pleasant, mellow tone, out of tune."

"Why do you bother with those high notes? We never use them."

"Because neglecting the high notes would be a bad habit for a tuner to get into. Also, those high notes, in proper tune, enrich the tone of the rest of the piano, by sympathetic vibration, more than you realize. A customer of mine had a good grand which had had its treble tuned unpleasantly sharp by some previous tuner in whom she had confidence. I had a hard time to convince her that it ought to be done differently, but after I had gotten it into proper tune and she had used it a while, she admitted that the instrument had gained in resonance."

"How many makes of pianos are there?"

"Over 7,000, according to a reference book. I kept a record until I got above 250 names, then discontinued, and that was years ago. There were never as many makers at any one period as there are names of pianos, as most of the big factories produce several name-brands. Then there is the practice of stencilling the name of a piano dealer on the nameboard of a stock piano, and quite often this name was also cast on a small plate and attached to the harp in such a way as to appear as part of the original casting, to further the impression that 'Bill Jones & Son' actually made pianos."

"Do you do this kind of work all the time? I didn't suppose there would be enough pianos out here in the country to keep a tuner busy."

"I haven't done any other kind of paying work for some years. If all the pianos in existence were kept in tune and repair, there would not be anywhere near enough tuners to meet the demand. As it is, I work in forty or fifty towns during an average year, spreading myself over a larger area as time goes on. Everything today is on an area basis, and geared to transportation, in such a service trade as this. But it isn't all take-home pay; in the long run, about thirty cents out of every dollar I earn goes into the automobile."

"What do you use to stick on ivories?"

"Odd as it may seem, I use key cement. One family piano I worked on gave evidence that several kinds of adhesives had been used, unsuccessfully, to stick on the ivories. Some of the key heads were sliding around on a tan substance that was still unhardened and ropy. I said to a young girl in the family, 'I guess everything has been tried to fasten these ivories on, and the last thing was vanilla pudding.' She looked utterly serious and replied, 'Well, 'twasn't.'"

"Don't you get tired of listening to pianos?"

"I don't get tired of eating with some degree of regularity, and tuning pianos supplies the means to do so. But seriously, the hardest thing about the trade is getting mentally fortified so that the sameness doesn't get you down."

Quite often I point out to a young person who asks such a question that one has to see some worthwhile objective, beyond his earnings, that furnishes an incentive -- the practice of a skill, the meeting of a need -- and this enables

one to live down the humdrum aspects. This is part of growing up. One high school boy listened thoughtfully to this pinch of philosophy and said, "Thank you." I thought there was some hope for him.

## A WINTER INTERLUDE

Even though tuning gets to be practically second nature, so that a casual conversation, or reading, can be carried on simultaneously, I sometimes tell people it's like the Scotchman's book. This Scot was living in a boarding house, and he had mentioned to the other fellows there that he read 20 pages in a book before he retired for the night. These rascals got into his room every day for a week and set his bookmark back 20 pages, then asked him how he liked his book. He replied, "Weel, 'tis a verra guid book, but there's a sairtin' amount o' r-r-repetition to it."

When the weather turned too cold for mason work, Daisy's next gentle hint began to be heard: "It doesn't seem as if it would take very much cutting to improve the view from the knoll." So I started putting in some time in the woodlot with this purpose in mind. There were four or five white pines suitable for saw logs obstructing the view, and a few smaller hardwoods. I needed to cut firewood somewhere, and accomplishing dual objectives in one operation suits the Yankee temperament. On an occasional spare-time day it was most welcome to exchange the buzz of a cracked sounding board for the snore of my one-man crosscut saw, the methodical thumping up and down the keyboard by half steps for the bark of the axe puncturing the winter stillness with a rude staccato. Little traffic passed on the highway nearby. Aside from my own noise, the scream of a blue jay, the churr of a scolding red squirrel, the distant baying of Will Curtis' foxhounds, chickadees introducing themselves with cheerful insistence, were all sounds that fitted the scene, little accents in the soothing poultice of silence that envelops one in the winter woodland. I felt a kinship with the earlier Chases who settled along the Ashuelot River north of Keene, one of whom got this sad laconic entry in the family record: "Killed by a tree." The sounds of nature, coming down to our time from great antiquity, promote a sense of continuity with the past, greatly needed in a world where the rate of change accelerates with every turn of the wheel. But you never achieve, for long, a return to the past, even in fancy. I could look up almost any time and see the vapor trail of a jet laid across the sky, the plane itself being beyond hearing.

Working solo in the woods, I found I did well to clean up each tree before starting on another; I would cut the trunk into saw logs, salvage the top and limbs for firewood, stack the brush for burning at a safe time. Then, if snow fell, I could make a fresh start next time. There was no hurry; I was having my winter vacation, piecemeal. I knew that I could get my neighbor, Forrest Lowe, to saw my logs at his mill, come spring, even though most operators would not bother with such a little dab. Thank the Lord for neighbors, in the old sense of helpful people who live nearby.

On going up over the knoll on the way to Kozyhome after tree cutting, I never needed to look back; I would get a progress report shortly. Daisy would get into her winter togs and plod up the knoll, then come back and administer a

pat and a prod something like this: "Yes, cutting that big pine helped a lot. I can begin to see the tower on Crotched Mountain, but just beyond where the pine was, there are some little switches that stick up into the sky. It would be nice if..."

"Yes, woman, on my next free day, but I want you to realize that those 'little switches' are the tops of maples fifty feet tall."



## A DAY WITH BILLY

A renovation job that required most of a day served to get me pretty well acquainted with Billy Eva, then about five. His mother, busy at the telephone switchboard, told me to put him out if he bothered, but he was just interested, asked some reasonable questions, and watched. I was much more of a pest at a similar age -- an area in which most grownups have a surprisingly short memory -- so we got along famously.

Part way through the work, I had the piano action removed and standing on the floor, safe enough if left alone, but at this point Billy's mother came in. She took a backward step and knocked the action over, resulting in minor damage. After she had fled the scene with profuse apologies, Billy remarked demurely, "You might have expected a little boy like me to do something like that."

At lunch time, I stopped work, and Billy asked why.

"I'm going to eat my lunch and read my paper. When I eat lunch, it's just like being in church. Everybody sits still, and nobody says a word." So Billy climbed up on the sofa and looked at a picture book all the while, with never a word. Evidently he knew about church.

I resumed work, and Billy went back into action, still harmlessly, and lasted until the tuning began, which has been known to drive more mature and philosophical people away.

Billy's family progressed to a more beautiful home, and he went away to a school where skills are emphasized and valued. Whenever I saw him thereafter, he always manifested a respectful attitude. He went on to college, became a pilot, and later, when working in his parents' home, I saw photos of Billy and his bride, to be followed, in due course, by pictures of their children.

## MUSICAL ATOM-SPLITTERS

There was a small but varied gathering at the Watson Studio -- the two musical composers concerned, two other Colonists, a reporter in search of a story, a vacationing college student, and I. Some of the Colonists had their lunch baskets. The place had the atmosphere of an informal studio-laboratory, with microphones and tape recorders commanding attention, and cables strung around in bewildering but purposeful array -- a radical change from the days when Mrs. Beach worked there with staff paper and a piano. I had been tuning there the previous week, and Vladimir Ussachevsky had said, "Otto Luening and I have asked a few people to come in at lunch time next Tuesday to hear some of our recordings. Would you like to join us then?" So there we were, seated in the motley collection of chairs that suggested donations from several attics.

Mr. Ussachevsky opened with a few remarks. "We work entirely with sounds that were originally musical tones. Mr. Luening is an excellent flutist, while I play sufficient piano. The music has been put through filters in some instances which filter out the resultant tone and leave the partials that make it up. Sometimes we put the music into a different range by halving or doubling the original speed of the tape, and so on. We have worked together for several years. It requires one who understands what we want to accomplish to operate the recorder. Equipment is expensive, and we have had to proceed slowly."

We then heard a composition of Mr. Luening's that conveyed a somber or religious mood. Flute music had been lowered in pitch to give depth to the work, normal flute tones had been recorded along with the altered parts, and the intended mood was effectively evoked. A central tonality sounded steadily throughout, with short sounds coming in periodically above and below it in pitch. I could best describe this work in terms of light. It was as if a shaft of somber gray light shone steadily on a surface, with little blips of brighter hues flashing frequently at either side of it, and one watched for and imagined things that never actually appeared.

"After building up a library of these altered sound effects," Mr. Luening explained, "the next thing is to organize them into compositions that will have meaning for the listener. It is difficult to catalog this material, as there is no existing vocabulary to use in describing what we have done to the sounds."

(More recently, I came across a young musician at the Colony who came there to work out a notation system for classifying electronically altered sounds, showing that when a need exists, someone endeavors to meet it.)

A composition of Mr. Ussachevsky's called "Sonic Contours" was played. He touched upon some of the techniques employed. It had all started out as piano music except for one passage where human voices were used. The piece opened with some normal piano music of modern dissonant character. Then came some chords

that sounded like brilliant organ stops resembling brasses. This effect had been obtained by turning on the microphone a split second after each chord was struck, then turning up the volume gradually, so that the initial percussive stroke was omitted and the natural dying-away effect was overcome, the chords being stretched out at an even level of volume. The work was embellished occasionally with pearly arpeggios and elfin-like runs. The altered human voices were like handicapped persons striving mightily to get some meaning across, but falling short of their goal. The result was a colloquy of repeated syllables at different pitches -- awh-awh-awh-awh---ih-ih-ih-ih---uh-uh-uh-uh -- and the like. There was a simple canon that had been recorded and re-recorded on itself many times over, which built up to an organized percussive jangle, then came restfully back to the single phrase. The piece ended with a continuous tone of gauzy texture that sounded on and on before it faded, suggesting the tail of a comet disappearing over the horizon -- eerie and fascinating.

These altered sounds gave one the feeling of being liberated from the limitations of conventional music. I have heard another Colonist, a composer, object to their being called music, but no one could dispute the value of such advanced studies in sound. They are capable of greatly intensifying taut situations, a wonderful vehicle for incidental sound effects for a space-ship movie. Hearing these compositions at the laboratory level was a gripping experience; I could say with Keats,

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken."

I also felt somewhat like the old farmer who for the first time saw a cow with a window installed in her side.

When, during the second winter after this demonstration, these composers brought out their "Poem in Cycles and Bells for Tape Recorder and Orchestra," which toured some of the major symphonies in the U.S.A., I swelled very slightly with pride, since it is probable that some of the component sounds in this work had originated from the old black Steinway I had tuned in the Watson Studio.

## WHY PEOPLE KEEP PIANOS

Keeping a piano is with many people a matter of inertia; those so kept rarely get tuned unless a note gets out of order. They keep on jangling year after year, and my reaction is, "No hear, no suffer." This goes on indefinitely until a member of the family feels the urge to modernize, the old upright does not fit into the new decor, and someone whose children are wishful to try tickling the ivories trucks it home, at which point I may see the piano for the first time, and perhaps wish it had slumbered on in its old location.

A trifle more active reason is the semi-sentiment, "We've allus had a pianer in the house, and I'd sorta miss it." A parent made a remark indicating about the same degree of feeling: "My folks kept a piano when I was growing up, so I want one for my kids to bang on."

There is also the visiting relative motivation. "My niece comes up from Boston on her vacations," one woman told me, "and I keep the old piano on her account. You just oughter hear her play 'The Midnight Fire Alarm' -- why, she gets all over that piano! You can hear the bells a-clangin' and the hosses gallopin' and the people screamin'!" As she told this, her eyes glowed with a fine Victorian excitement as she recalled the mounting horrors of this pianistic melodrama.

Pardon me if I dwell on the bizarre; there are always the expected, logical reasons for keeping pianos and having them tuned. People want their children "at least to be exposed to music," as a mother explained; a person who can teach piano naturally wants to earn by this method, and may even have an interest in developing talent in the young; one who has had some piano training doesn't want it to languish altogether; "We like to have the choir meet at our house," and so on through a list of reasons which, although dully logical and proper, furnish the mainstay of the tuner's livelihood. Like the antique dealer who must of necessity keep picking up standard items, but whose sheer delight lies in the unexpected, one-of-a-kind items, so the tuner recalls with greatest relish the oddities.

One woman kept a piano for the sole reason that the D.A.R. met at her house at long intervals. She got in touch with me well in advance of the date, and wanted her piano tuned just before the event. It was always miserably out of tune, from a general-use viewpoint, but this went on for years and was satisfactory on that basis. I did not mention to this customer the still-debated point of whether or not the Daughters had taken an official stand which resulted in a concert being given before the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday, 1939, by Marian Anderson, a great musician and a great American.

I could not pass over as too ordinary for mention the fact that some people keep a piano chiefly because it belongs in a well-appointed home, and keep it in tune for similar reasons, for this has led to my seeing and enjoying a variety of

premises that I could hardly have expected to see otherwise.

One man, Charles A. Smith, clock maker, of Brattleboro, Vt., kept a piano because he liked to play old dance tunes on the fiddle, and delighted to find anyone who could play suitable chords as a piano accompaniment. He could read very little music, but had a natural musician's feeling for harmony, played in good tune himself, and appreciated a piano in decent tune.

A family who had an old square piano decided that it wasn't worthwhile to have it tuned any more, but kept it for a long time after that because, as the man of the house, a poultryman, said, "It makes a great place to keep hatching eggs."

There are those who keep a piano because they love to dust and polish. A man in my neighborhood told a friend, "My piano hasn't been tuned for seventeen years, but it has had the best of care."

## XXIII

### COLONY ECHOES

A former Colonist, Frederick L. Day, told me, "When I first went to the Colony, in the 1930's, Mrs. MacDowell explained the rules of the place to me. She said the studios were not to be used after 6 P.M., adding with a wise smile, 'because of danger of fire,' but I knew, and she knew that I knew, that that was not what she meant."

\* \* \* \* \*

In showing me around the Colony grounds, George Hemphill pointed to a gate and said, "When Mrs. MacDowell was managing things here, that gate was locked after a certain hour, and if a Colonist wanted to go out in the evening, he had to be back by that time, and also had to account for where he was going, and with whom, even if it was only a trip to the movies."

"Did this regulation have the effect of keeping scandal out of our fair Colony?"

"Humph," he chuckled, "the effect it had was that some homely dame that a fellow wouldn't ordinarily look at twice, would look positively beautiful to him when he hadn't seen anything else for a couple of weeks."

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On account of the emphasis on work at the Colony, the public has limited access to the grounds, and many people who live nearby know very little about the place and its workings. Besides giving out serious information, I once quoted the remark about the locked gate to a graphic artist of distinctive individuality, and added that the Colony at that period had some of the features of an old-fashioned boarding school.

"I attended a very strict boarding school in England," she said, smiling reflectively. "Coeducational? Oh, my, NO! Not a boy was allowed on the premises. We had dances, yes, but we danced with one another. We could wear only long white dresses and black shoes and stockings. I always rebelled at this, perhaps because I had an American mother. Once I came down to attend one of our dances wearing dark gray shoes and stockings -- heaven knows that was bad enough -- but I was promptly detected and sent back to my room to put on the proper black. My brother came to call once with two other boys. I went out and sat in the car with them, which wouldn't have been allowed at all except that my brother was present. The windows around that school were filled with faces. To tease them, my brother pulled down the curtains in the car, it being an old-fashioned automobile. That was back around 1921. In this day, we marvel that covering a large portion of the anatomy with ugly accouterments could ever have been expected to make people good."

\* \* \* \* \*

A neighbor of Mrs. MacDowell's told me, "Mrs. MacDowell used to invite some of us who live nearby to come to her house one evening during the summer, and she would have a Colonist perform for us. One year it was a composer, who came in after we were all seated, sat down at the piano, looked dreamily off into space, and kept poking one note. Once in a while he would go into a flight of chords all over the piano, then back to poking the same note. That lasted quite a while, and we wondered if we could endure it any longer. Finally he got up to go, and she thanked him. Afterwards, she excused the performance and said, "I didn't suppose it could be quite so bad."

It may be that the composer had his side, too; the whole act may have been his protest at being put on exhibit.

Mrs. Mabel Scott Holland told me she knew Mr. MacDowell very well. "Wasn't he quite a handsome man?" I asked. "I shouldn't have called him handsome," she replied, "but he was good-looking. I used to sit beside him at the baseball games. I was a young girl at the time. He liked to watch a ball game."

Miss Mary Seccomb related: "The only time I ever heard Mr. MacDowell play, about half a dozen of us children went and sat on the stone wall near his studio in the rain, and he played. He had promised to play at our house one evening, and we children were allowed to sit up to hear him, but he and my father got to talking, and we got very sleepy, but he didn't get around to playing. Mr. MacDowell was very fond of my father. He told his wife, 'Captain Seccomb is one person I hope to meet in the after-life. There are some I should not care to meet, but I do hope to meet Captain Seccomb.'"

## LITTLE GLIMPSES

In the course of going about the country, working perhaps a couple of hours in someone's home, then moving on to another such errand, one doesn't get to know many individuals at all well, but the glimpses of people are many and varied. When Washington Irving wrote his account of "The Stout Gentleman" in "Bracebridge Hall," he made it so lively with small observations and large conjectures that one comes to realize only at the end of the piece that all Irving ever actually saw of his subject was his coat tails and breadth of beam as he mounted the stage-coach at the time of his departure from the inn. So in brief observations of people, one fills in the blanks out of his own imagination and experience of human nature -- a sort of mental fictionalizing. But I shall stick to what I saw, mostly.

\* \* \* \* \*

In a Dublin mansion, after finishing my tuning, I found the lady of the house visiting with a caller over a tall green bottle and two elegant goblets. The lady arose and went elsewhere in the house to get her purse. I went along a dark hallway toward the exit, and waited for my pay. I could look through a little vista of intervening passageways and see my customer's guest still seated within easy reach of the tall bottle, from which she proceeded to fill her goblet. Then she gulped it down, refilled it to the same level as when I had interrupted the tete-a-tete, and thus fortified, politely awaited her friend's return.

\* \* \* \* \*

In working for a family in Bennington, I learned that the handsome house guest was a Marine bandsman, who was visiting the daughter in the family. The accord between them was not at this point very well established. The girl would talk with him for a little while, then go out to the kitchen and spend some time with her mother. This shift occurred several times while I tuned that piano. The Marine waited calmly, looking very attractive and self-possessed, and chatted with me about piano tuning at times when the girl was out of the room. Apparently his tactics were effective; I did hear later that they got married.

\* \* \* \* \*

A woman in a nearby village was something of a local character, noted for driving her husband out of the house, after which she would stand in the doorway and rail at him. His method of reprisal was his own get-up. He was an able drummer, and although she had bashed in his drum years before, he did manage to keep a pair of drumsticks hidden from her, and he had an oak keg that was too stout for her to smash up. He would sit on the chopping block in the dooryard and drum on that keg until she retreated from the doorway, which sometimes took an hour. When the neighbors heard that tireless tattoo in plain and fancy



rhythms, they knew that couple had reached a stalemate in their unholy deadlock. The woman had asked me to stop and look at her old piano at my convenience, which came about on a warm summer afternoon. She answered my knock at the door with a sharp, "Who is it?" from somewhere inside. I announced my name and errand, and she said in an entirely different tone of voice, "Wait a minute." It was several minutes, and when she finally opened the door, she stood there in slippers and a thin wrapper, but all decked out in war paint and eye shadow. Obviously, she had spent the time while I was waiting at the door warming up the odds and ends of her leftover charms into a sort of cosmetic hash. All smiles, she explained, "Sorry to keep you waiting, but when you came to the door I had just retired for a nap, and I was in my birthday clothes..." at which point she wriggled coyly under the wrapper. It took a very short time for me to look at that piano and depart. My reaction was similar to that of the Boston judge who was delegated by the Watch and Ward Society to read James Joyce's Ulysses when it was a new and shocking book, with the intent of ascertaining its possible effect on morality. After his perusal of the book, he was said to have reported, "The effect of the book on public morals would be difficult to determine; its effect on me was that of an emetic rather than an aphrodisiac."

\* \* \* \* \*

Late of a summer afternoon, driving slowly along a lane leading to Sutton Center, I met a tall boy and a short boy with their swimming togs returning from the ol' swimmin' hole. As I passed them, the tall boy put an arm around the short boy's shoulders, and the short boy responded by sliding his arm around his companion's waist, then they strolled along engrossed in their frank affection, unmindful of the rest of the world, and no doubt unaware that this was the most carefree love they could ever know.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard Call in Sutton watched me working on a piano, and a far-away look came into his eyes as he told me, "Piano wire -- the North Korean guerillas used to take a piece of it, put a handle on each end of it, and use it to garrote our boys. A couple of fellows would be walking along at night, and a guerilla would sneak up behind, and all of a sudden one of them would lurch, and his head would be hanging off to one side at an odd angle."

\* \* \* \* \*

A man I tuned for in Wilton was a retired fermentologist. During his active career he had worked in several countries where the production of alcoholic beverages was a government monopoly. He would be given the best living conditions, provided with a car and chauffeur, and otherwise accorded V.I.P. status, to enable him to engineer those industries most effectively. The dirtiest phrase in his vocabulary was "wild yeast." It seemed that wherever he took on a project, the natives were fermenting their concoctions with wild yeast -- a most heinous thing to do, in this man's view. He had to institute the use of cultured strains of yeast. But don't think his attitude was one of disapproval merely. A Puritan of the Pilgrim century preaching against open and shameless immorality could not express any more severe denunciation of the act, condemnation of the culprits' baseness, nor contempt for their lost and ignorant state, than that man could

pack into that one phrase "wild yeast." The things we abhor are determined by our frame of reference.

## THE NEED FOR PLODDERS

A piano tuner is a musical plodder, and how I got that way is illustrated in the way I learned to read music at the piano. By the time I was about eleven, I had realized that people read off a printed page what they played at the keyboard. When I was in the primary grades at Shattuck Street School, Nashua, New Hampshire, Euzebius G. Hood, a rather colorful figure, used to come to our school to teach singing. The school had no piano; the pitch pipe was the sole teaching aid. During these sessions of instruction I learned the letter names of the lines and spaces in the treble clef, also middle C. So when I had time, I sat at our family piano with a song book opened to "Annie Laurie," which I knew by heart, and with much slipping and sliding got so I could read that song off the printed page. I was months accomplishing this. Then I transferred to other songs, learned by trial and error how to put in sharps and flats. It's a good thing I had a feeling for standard harmony; free-wheeling music not anchored in a definite key wouldn't have been much help in my learning process.

You can't have a manufacturing plant staffed with top executives, with no technicians and workers, nor an army made up of generals and no privates. One doesn't get very far very fast by my self-instruction process, and I have been told, "If you can remember how many music lessons you've had, you haven't had many." When people tell me, "My mother had me take piano lessons for nine years, but I never play any more, not even for recreation," I know the benefits showered upon them did not cost them enough in personal effort. Had it been their own idea in the first place, carried out on their own initiative, they would have appreciated the accomplishment more and would not have quit the piano. But this observation carries no regret; my slow empirical method of learning was good foundation for an indigenous winder-upper.

I once knew a writer whose ready pen seemed to receive stimulation from his talks with me; my pedestrian phrases served as a convenient springboard for his afflatus. Just so, the ministrations of a piano tuner serve as a contributory factor in music, a link that is missed only when it is missing.

On an occasion when I had to wait for a few minutes for a school class to be dismissed so that I could go to work on a piano, I sat and watched a sound film on the structure of music. It was lucid, suited to the grade of the class, and held my attention. The thought came to me, "Who knows? Perhaps if such predigested musical pabulum had been spooned into me at a similar impressionable age, I might have become a musician instead of a mechanic."

## RECOLLECTIONS OF FRANK J. STEELE

Frank was a resident of Roxbury, New Hampshire, at the period when I knew him, about 1940-1950. He was semi-retired, played the violin quite well, and liked to tell of his instrumental ancestry: "I was a pupil of Sawdon; Sawdon was a pupil of John Dunn; John Dunn was a pupil of Joachim." He had been active as a piano tuner around Sherbrooke, Quebec, in his younger days, and was full of stories of his experiences.

"I sold pianos for a dealer in Sherbrooke in the towns all around there. Those French-Canadian people were very substantial, most of them had money in the bank, and were as honest as the day, so there was no trouble about making collections, even if they paid only a little at a time. Some of those villages didn't have a single piano in them when I went to work around there. I knew enough of the language to get along in business.

"One winter day I went into the stockroom of the dealer I worked for and saw a new shipment of shiny upright pianos lined up there. The boss asked me, 'Frankie, what are we going to do with them?' 'Why, take them out and sell them,' I told him.

"This is how I did it. I hired a man with a team of horses and a platform sled -- it was all horse travel up there in those days -- and we loaded on two pianos back-to-back, covered them with blankets and tied them down. I told the driver to go to a certain village a few miles out of Sherbrooke. It was a snowy day, and I knew most of the male population would be gathered in the local bar. I went in and ordered a round of drinks for everybody. While they were having their drinks, I leaned over the bar and talked with the bartender and learned that the most prominent man in the village was, let us say, Antoine Birot. Then I turned to the men and said, 'I'd like half a dozen of you stout fellows to help me move a piano into Antoine Birot's house.' Plenty of help volunteered, we went to the house and moved in the piano, then I proceeded to sell it.

"I sold pianos in that way a good many times, made my collections, and went back regularly and tuned them, building up my trade in the process. Once I thought I was going to have to move a piano out; the people were not taking hold at all, and it hurt my pride. Then one day as I was going my rounds tuning for my customers in the village where I was having the problem, I met the parish priest, whom I knew slightly, as I knew so many of them around there, and we stopped to talk.

'How are things going?' he asked.

'Not so well.' Then I told him about the family who were not inclined to buy.

'Come with me,' he said, 'I'll sell it for you.'

"So we went to the house. The people had great respect for their priest. He talked to them and painted a glowing word picture of the young people gathering around the piano with their friends to sing in the evenings in the wholesome atmosphere of the home, which was to a large extent true, and all dependent upon their buying the piano. Then he drew a contrasting opposite picture:

'But if you let this instrument of culture and refinement go out of your home, your young people will scatter in the evenings, perhaps to find unworthy companionship on the streets, and your home will be sad and empty,' and so on.

"They bought the piano."

## XXVII

### IN HOMES

A viewing of many things in the same class leads to comparison and evaluation. The privilege of working in hundreds of homes gives one a cross-section of human likes and loves, and of where different individuals place emphasis in daily living. The reputed charms of music are attested by the fact that people in all walks of life and in all conditions of wealth own pianos and have them tuned. I have worked in homes where the whole batch of furnishings would not bring over a few hundred dollars at auction, and in others where \$50,000 could scarcely duplicate the furnishings of a single room. Yet the intangible factors that make a house a home may have been abundant in the first instance and scanty in the second. Cheery geraniums in a window or a piece of joint-plant dangling from a hanging basket may mean as much to the owner as the lavish floral display I observed in one house of wealth.

In an interestingly irregular room of perhaps 30 x 60 feet there were two immense arrangements of cut *lilium rubrum* in metal urns, about fifty blooms in one and thirty in the other. There were also in the same room two large bunches of the most elegant sweet peas and a fine globular container of cut roses. On the deep sill of a mullion window were six pots of the choicest tuberous begonias in cheerful, light shades. But in that room, dark in finish and ultra-dignified, the thing did not seem at all overdone. After my work was finished, the good lady of the house, Mrs. J. L. Mauran of Dublin, (mentioned with unvarying esteem by all working people around the town), invited me to walk out to see the formal garden. This I was glad to do, starting from an open porch which afforded a view across several acres of lawn, edged by a long border of showy annuals, toward Monadnock three or four miles distant. The formal garden, bordered by clipped evergreen hedges, was outstanding in its class, with pool, garden furniture, and beautifully kept regimented plantings. It was late of a warm September afternoon; the fragrance of abundant beds of heliotrope hung oppressively in that sheltered spot. In the orderly quiet the background music of myriad insects, always unobtrusively present at that season, enhanced the feeling of peace and security which such sumptuous surroundings suggest.

I love the little touches that reveal fondness for home and the presence of faithful care -- the chirping housebird, perhaps, or a bay window full of carefully tended plants furnishing a welcome oasis of greenery when the outdoor scene is subdued, and bright blossoms shout a nurtured defiance at the numbing cold that lurks only two panes away.

In many homes a well-rounded set of furnishings manifests the general good taste of the owner, while in others some dominating interest is expressed -- oriental rugs, or etchings, or cloisonné items. One room, tastefully decked out with restrained elegance, contained scarcely any pictures; several handsome carved jade pieces and a small antique Buddha provided ornament enough. I remarked about them. The owner laughed. "I'm not a Buddhist," she said, "I'm a

good Episcopalian. I just happen to like oriental art, so I collected these things."

There is a large cult of Ye Olde in New Hampshire, and the most acutely conscious in this class are apt to be new settlers from down-country (which generally means eastern Massachusetts hereabouts). All manner of unrelated objects get hung from hand-hewn timbers or stood around, about which the owner says reverently, "They're old." That dignifies even the ugliest. Natives of a couple of generations ago would have some loud fun over a milk can light fixture, or a horse collar hung in a breakfast nook.

Things collected from far places find haven in homes. There is food for thought in an elaborately carved or inlaid piece from the Orient, on which some craftsman labored for months or years for microscopic wages, while in our day and age nearly everyone demands so much for doing something that will not last to be collected and enjoyed by anyone for long.

I admired several choice curly maple furnishings in a room in Hancock where I was tuning. The caretaker, who was opening the house for the summer, said, "Oh, the place is full of that stuff. The old Doctor and his wife collected it for years. After you finish, I'll show you around." I took him up on that offer, and saw in many rooms a surfeit of rare pieces. One bedchamber contained five chests and bureaus besides a bed and other pieces, all curly maple. To an amateur fiddle maker who had sought long for curly maple suitable for one fiddle back, this was staggering. The owners had collected mightily, with unlimited means, but with discrimination.

This last point is the indispensable one for collectors, far more important than having unlimited money. What money without discrimination may accomplish was illustrated in one house that contained an assemblage of antiques, mostly good, but after I had completed my work the grandmother in the family, who had seen me at many auctions, said, "I want to show you what Mr. Dutton sold us. We paid too much for it." "All you have to do is to stop bidding before someone else does, and he won't load you up," I remarked. She led me into another room and pointed to a cumbersome old chest, nondescript as to design and period, but certainly old -- some Yankee woodworker's misbegotten nightmare. Then this grandmother, shaking her finger at the piece said in a tone of exasperation, "And we went and bought that thing. It's what is known as a barstard."

In fine, home furnishings express the thought of the people. If a piano is piled with family photos, or with doo-dads from fairs, I know a bit about the people. In some homes I never see family photos in the rooms I work in, while in others a single child may be featured in numerous poses. The sheaf of music on the rack may contain nothing more recent than "Put on Your Old Gray Bonnet" or "Roses of Picardy."

In a house that had a plum colored rug in one room and a mostly green one in another, with a connecting hallway between, a woman asked my advice on selecting a rug for the hallway that would harmonize with both the large rugs. She needed a chameleon.

People often express themselves in very positive terms on many subjects.

The morning after the passing of Serge Koussevitsky, a Jaffrey Center customer volunteered, "Koussevitsky is dead, and I for one am glad of it. He played too much of this modern music." A day or so later, in Greenfield, another musician launched into an unqualified eulogy of the maestro. Probably the truth lay somewhere between these two extremes.

People like to talk about their children, and to one who loves folks in general, this makes easy listening. The boy in the service in Texas, or the daughter training for a nurse in Boston, is mentioned with pride and affection, and held thus in thought, they do not seem so far away; this bond is helpful to the young people and the home folks alike.

An excellent retired professor apparently assumed that I was of the same communion as herself because I had mentioned knowing some who attended her church. She gave a dissertation on the reasons why the Episcopal church could not merge on an equal basis with the Methodist Episcopal church; this was scholarly, ably backed by quotations and references, and utterly logical within the frame of her brand of orthodoxy. When she later learned that I was not of the same communion, she apologized for having said so much on the subject. I assured her that I had enjoyed her able discourse, and that I appreciate scholarship and sincerity wherever found.

The tuner is asked to sit and eat with the family in some homes and although the day is often so crowded that sandwiches eaten on the run between jobs are more practical than stopping to eat, I do accept some of these kindnesses, and am rewarded by getting to know the people better. A young mother out in the country excused herself for not having a cup with a handle, but she did her best and gave me one with half a handle. This was during the war, and, as she explained, there was no crockery in the stores, no auctions were being held, and the children were hard on dishes. She had an extra good corn chowder, and I made out very well. In a home of considerable elegance where the table setting was most correct and the silverware fairly shouted its sterling worth, the black bean soup with slices of hard-boiled egg and lemon was also good.

A genial housewife, Martha Twiss, once asked me to eat with her and her husband, if I could make out with what they had. I told her, "Oh go on with you. That's always the sign of a good cook, excusing her meals. My mother was that way." The meal was superb: roast lamb and vegetables, hot rolls and strawberry jam. Mr. Twiss and I talked about filing saws. Later, his wife told me, "My husband seldom talks with strangers, but you struck him just right."

In an expensively furnished dwelling where there was every evidence of abundant material means, including a large stack of cases of liquor, just delivered, which nearly blocked the entrance, the owner sat patiently peeling, left-handed, tiny boiled potatoes from a large kettleful. He referred to them, in talking to a friend, as "our own potatoes," with a show of pride which marked him as an outlander, because a native would be ashamed to feed such potatoes -- none bigger than a marble -- to anything but a pig. But it's the U.S.A., and the man had a perfect right to his illogical southpaw thrift.

A mother commenting on her grown-up children told me of a daughter who had been away for a long time in the WAC, and had married. "We haven't seen



her husband yet. She ought to be able to pick a good one -- she has had boy friends enough -- but some people can walk all the way through the woods and still come out with a crooked stick."

## XXVIII

### THE ENTERING WEDGE

When I look back and recall what Daisy started out with -- how she must have shuddered inwardly when she first saw the "kitchen" at my old place -- I marvel at the changes wrought by gradual processes. Freeing the earth of frost in spring-time, the refinements wrought by the sculptor starting with a rough block and carrying through to the finished statue, the tiny seedling growing in the cleft of a rock which in time results in the cleavage of the rock -- all these phenomena and many more are accomplished without fanfare, and unresisted, except by inertia.

The kitchen at my old place had been largely taken over as a workshop. The base of an old square piano made an excellent workbench, which at Daisy's first visit was littered with tools and unfinished projects -- parts of fiddles, piano parts, and a saw filing vise. A dovetail saw hung silhouetted against the top light of one window. It was handy on stormy days to have a heated place to work; the cookstove, burning wood, took care of that. Daisy didn't say much, but after the merger she entered a discreet objection at rare intervals; the shop activities were confined to the basement at "Kozyhome," and a shack down back served the purpose at the stone house. The key is gradualness. More international diplomats and labor-management negotiators should be women, wives in particular.

But I was not unfamiliar with the requirements of the process. Anyone who has split wood with a maul and wedges knows that an indiscreet attack results in rejection. If the wood contains sap or frost, the wedge flies out when driven too vigorously. Easy does it; tapping the wedge lightly will accomplish the purpose. The human mind's initial inertia offers little outright opposition when overcome by easy stages.

Daisy came closest to a confrontation in resisting the names I thought up for the stone house. Being surrounded by a carpet of pine needles, I thought "Brown Lawn" would click, but she would have none of it, and "Stolen Stones" fared no better.

## MORE SOUR NOTES

At a residence in Hillsboro, I ran across William Collie, a woolen mill superintendent. He watched me work for a while, then asked in a burr that was the very birthmark of Scotland, "Is anyone learning this trade today?"

"Few, apparently. It takes some time to get to doing professional work."

"It's the same in my trade. Most of the young fellows want quick money. I put in my seven years in the old country. You have spells of liking it and spells of not liking it, but after putting in all that time, you're not likely to do anything else."

I could agree with this. Any one thing gets too familiar by spells, and one has periods of fighting it, until a gain in philosophy or a thin purse prompts a brighter outlook, aided in my case by perspective. I could look back to times when seasonal work did not bring a very fat pay envelope. I once agreed to saw out, by hand, 100 cakes of ice at 3¢ per cake for a neighbor. It was late in the winter, and the ice was two feet thick, so I had to saw the long way of the cake; it took me two hard days' work to earn that \$3. Walking home in the winter dusk from a day of woodchopping was likewise not particularly idyllic. After sunset the temperature dropped rapidly. First the damp legs of my overalls would freeze stiff, so that they scraped at every step. Then the boots, moist inside from perspiration, would freeze, and, likewise, one or two of the four pairs of woolen socks. It was just like walking on sticks of wood, even though my feet were warm.

My tuning teacher, Ned Quint, took a fairly constant grumpy view which colored several memorable remarks. After he had instructed me over a period of months, he turned me loose on the public. "What you need is to work on fifty makes of pianos, Chase, then you'll know more about it. If you get stuck, come back and I'll set you straight."

After a while I did go back with some problems, and Quint helped me. "What're you gettin' to work on?" he asked.

"Old squares and uprights that haven't been tuned for 18 or 20 years."

He put on a pained expression and inquired, "Why disturb 'em?"

I have been learning both the wisdom and the humor of that remark ever since, and have come to understand the patient acidity that came easily to Quint. He was once called to fix a note that didn't sound, fixed it, and, as the woman was paying him, she stated that the piano hadn't been tuned for 17 years, and asked if it needed tuning. Ned replied, "I guess it'll go a while longer," and walked out. At another time he had to tune an old upright with the birdcage dampers found in some European uprights-- a mean mechanism that is always in the tuner's way in placing his mutes. He tuned it, and as he was leaving, growled, "If this ever needs tunin' again, consider that I've died."

The beloved piano teacher, Mildred S. Porter of Hillsboro, asked me to come back to work for her after she had been having another tuner for a while. Her piano was old and tough; some of the bass strings had been tied with splices, and throughout, it had the most brittle wire I ever want to see. I tried to dodge, and suggested that she find someone else. She wrote me a very fine letter in which she said she felt just that way about teaching certain children, but that a parent would say, "If you don't take my child, she won't get any music." So Mrs. Porter would give in and take the pupil, and she said she hoped I would relent in a similar way about working on her poor old piano. I did so, and kept tinkering on it periodically as long as she needed it.

Starting with old and long neglected pianos cannot be avoided. Often it is the only piano the family is likely to have and there may be promising children who would use it, so one starts in.

I remember one which had about a dozen pieces of ivory on the whole keyboard, and when opened to the light of day, there were magnificent festoons of dusty cobwebs, toys and parts of games, bits of dried food, and sheet music, but after vacuuming out what would let go, it was not mechanically hopeless, nor in frightfully bad tune. I told the people I could not do anything for the bare keys, but that I could fix the silent notes and do the tuning, and they were pleased with that much. Some have expectations beyond the realm of the possible.

Some people just will not cooperate. A woman who had bought a new piano of a good name had me tune it for a concert, after she had neglected it for some months. It was sadly out of tune and the action was bothersome. I worked on it almost up to concert time and got it usable. She showed appreciation by paying a bonus. Later, I worked on it at intervals, but it was so swelled up with dampness that accurate tuning was impossible. I told the owner that the piano would behave better if she would keep the heat at a constant level. She replied, "I keep the heat turned down in there until just before I go in to play, the oil is so expensive."

Months later I saw this woman at her neighbor's house, and she told me, "I had my piano serviced by a man from Boston. I wish you might have been there to watch him work. He told me I should keep more heat on my piano, and since I have been doing so, it has behaved much better."

I related this experience to Carl Maki, a caretaker on a private estate in Dublin, who had worked on private estates most of his career. He wore a smile of comprehension as he said, "The expert always comes from away."

Proud piano owners who want words of praise for their old music boxes often put the tuner on the spot. I try to be pleasant, like the old gentleman who was shown a very homely baby. He could not honestly say the child was cute, or rosy, or any of the usual remarks, so he put on his most engaging smile and exclaimed, "What a baby!" I may say, "Oh, yes, there's still a lot of music in that old piano," with the mental reservation that it's an awful job to release it. I also have a paraphrase of the classic remark about a Model T. Ford: "It's a pretty good piano for the shape it's in."

I know of music departments in public schools that have been stocked with

pianos largely on the basis that Mrs. Jones down the street got tired of looking at the old family piano, so she gave it to the school. These benevolences are seldom declined. Dick Gagliuso, music director in Concord High School, had me go with him to look at a piano that had been offered to the schools. It was a very early upright of good name, but worn wobbly in the action, and with rusty wire that tuners had had trouble with. After we got outside I told him, "You've got enough of these klunkers now, Dick. It will cost the District to move it. You had better pass it up and save the price of moving toward something better." He was willing to abide by this, but a while later the relic showed up in a school room across the river where there was a teacher who could use a piano. The owners were so anxious to get rid of it that they had paid for the trucking. Oh well, nobody wins every time.

People who wouldn't get along with an early small-screen television, or an automobile over a year old, are limping along musically with grandma's old piano "for sentiment's sake," which emotion does not prompt them into retaining Grammy's old black kitchen range, or her three-hole privy.

A friend of mine, Ottavio DeVivo, who played the violin, used to play frequently with Boston Symphony men during the depression of the 1930's on outside jobs -- pot boilers -- and several of these musicians had pet projects they were looking forward to. Viola player Charles Deane used to say, "If I could just see how to break away from this thing, I would start a chicken farm down in Maine." Another was thinking of a delicatessen shop, and so on. My friend, an ambitious young man at the time, and looking forward to marriage, thought, "Good night! If this is what music leads to for these men who are good, and have practically given their lives to it, I'm going to look for something else." So he laid aside the violin, against the remonstrances of his teacher, Felix Winternitz, went to Boston University and secured a degree so he could teach, and forthwith landed a job and got married.

I could see no gain in dying out of an unpleasant situation, but I should like to follow Quint in the desire never to see some pianos and their owners again. A woman who has a fairly good rebuilt grand waits about three years before asking for a tuning job, by which time the pitch has dropped a quarter-tone or more, and is of course almost chaotically out of tune. Then when I start drawing it up to pitch, she comes along with a running commentary prefaced with the statement, "I have absolute pitch." And again, "That seems too high to me. That sounds like F that you're on now," when like as not it was D. I did tune it one fall, and the following spring she heard I was to be in the neighborhood, and asked to have me fix two notes. So I pulled those up, and a lot more that had slipped, due to extreme dryness in winter of a superheated house, by which time she had retreated into the farther reaches of the house to enjoy her impeccable sense of absolute pitch in solitary grandeur, after informing me with an accusing look that I had been there only a month before. I shook the dust of that house off my feet with neither thanks nor pay, and for the last time.

## WHERE PIANOS ARE KEPT

Pianos are where you find them. I have found them in every part of the house except the bathroom, and have tuned them in back sheds, hallways, dining rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, cellars, rumpus rooms, attics, porches and dens. Also outdoors, for special occasions.

A physician whose hobbies were music and gardening kept his piano in a veritable conservatory. All sorts of rare plants overflowed the place. Ingenious lighting devices catered to the special needs of some species -- likewise devices to control moisture. An assortment of surgical instruments, past their prime for use on humans, were at hand for plant surgery. A long hemostat is wonderful for reaching dead leaves in difficult places. Such a room has a good atmosphere for a piano; the humidity is constant and the temperature even.

A school bought a new grand piano of an excellent make, which at the time of delivery was as fine a piano as I have seen: it was both beautiful to play on and good to tune. It ran afoul of POLICY: the students must not play on it. So it was rolled into a special closet and locked up between concerts, and in tuning for these events, I found it getting more and more difficult to put into shape. Finally some performer had trouble with it during a concert, and when I was later pointedly told of this, I informed the one-man music department that he would have to get a man from the factory that built it, as it had gotten beyond me, a mere tuner. He did so, and I backed away with this parting shot at the management: "You are in the illogical position of a school that would insist on keeping its prize athlete chained to a bed for months, and then blame a coach for not being able to put him in shape for the Olympics overnight."

I had suggested from time to time that the piano, in need of being limbered up, should be played, but ever and anon that old refrain: "The students must not play on that piano." About the time I severed my connection with this outfit, I discovered that lack of use was not the worst contributing factor to the trouble with this new piano. The closet where it was kept locked up was off the gym stage, directly above the swimming pool. This seemed harmless enough when the heat was turned up during the daytime, but at night when the heat was turned down, the humidity must have gone up to 90%, and the effect on a new piano was crippling. A leading piano maker recommends a temperature of 68 degrees F. and a relative humidity of 50% as ideal.

Possibly my sassy remark about conditioning the athlete was an affront to a professional educator, whose function in life is to know, but I was never too good at biting my tongue. This and other forms of impudence return to haunt one in after years. Called to a boys' summer camp to tune, early in my career, I noticed a familiar figure going about the place as I worked, whom I recognized as a certain mustached teacher known as "pooch face," who was housefather in the dormitory of New Hampton School which I had attended some fifteen years earlier.

So I thought back to sundry pranks that had plagued the good professor. One persistent source of annoyance was a cowbell that was hung in the supposedly locked attic, with a string running down to this or that boy's garment closet. The bell would break out in joyous clatter in response to non-bovine stimuli at the most unseemly hours, arousing a varied set of emotions in the professorial breast. After this good man and I had eyed each other real hard a few times in passing, he again entered the lodge, and I addressed him properly by name. He came forward and shook hands, friendly enough, saying, "I can't remember your name, but you were a TARTAR!"

## A FARM CUSTOMER

Called one summer to work for a family out in the country, I found that they lived on the south side of Craney Hill, something of a climb up and over from Henniker, with rewarding views along the way. Arriving in the neighborhood, I found a house with the family name I sought -- Morse -- and secured final directions. I noticed that the children at this place had a young woodchuck for a house pet. "We catch one 'most every spring," they said, "but they never get real tame; they don't like to be handled." A girl held up a bandaged hand to prove this statement. Down around a couple of turns in the road was the place I was headed for, with plenty of people around. "Do you have house woodchucks, too?" I asked, after identifying myself. "Yes, we gen'ally have one in the summer, but they go out and hole up in the fall, and the next year they are wild chucks. The dogs won't touch the house chuck, but they'll shake a wild one every chance they get."

Shown into the front room, I found the piano was an early square pianoforte by a maker named Berry. It had always been in the same house since it was bought. They even showed me the original bill of sale, dated May 6, 1869; it had cost \$225, plus \$9 for delivery from Boston. It hadn't been tuned many times since. Not too promising musically, it still belonged in that old house with its liberal furnishing of family antiques. I was able to bring about some improvement.

There is something easy to approach about one's own breed of folks, in this instance native Yankees. I had never seen these people before, yet in a way I had always known them. I could start right in with a kind of banter they understood, which would have been effrontery toward an outlander, and they came right back in the same vein. As I was about to leave, Arnold ("Pat") Morse asked me how much he owed me. "Well," I replied, "you haven't got much to work on, so I'm not goin' to charge you anything for the work, but I am chargin' you a good fat price for makin' the trip." Everybody understood.

The following winter I was called back to this same piano. Craney Hill was out of the question at that season, so I approached the farm by back roads in East Deering and Weare. There had been about four inches of slushy snow which had not been plowed, and had frozen. Some of the way there was only one set of tracks, made in the slush a couple of days earlier, and frozen solid; these icy grooves kept the car in the road, but to turn out would have been impossible. However, few were abroad that day except the hardy critters, red squirrels and a piano tuner bent upon wresting a living from that frigid countryside. The remnant of beech foliage, sere and brown, which hangs all winter, was stiff with ice, and the air had that penetrating coldness that follows a wet storm and freeze-up.

At my destination, only "Pat" Morse was at home. He conducted me through cool passageways, typical of a country house that has only stove heat in separ-



ated rooms, into the piano room. A hot blast struck me: a coal-burning rotund station heater kept the room hotter than mustard. My guide explained, "Since we got the stove set up in here this old pianner's gone flatter'n a gutted toad." I poked a few keys. "You can say that twice and be right both times." I had quite a struggle. Part way through, my customer reappeared saying, "Welcome t' set down with me and have a bite. Haven't got any bread; she for- got t' get any last night, but we've got some beans, and I guess I can find some crackers, or suthin' the rats overlooked."

This I recognized as hospitality in reverse English. What he had was very good, well seasoned with his own special brand of talk. I hope he and his like stay with us a good long time. We need such independent talkers with their original sayings and regional accents to counteract the homogenizing effect of mass media of communication. I shudder to think that in another generation it may be hard to find anyone who does not talk just like everybody else.

On May 6, 1969, a century after its purchase, I tuned the Morses' square piano again, a record I should not expect to equal. Not that the age of the piano was beyond compare, but few owners have kept such data.

## GRANITIC SOLACE

Once in returning from tuning a particularly unresponsive piano in Temple, I drove past an area where the road men had been widening a bend, and there in the resulting heap of stones was a sliver some four feet long, with one good true face. I thought, "What a shame to leave it for those hard-working men to load on and truck away," so I appropriated it for my purposes, later laying it near the base of the fireplace chimney. Perhaps my disposition was a bit frayed from struggling with that tough piano. Anyway, I, as well as the stone, got a distinct lift in the process. Like Jacob, who "took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows," (Gen.28:11) I derived a substantial granitic solace from this acquisition and its use.

## WHAT PEOPLE DO TO PIANOS

If there is any class of things that comes in for a greater variety of re-furbishing jobs than old upright pianos, I have not seen it. About anything will do, short of throwing the old thing out and getting a modern one. Some owners clean off the old finish and leave the wood bare; others pile on paint in all imaginable colors, gumming the hinges in the process, and forgetting the fold of the fall board that covers the keys. Still others feel a compulsion to do something to the case, such as boxing in the Victorian carved front posts with plywood. During periods when new pianos were hard to get, some shops made a step-down cut at the top of the cases and covered the pin block area with a box covered with mirror glass, giving a pseudo-spinet illusion to the decor, and for evermore plaguing the tuner with the necessity of hoisting off that fragile contraption at every tuning.

Then there are jobs of fixing that are well meant, done by "lesser breeds without the law." In the Troy, N.H., Town Hall I found an old piano, painted white, that I had an awful job to take apart. I was told that the populace had had it outdoors on the village green for some shindig, and the front board, lacking fixtures, kept falling out, so some mighty Trojan nailed the board on with long finish nails. It stayed put all right, but a tuner doesn't come equipped to cope with such mutilations.

A grand piano, borrowed and moved to a public hall for a concert, was in place when I arrived. I tuned it, then checked the pedals. The action refused to slide in response to the shifting pedal, so, reasoning from effect back to cause, I discovered that the socket plate of one leg had been put on with long screws that locked the action in one position. I found something for a prop, raised that corner of the piano onto it, took off the leg, removed the screws and took them to a nearby garage where I cut off the surplus length with a hacksaw, then reassembled the thing, which was simple, but learning to solve such problems is not. Later in the day I ran across one of the wretches who had perpetrated this repair and he informed me gaily, "One leg got pulled off, but we put it on to stay."

Passing over the minor villainies of putting thumb tacks into the hammers of an upright, or placing objects on the strings of a grand, executed by small fry with a penchant for the bizarre, let us pass to sterner issues.

Before they had a gym of their own, the high school boys in Peterborough used to practice basketball in the town hall. At one practice session two boys started tossing the ball back and forth across the stage behind the curtain. An upright piano stood in their way, so one boy gave it a shove; it fell flat on its back, and when righted, with the removable lumber dislodged, the keys were slewed up into the cutest little hill I ever saw, sort of stepwise, like the approach to a Mayan temple. At this point the town fathers called me for a con-

sultation. I decided it could be fixed cheaper than replaced, and took the job. Three of the four slender action castings were broken, and it took some undoing to remove these, take them to a garage and have them welded, and get the action to acting again. The boy who applied the big push came around during my operations, very penitent, and said his mother was making him earn the cost of the repair. I daresay he never shoved another piano.

The janitor of a school hall in Jaffrey told me he heard a great clatter as he entered the hall, where some senior girls were waiting to rehearse a play. He caught one girl walking on the piano keys. He later told me, "I scolded her in good shape, but I learned afterward that I shouldn't have picked on her alone, because they had all been doing it. They were playing 'follow the leader,' and she just happened to be the last one."

I noticed on Beverley Tenney's piano some odd gouges along the edge of the board where the music rests. She came into the room while I was working, and asked if I could tell what those marks were. I could not. "Well," she explained, "the family I bought the piano from had a big brute of a boy who hated piano lessons, but his mother made him go in and spend a certain length of time practicing every day. So he just sat there part of that time and bit the piano."

"It worked, didn't it?" said I, "his folks sold the piano."

## PASQUALE TALLARICO

By the routine process of trade work, I came to know this remarkable pianist and teacher. He had no publicity man to blazon his name, but it is a source of satisfaction to find a man who is bigger than his publicity. At his farm in Wilton I have found him busily at work in his garden, pausing occasionally to shoo errant grandchildren out of his flower beds, and he talked just as enthusiastically about peas, peonies, and petunias as he might talk about the "three B's" of music.

At High Mowing School, during the first year of his part-time teaching, he usually played for half an hour after lunch on Fridays, but the students had not comprehended his caliber by November, when one of them told me, "There is a girl in school who plays at least as well as Mr. Tallarico." By April, I heard no more about the girl, and a student told me in wonderment, "Mr. Tallarico has been playing for us every week, he has never programmed any repeats, and rarely reads any music. Sometimes he brings the music and sets it on the rack, saying, 'I may have to open the book today; I have not been practicing very faithfully this week,' but he doesn't open it." The pianist himself told me, "Some of the things I play may not mean very much to the children now, but sometime they will hear these works played again, and will remember that I played them here at the school."

After years of acquaintance, Mrs. Tallarico, told me, "Pasquale always memorized a winter program for recitals, and in 32 years at Peabody, he never programmed the same number twice." At another time he told me, "Living up here in the country in the summer, I memorized my winter programs. One year I got down to work and memorized my program in three weeks." These comments came out casually, as one might remark about the weather.

After completing his formal training with Rafael Joseffy, Tallarico made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1913, and concertized successfully for two years, after which a teaching position seemed to offer more secure conditions for rearing a family. Through his teaching, especially the 32 years at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, his influence went out through hundreds of pupils to many parts of the country.

The just and moderate attitude of this man toward other musicians has impressed me in the many talks I have had with him; it may be summed up as a wholesome perspective. I have never heard him condemn or harshly criticize people, but he has indicated his disapproval of things tawdry and cheap. Nor have I heard him give unqualified praise. I asked him to name the greatest pianist he had ever heard; this he would not do. He admired Busoni for his scholarly approach and classical authority, De Pachmann for his poetic interpretations, "Lhevinne played the best octaves I ever heard," and so on. Often his recollections have been warmed with mellow humor, as when he told of meeting

De Pachmann: "He wanted me to go to Europe to study with him, but I was quite satisfied with Joseffy in New York. De Pachmann told me (striking a pose), 'I am the world's greatest pianist. Moritz Rosenthal is second. Paderewski is third.'"

Shortly before I first heard Tallarico play, I had heard a woman pianist, also a Joseffy pupil, who played a very enjoyable program, and my reaction was, "How faithfully she has worked to memorize all this so perfectly!" After hearing Tallarico, I thought, "What wonderful music!"

A number of comments made by this artist in conversations we have had over the years come clearly to mind:

"I have found few among the younger generation of pianists who have much appreciation of either mellowness or beauty in music."

"Some contemporary composers are very serious men. Stravinsky told me he had spent two days on a single measure. We ought not to think that we can get the full meaning of their work at a single hearing."

"Young people should have more appreciation of accomplishments. When Sembrich gave her annual recitals in New York, those were occasions for musicians. Always, part way through the program, she would come out on the stage alone for an encore, pull off her long gloves which reached above the elbow in the fashion of the time, sit down at the piano, and sing 'The Maiden's Wish' by Chopin, playing her own accompaniment. Now she had the best accompanist to be had at that time; she did not have to play her own accompaniment, but that was an accomplishment."

"We have to remember that every pupil has to go through every step that we went through."

"More people should be capable of evaluating their own work; if they were, we should have fewer composers. Knowing about music is far different from producing good composition. Taking a piece and pointing out 'Here the theme comes in again' is just the A-B-C of music....I know a man who plays the violin quite well and also plays the piano some. He is considered a good teacher of harmony. I heard that he is now writing an opera. He works at composition one day a week. Now music is the language of the spirit. I do not believe good music is made that way; that is like saying, 'Now I do all my work on certain days of the week. I do my washing on Monday'...."

A young European pianist who had toured the U.S.A. was severely criticized in Tallarico's presence for producing a too enthusiastic volume of tone in recitals. He smiled and said, "It's her youth."

When asked about someone with whom he had been associated professionally, he commented on the person's excellent training, then added, "He and his wife were always polite toward us, but they are people who rate everyone according to that financial table...."

"Dun and Bradstreet?"

"Yes."

"Daisy and I have fun speculating on just what would happen if we should come into some money. The thing that would interest us most would be to see who would start noticing us who hadn't done so before."

Instantly he remarked, smiling, "Those would be the small people."

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Tallarico's remarks about pupils have appealed to me for the kindly attitude revealed in them. He might mention one as having "a promising talent" without pride, or another as "a little scatterbrain" with an amused tolerance. Of one boy who had little interest in music study he said, "I think the piano lessons have helped his concentration." Of talent in general he told me, "I have had pupils who have had outstanding talent at the keyboard, but they wouldn't work, and talent alone means little unless it is disciplined and organized."

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"MacDowell was an intensely imaginative person; one has to know that in order to understand his music. He was always peopling the woods around his studio with pixies and other fanciful creatures. The reason his music is not used more today is that so few people understand the man. He was the only American composer of his period who had an idiom of his own. Chadwick and Foote wrote correct music, but neither of them had a distinct idiom."

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"Once a pianist has acquired an adequate technique, the only reason for his having a limited repertoire is that he won't work."

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"One year in Baltimore, Lhevinne was one of the judges of our candidates for degrees in piano. Some of us got together for a few drinks afterward, and he told us this story: 'In Russia, I was invited to a banquet given by the royal family. The court etiquette required the guests to drink a toast to each member of the royal family, and it was a large family. During the evening someone led me to a piano, and I sat down to play, but after looking at it a little while, I stood up and said to the Czar, 'I must ask Your Majesty's pardon, but I have not been trained to play on a piano with two keyboards.'"

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Tallarico's comments on works he is about to perform are brief, informative, often lightened with humor. He played the themes on which the Waldstein Sonata was built with the comment, "Simple material, but it took Beethoven several days to elaborate it." Before playing an intermezzo of Brahms: "Brahms showed himself a great master in his ability to develop the most simple thematic materials -- materials that most composers would pass by as unworthy of their talents -- and build masterpieces on them." Then, after playing the few simple notes that

constitute the theme, he turned toward the audience with a smile and inquired, "If you were a composer, what would you do with that?"

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"Many young persons today buy a record -- anyone can do that who has the money -- then they try to make their playing sound like the record, without realizing what an immense amount of work was required to bring the performer to that point. Some put a few simple notes on paper and call themselves composers. Now take Brahms. No doubt he tore up a lot of what most of us would call rather good music; he was a master of his craft before he put down 'Opus One.' He always worked according to definite rules. Ravel broke all those rules, but he made another set of rules which he worked by. He was a close student of the artistic effect of his music."

When I took a gifted musical boy to have a talk with Tallarico, he told us of his re-study of the works of Ravel, and illustrated how this master kept the same tonal color throughout a composition. He told the young musician, "Everything that you are, every aspect of your life and thinking, comes out in your music." Then he added with benign authority, "You must be a wholesome person." When we were departing, his last words to the boy, given in kindly affection, were, "And keep modest."

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Anna Tallarico told me, "When one of our sons was in the service during the war, he was going to be sent on a very dangerous mission, from which he might not return. His commanding officer asked him if he had any special request before starting on the assignment. He replied that his father was to give a recital soon in a certain city, and that he would like to attend it. His request was granted, and it was made possible for him to go to hear Pasquale play. After he returned from the war he told me, 'When I was in great danger, I would think of Daddy's music, and it helped me.'"

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Their golden wedding reception, held on the Sunday after the actual date, was a great outpouring of love and esteem. As Daisy and I were going through the line, Anna, looking a bit roguish, leaned close and said to me, "I told Pasquale the other day, 'You couldn't find another woman who would live with you for fifty years.'"

I said, "I don't think he'll try."

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When the Tallaricos were spending an evening with Daisy and Ethel Alexander and me, Pasquale told of performing the Schumann piano concerto with Stravinsky conducting the orchestra, and of how particular he was that they should be in agreement about every point in the interpretation of the work, so they went over the score in detail before the performance, although of course Pasquale performed the solo part from memory. "After the performance, I asked Stravinsky to



autograph the score for a souvenir."

Anna broke in at this point with, "Pasquale, don't tell that." But he smiled and kept on.

"Above his signature, he inscribed it, 'To a Magnificent Musician.'" We all applauded at this, and felt it was all the more significant in that it came from a master noted for being sparing of praise.

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Another teacher, a person of discrimination and good taste, commenting on Tallarico as a performer said, "People marvel at the vigor and dexterity of his playing, but he will never grow old at the keyboard, because, when he is there, he has a grasp on something eternal."

## OVERHEARD

A tuner is often said to have particularly acute hearing, but the fact that he hears things that other people do not is a matter of training related to his work, and of attention to the things he overhears. Some reportable episodes are here given which came through and registered despite my routine thumping.

GIRL (very exasperated): Guess who wrote to me. I give you three guesses, and the first one is right -- yes, Junior. Oh, honestly, Mother, he is the dumbest thing! (Stamping) He writes just as if nothing had ever happened, and he wants to date me during his next vacation!

BROTHER (in velvety deep voice): If you want to know what I think, Ma, Sis still loves him.

GIRL: Mother, make him stop.

MOTHER (much too casually): Oh no, I'm sure she doesn't.

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In walking through a school dormitory I noticed jugs of foaming cider in some of the boys' rooms. Later, as I worked, two of them passed me, coming from their rooms. One said, "Remember, it's laxative." The other replied, "I don't care if it is. It tastes like whiskey to me."

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As I was finishing my tuning of a family piano, I paid no special attention to the small boy who watched me for a while, but kept on rapidly twitching the tuning hammer. The boy went into another room and reported to his mother, "He shakes like Grampy."

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In the home of Miriam and Ross Roberts, on a Saturday afternoon, as I worked I gathered that the mother was about to start on a weekend trip, while Edwin and his father were to remain at home. The parting words of this twelve-year-old to his mother were, "Will there be any dinner today?" Scarcely concealing her amusement, Miriam replied, "Yes, there will be dinner today, and tomorrow, too, and I hope the next day."

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On two occasions as I arrived to tune for a fine, conservative, wealthy couple, this exchange took place, sotto voce:

MAN: Has he worked for anyone we know?

WIFE: Oh, he's all right. He works for the MacDowell Colony.

Then after I had completed my tuning, in a barn studio, I would go to the kitchen door to inform the people of that fact, and the cook would say to the maid, "It iss der musiker."

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In a parsonage, the resident minister and a visiting parson were discussing the quality of the meals at various summer conferences they had attended. At one of the conference dining rooms, one of the items on the bill of fare had been Washington pie, and when it was brought in it proved to be chocolate. Someone said, "Oh, this must be Booker."

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In a rectory, everything indicated that a daughter was being married off. A messenger brought a parcel to the door. The girl dashed downstairs to receive it, ran back up with it, and after a rustle of papers, an ecstatic comment, "Oh, Mother, isn't it beau-ti-ful?" The mother replied wearily, "Yes, dear, it's very lovely." Later, in passing through the room where I was at work, the mother sighed out, "Oh, I think weddings are positively demoralizing."

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A small girl of about five at the time, Fay Baldwin, went out and talked to her mother after watching me work for a while, referring to me as, "that boy." After completing my work, I told the mother that I felt quite flattered to be referred to as a "boy." "You needn't be," Betty said, "Frank Gay across the street is 76, and she calls him a 'boy' too."

## INTERLUDE IN SPRING

New Hampshire grants a weather bonus in early spring almost every year, generally before all the snow has melted from ravines and shady spots. A day comes which warms up suddenly, the air is balmy, breeze gentle, and the sun's warmth is relaxing to the point of lassitude. You might wonder, could it ever be cold again? As a neighbor of mine used to say, such a day is like young love -- blissful while it lasts, but the payoff is terrific.

But let's relax a bit in this preview of summer. We'll drive through the countryside, stop by a wooded slope, leave the car at the roadside, cross over a rod or so of verge, step over the tumbledown stone wall. I'll hold the springy branches so they won't whip your face, and you'll do as much for me. In the shade of a fringe of hemlock a patch of old snow lingers -- granular at the edges, littered with the winter's accumulation of twigs and cones, and animated with myriad snow fleas, the tiny insects of dark slate color, conspicuous at this season alone, which are impelled to jump in a frenzy of activity with no purpose apparent to humans.

As we pass beyond the shade of the evergreens into a hardwood area, we catch waftings of peculiar sweetness released from the sun-warmed woodland floor. Unlike the leafy tang of autumn, which never lacks an element of acridity, this fragrance is of leaves and earth leached of all sharpness by association with clean snow and frost -- like one whose life has been purged of all bitterness through long periods of adversity, who has grown to bleed sweet, like the maple tree.

We notice at a little distance a patriarchal sugar maple. High in its top a red squirrel swings, head-down, at the end of a twig he has bitten off, enjoying a seasonal benison of sweetness, a surfeit of indulgence as a reward for his survival of the winter. There he may hang for hours, the rascal, if the sap flow continues, too blissfully engaged to scold at us, leaving that duty of woodland warning to a blue jay that jeers persistently a little way off.

But back to the fragrance, a blend of many essences: fallen leaves of sundry hardwood species, the earth itself, a whiff of pine scent from beyond a ridge, a hint of crackling dryness from gray mosses that carpet an outcrop of ledge where no other growth can find support, and the sweet pungency of juniper exhaling a winter's store of pent-up elixir in response to the sun. In all, a composite scent from diverse sources, unified by submission to a climate that plays no favorites, but rewards in unexpected ways those who stand up to its rigors. So we inhale deeply, gratefully, and catch overtones of renewal from this complex harmony of fragrances.

Let's lean lazily against a tree, now that we're high enough to see off a bit, and enjoy the contour of a ridge a mile or so away, the spruces along its

crest pricking perkily into the blue haze that masks out the distant horizon. We stoop and poke about in the leaves -- last fall's layer on top, crisp and normal-looking; underneath, a limp layer, still identifiable as to species, but skeletonized; under these, the actual leaf-mould, then the blackish mineral soil, penetrated by a network of roots waiting to bear aloft again the nutriment released by this cycle of nature. Among the tree roots are tiny bulbs which will later send up blossom stems of species that have adapted through the ages to the necessity of completing their most vital functions before the leafy canopy overhead shuts out sunlight for the summer. We break off a bit of goldthread root and chew it, relishing momentarily its mouth-watering bitterness, astringent and clean.

Suddenly low gray clouds scud over, obscuring the sun. The air cools rapidly; a few snowflakes sift down through the bare branches. We hurriedly draw our jackets close around us and make for the car. Before we have covered those few rods, a sugar-snow is falling, clinging damply to everything and taking the season back some weeks. Then we can see what the old neighbor meant by the pay-off. And we're glad that we didn't shy a stick at the red squirrel just to see him scamper; his enjoyment was soon enough cut short.

## FROM AN EARLIER DAY

At a summer residence in Jaffrey Center, I observed over the piano a number of framed photos, one of which was signed "Adelina Patti Cedarstrom," and showed the celebrated singer with her husband, attired in walking dress of the period. Other photos showed my customer, in her youth, as Elsa in "Lohengrin" and in other operatic costumes. This aroused my curiosity, so when this dignified mature lady came through the room and said, "We are just now having some coffee, wouldn't you like some?" I accepted, and remarked, "It is unusual to see Patti in any pose except as a singer."

"That was when she was living in retirement in Wales; you see in one of the other photos a view of her castle, in another, a view of the dining room, which contained seven portraits of herself. She had lived for some time with only servants in the castle, but with a million and a half worth of jewels, she felt apprehensive, so she remarried. Sweden had at that time a large number of small noblemen, of which Baron Cedarstrom was one. Much younger than Patti, he was a nice boy, and liked an easy living."

"You, of course, sang."

"Yes. I was a pupil of Jean De Reske, and sang in opera for a few years, but a throat condition required an operation, and I wouldn't sing again, because I knew I would sing flat. A famous Italian prima donna was in the same situation, but the surgeon I had would not operate on her, as he knew she would blame him for her singing flat afterward. Someone else did her operation, and she did sing flat.

"My teacher, Jean De Reske, was a great, finished artist and a great person."

"You must have known many of the musically great of that period."

"Yes. Besides my teacher there was his brother Édouard, the basso. There was a third brother who had, in my opinion, a more beautiful voice than either Jean or Édouard, but he did not choose music as a career. After the revolution, he and Édouard starved on their estate in Poland...Marcella Sembrich was a great artist and a great person. Melba was not a great person. Caruso had a beautiful voice, but he was not a great artist.

"I was studying operatic roles with my teacher; he had a complete little theater where he did his teaching. I remember that when we were working on the second act of "Otello," besides Jean there were also present his brother Édouard and the bass-baritone Pol Plancon. Mme. De Reske was playing the piano. These singers, all huge men, each got down on the floor in a reclining position to show me how different parts of my role should be sung. Opera at that time was rigid; you had to have your foot on a certain spot on the stage when a certain

note was sung. Mary Garden did more than anyone else to free opera from those conventions."

She paused and smiled, obviously savoring a recollection.

"I was present when Mary Garden came to my teacher for an audition. He heard her, then told her, 'You haven't got much of a voice, but I can help you to cover up your mistakes.' She didn't put that into her book. About that time, she was invited to sing for a gathering of musical people in Paris. She didn't have any money, and had no wardrobe. She appeared in a nondescript shirtwaist and skirt, looking much like a grain bag tied around the middle. There was present a noted teacher of physical culture who could see possibilities in this American girl. He asked her to come to work with him, which she did for two years. She was a worker, and he got her so trained that even a slight movement of a finger could express much, and he taught her that magnificent carriage and stage presence which took her triumphantly through so many performances.

"I was doing some teaching for De Reske at that period, so when Patti sent to him for help with her breathing, he sent me over to Wales to work with her. I went for two weeks, stayed five, and had a wonderful time. Patti was preparing for an American tour. We worked with her breathing in the mornings, and she helped me with my operatic roles in the afternoons. She even gave me her stage jewelry. I have heard that she had a temper, but I never saw it; she was always wonderful to me. Her last American tour was not a success. She always insisted upon getting her fee before she went on to sing, and this resulted in arguments with managers, which did not leave her in a frame of mind to do her best singing."

"Was Patti Italian?"

"Her father was, but her mother was Spanish. She was born almost on the stage in Madrid, where her mother was singing in opera. The mother got off the stage just in time to give birth to this child that became the singer. Nothing was known of proper child feeding in those days, and they brought that child up on sponge cake and port wine. Patti was very strong, apparently was never sick, and would accomplish the most remarkable feats of physical endurance. When she sang, her throat opened like the throat of a bird -- wonderful! She had a chromatic trill from about here to here (indicating on the piano) that was unlike anything I had ever heard. The records that are in existence do not give an adequate idea of her voice. The same is true of the recordings of the voice of my teacher, Jean De Reske. Maggie Teyte was a pupil of De Reske when I was, and she went farther than any of us. Now, she is careful what she sings, but she is doing remarkably well.

"Mr. Low and I were married in England, and lived there for some time before coming back to America. There was a little stable boy who used to bring our carriage around when we went driving. After he got to know us, he begged us to sponsor him so he could come to the United States. His father and grandfather had been stablemen, and according to the rigid caste system that prevailed in England at that time, he could not hope to better his station in life. We could see that he was in earnest, so we arranged to bring him back with us, and kept him in our home a year until he got established. He was ambitious and went

right ahead. At the time of his death he was at the head of the largest machine shop in Lynn."

This discourse far outlasted the coffee, and I was most grateful. She signed her check "Florence Stevens Low."



## XXXVIII

### SPECIMENS

Here are a few oddities that have appeared in the line of duty:

An ex-player upright that had fancy leaded stained-glass windows at either side of the place where the roll was put in. What could contribute more effectively to a hard, metallic tone than this?

An upright with cute little music storage pockets that hinged out from the board above the pedals -- clever for utilizing space, but needed a gooseneck light for seeing into them, and a very limber-necked player to utilize them.

An early square piano with a small cast harp in one corner of the case: this furnished anchorage for the loop ends of the strings, and was fancifully designed with roses, hearts, and Cupid's darts.

An early English upright by John Broadwood that had a straight harp with no overstrung bass section, and had little brass candle brackets mounted at either side of the music rack.

A nondescript upright with five pedals, some of which did not accomplish much, but a well coordinated quadruped could have fun on it.

A rather good old Wing & Son upright with four pedals, labelled: the usual "Forte" (sustaining), "Piano" (shifting), plus "Orchestra" (a really good mandolin attachment), and "Tremolo." This last operated a bar that turned on off-center pivots so as to bring against the strings, through about two octaves of the melody range, a series of loosely hung metal weights, resulting in a pleasant tinkling effect when those notes were sounded.

An upright labelled "Patent Inverted Grand" made by Paul G. Mehlin & Sons, New York, U.S.A. At least, the misuse of the word "inverted" was patent.

A keyboard lid that rolled out on little cogwheels that ran in corresponding castiron tracks.

Fancy names -- anything to further the impression that an upright could be equal to a grand: Upright Grand; Parlor Grand; Cabinet Grand; Petite Vertical Grand. Suggesting waftings of perfume and pink rayon intimacy was this fetching appellation: Boudoir Grand. Sohmer & Son matched this with a baby grand: "Cupid Model."

The specimens which have been sold to the unsuspecting public by wily piano makers are too numerous to mention, but in general the worst production came at periods when the industry was converting to new designs, as in the case of the first uprights that followed the early square pianos. Many of these were built, even by reputable makers, without a full metal plate to support the tension. Probably they behaved fairly well in houses with only stoves and fireplaces, but the intense dryness of some forms of central heat has rendered many such instruments hopeless. Experience brought the better makers to use a full metal plate to insure adequate support.

Many early makers built their own actions with parts unlike those used by other makers, but the industry gradually turned to standard actions built by a few specialists in the field. Ivers and Pond of Boston (a Swede told me this factory used to be known as "the Swedish poorhouse," because so many Swedes worked there for low wages) were so proud as to tack a little celluloid plate bearing their own name over the Wessell, Nickel & Gross stamp on the action they used for many years.

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Most reputable makers put a ten-year guarantee on their pianos, so I could read a lot between these lines placed above the tuning pins of a half-plate upright:

(maker's name) New York  
Manfrs of Pianos for Export Trade a Specialty  
Guaranteed five years

\* \* \* \* \*

A cute little old upright in black walnut had an arched-top decorative panel above the actual top which contained as its centerpiece an embossed metal plaque of Mozart's profile. It had a short keyboard, and had been built with the sustaining pedal only. The action, although unique, was repairable, and the instrument had musical merit. Label:

MODEL PIANO  
Simpson & Company  
New York

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Besides oddities of manufacture, some of which are refreshing and commendable, a tuner has to contend with specimens of malfeasance resulting from the efforts of would-be tuners, all of which are irksome and condemnable. When a string has gone flat, someone has the urge to fix it, so he goes and gets a pipe wrench, batters the corners of the tuning pin, and leaves the string flatter than before. Only a tool that grips all four corners of the pin evenly can be used to turn those soft iron pins successfully. More than once I have been called to clean up after a man who should have retired long before he did so, and have found two adjoining notes almost exactly the same pitch. Now I maintain that a proper tuning job which has gone somewhat out of tune is preferable to a mis-

tuned piano, for in the first instance, some of it will still be correct, while in the latter instance, none of it is right.

A piano owner, a Chase by name, whom I presumed to be related to me only through Adam, telephoned to me and said his piano had been last worked on by a butcher, and wanted me to fix it right. When I saw the way the instrument had been maladjusted as well as mistuned, I told the owner, "I hope the 'butcher' who worked on this piano could cut meat better than he could fix pianos." Dead-serious, the man looked at me real hard, then growled out, "You know what I meant." Maybe he was more closely related than I had thought.

## HELPFUL TO KNOW

If we could control humidity changes in the atmosphere in which a piano is kept, this would go far toward keeping it in acceptable tune. But who wants to shut out the fragrant humid air when the weather clears after a summer shower? So the best we can hope for is the avoidance of extremes. Placing a piano over a warm-air vent, or backing it up to any form of radiator, leads to trouble, and should be avoided, as should also the placing of one in a damp location, or where it is likely to get wet. All extremes and sudden changes are unfavorable or damaging. Much of a piano is made of wood, which is affected more by humidity variations than by temperature changes. This holds true not only of the basic structure, but also of the action.

In an early upright, Chickering of Boston attempted to get around action shrinkage problems by using metal flanges; it was one of the most troublesome actions ever built. So, forced to work with something short of perfection, we may still apply the rule of sweet reasonableness with a degree of success. Although tuning is a service trade, conditions that make very frequent tuning necessary are also apt to cause permanent damage to the piano.

A woman who called me back to correct unisons that had slipped a little soon after tuning, told me, "When my husband moved our Christmas tree in, he insisted upon leaving the door open for about half an hour, and I couldn't convince him that the sudden cold would affect the piano." Besides guarding against sudden changes, placing a piano where it is exposed to direct sunlight is also bad; the sun's heat, added to whatever type of heat may be in the house, damages the finish. Good ivory keys are often warped from this cause. The veneer of the case also fades in direct sunlight, so that even in refinishing it is hard to restore uniformity of color.

Moth damage is a leading cause of shrinkage in piano value, and can be held at a minimum with slight expense. Moth crystals may be placed in mesh bags and hung inside the piano. If the case is kept closed for short periods, the gas given off by the crystals builds up to an effective concentration. The cost is higher in persistence than in money. A one-shot moth treatment does not relieve the piano owner of the necessity of giving the matter systematic attention, especially in an old house, where there is very likely enough woolen lint in cracks and crevices to nourish a moth population. Some sprays are effective, but they may contain chemicals that would corrode the center pins, in which case the remedy would be worse than the ailment.

In many pianos that have obviously never been cleaned inside, the old dust contains woolen lint that moths feed on as readily as on cloth and felt, and this accumulation of dirt also develops, through the years, an unpleasant mustiness that is particularly bad in humid weather. But not all tuners feel as I do on this subject. The common dodge to avoid a cleaning job is to tell the

customer, "Never disturb the dust; it makes the tone softer." Occasionally someone asks me if it amounts to anything to get the dirt out of a piano. Being of the opinion that a stupid question deserves a stupid answer, I reply, "If you have to move the piano, it won't weigh so much."

People often say, "It doesn't do a piano any good to have kids banging on it." I would add that anyone's banging is as bad as that done by kids. Some people's concept of music includes an absolute high level of volume with little variety. Pianos so played upon lose their flexibility, and the possibility of tasteful expression becomes greatly impaired; the hammers get thumped down so that they produce a monotonous dead level of percussion, and any shading is hard to attain. Reshaping and softening the hammers might help temporarily, but the kind of playing determines the condition of the tone more than most people realize.

On the other hand, pianos are made to be played on, and one that is used regularly is a lot better to tune, and is likely to hold tuning more dependably, than one that stands idle much of the time.

It pleases me no end to find a piano owner who thinks of the welfare of the instrument and its musical value in placing it in the home, rather than considering primarily its decorative effect.

## CUSTOMER ATTITUDES

There is a general misunderstanding of the independent tradesman and his problems and of his approach to his job. One customer, a salaried employee of a large corporation, whose piano I had serviced regularly for years, inquired good-humoredly at one of my periodical visits, "Did you get short of cash?" So, with most people, it works better to wait until they themselves recognize the need for tuning and make the approach on their own initiative; this gives them a feeling of participation in the transaction. People who depend on the tuner to tune their piano are often suspicious of letting him tell them when it needs tuning.

With most organizations, something out of order sparks a tuning job. "The pedal doesn't work. And while you're here, you might as well tune it." Afterthought.

Occasionally a mother remarks, "The piano will not be used all summer, as my daughter will not be taking lessons." Why should the girl take lessons at all, if not to play for enjoyment?

There are some who keep their shrewdness through any crisis or emergency. The daughter of a prominent professional man called me late one evening, all helplessness and feminine appeal, stating that her mother had just passed away, their piano had not been tuned for years, and they would be mortified if it were not in tune by the time of the funeral, and she had just learned of me through a friend, and could I possibly come to the house the next morning and tune their old family piano? My day was fairly well filled up, but in order to accommodate the situation, I shoved things around and went there the next morning. Entering through the back door and laundry, I observed that the equipment consisted of a pair of set tubs and other period pieces that dated back to grandmother's time, all this in the choicest residential section of the town. I got the old piano yanked up as much as it would stand, over a background of talk by a constant stream of friends bearing condolences, and deliveries by the florist. As soon as my tuning was done, the daughter who had summoned me switched back to her norm and informed me, "My mother would ordinarily have paid for anything like this around the house, but of course her money is tied up until after her estate is settled. I'm going to try to get my father or my brother to pay for this; they have more money than I have." I mailed a bill to the family at their home address, and in about a month received a check from one of the menfolks. Who said that the woman always pays?

A fine singer of my acquaintance, whose professional standing commanded a considerable fee, told me that he had been engaged to give a recital for a social organization in a Boston church. The date had been set, and in talking over arrangements with the program chairman, the singer mentioned that the piano should be tuned just before the performance. "Well!" the chairman exclaimed,

"if we've got to have the piano tuned, we won't hold the concert." And they cancelled it forthwith.

Administrators of institutions and officials of organizations, however well educated in other respects, often exhibit an incredibly uncultured insensitivity in regard to pianos.

## CHANGE-OF-PACE LISTENING

Most people find a change of pace relaxing, often more refreshing than taking a long and perhaps tedious trip to some distant spot. Being a listener by trade, I am convinced that what we hear is largely a matter of attention, but the listener-by-training reaches a point where it is a part of his nature to hear critically or appreciatively without conscious effort. So, besides hearing snatches of conversation from some little distance while thumping up or down the familiar 88, I enjoy frequently a bonus of varied sound that some would regard as boring stillness; to me, it is an eloquent silence.

I had to wait for a brief space on the front steps of a country house in Antrim. At a little distance across a patch of lawn and bordering the roadside, were three handsome rock maples in full summer foliage, their ample domes affording many leafy caverns to invite the sweeping wing or the questing glance. A light breeze stirred the leaves to a faintly audible whisper; then, the breeze strengthening, the sound crescendoed to a gay flutter. In Isaiah's happy phrase, the "trees of the field" did indeed "clap their hands," the volume rising and falling in most subtle gradations.

The breeze passed, the maples fell silent, and another movement of air cut through the stately pines a little way off at one side of the clearing. Just as the theme of an orchestral work is passed from the strings to the woodwinds with an unmistakable change in tonal effect, the pine section produced a sibilant tone as distinct from the voices of the maple choir as flute tone from 'cello, yet it was as pleasantly musical -- symphonic variations on a theme older than the memory of mankind. This bit of observation afforded me a freshness of approach that enabled me to take in happier stride my subsequent encounters with octaves and fifths and the people who use them.



## MY PUBLIC

Working at a service trade, I try to arrange my days so as to accomplish the most work with the least travel, hence have become cautious about saying exactly when I will arrive at a customer's house. I have to leave it flexible, never knowing in advance just how long each job will require, and planning other work that I can do to advantage on the same trip. So if I arrive during baby's bath or the boiling over of the jelly, I just tell the people, "Don't mind me -- I'm the winder-upper. I'll find the piano." Nothing shocks me, absolutely nothing. So much good nature is expressed. A young housewife greeted me with a grin and a groan, saying, "The painter and the plumber are here, so the place is all torn up. I was just saying 'If only the piano tuner would come today, everything would be perfect,' and here you are. Go right ahead."

Daisy has observed that I have a varying approach, tone of voice, and vocabulary in talking with different people. One of these she calls my "cultured tone," another is "just ordinary," but when talking with my brothers or my native neighbors, she says I "turn Yankee." I was not aware of this before the merger. Probably everyone reacts differently to different kinds of people. I have developed a feeling for premises; the look and atmosphere of some houses call for deference, while in others it seems natural to be breezy. In no single respect is this tendency more marked than in the matter of asking the location of the bathroom. Often I ask for just that; once a child grinned up at me impishly and inquired, "Are you going to take a bath?" only to be promptly and firmly squelched by his mother. In an extra nice place I inquire, "May I be directed to a plumbing installation?" If it is way out in the country, I usually ask for "the bathroom, or whatever serves the purpose," and occasionally get directed out a long trail of sheds and ells to the latter. If the people appear folksy, it is likely to be "Where is the john?" I got cured of asking for the lavatory when one literal-minded customer responded with, "Oh, you want to wash your hands. You may use the set tub right out here in the laundry," and she superintended the operation, which didn't help much. In a house that was being spasmodically remodelled by the owner, a door was pointed out in response to my question, and upon opening it I was confronted by a two-foot step up onto the next level. That house should have turned out a lot of hurdlers and mountain climbers.

While I was tuning for an elderly lady, her daughter was sniping around the edges, complaining that a piano should not need tuning so often. "Why," she said, "my piano hasn't been tuned for seven years, and my friend who plays says it isn't too bad." But could you imagine anyone's social acquaintance saying, "My dear, your piano sounds perfectly horrid?" We all have some taboos and reticences with our friends, even the closest, for which reason we seldom get down to anything basic or earnest with them, but remain largely on a basis of pleasant casualness. But entering so many homes in the way I do, it occasionally comes about that the absence of habitual mental barriers permits some really worthwhile talks.

A fine woman, Mrs. Grace Perry, whom I knew only slightly at the time, came in while I was working, and almost immediately we were engaged in a discussion about the experience of death, and how we might recognize those who had passed on before us. Suddenly stopping short, she said in surprise, "Here I am talking with you on this subject that I wouldn't discuss with my best friend!"

A young woman told me about her father, to whom she had been very close. "We never had much money, and he did not have enough left, above the needs of his family, to dress as well as he'd have liked to, but he was fond of handsome neckties, and always managed to keep some good ones to wear. After his death, I felt very troubled for a while; he had been such a good man, and had so few rewards for all his labors. Then one night I dreamed that he was in an exclusive men's shop picking out fine neckties for himself. After that, I felt at peace about him."

A woman of mature age told me of the circumstances of her marriage. She was quite young at the time, her home life, involving a stepmother, was not happy, and along came a young man whom she liked, who proposed marriage. She could see this as a way out of the home situation, but she did not feel ready to marry, and told her suitor so. "Very well," he responded, "but I want you for my wife. Let's get married, but you won't have to live with me until you are ready to." So they married on that basis. The husband went to a distant city to learn a skilled trade, and the wife secured employment as a single domestic worker in the home of a physician. Her husband came to call on her Sunday afternoons. This went on for some time, and was mutually satisfactory. The doctor had hired her as a single girl, and after a while he was led to question the status of the young man who called regularly, so she told him the whole story. He was most understanding, and said, "Feel free to have your husband come to stay with you at any time." But it was still a long time before she felt ready to assume the responsibilities of marriage, and until she said the word, her husband waited according to his agreement. They became a very devoted couple.

\* \* \* \* \*

I often tell people that my trade is like greasing automobiles in one respect: it is something that will have to be done again sometime. You might think that the comparison ends there, but some pianos put on mileage, too. A minister's wife told me their piano had been moved 27 times in 28 years. They stayed longer than their average time in Greenfield, and I got to know them fairly well. I could see why they might have changed parishes quite often: Mrs. Parson was the aggressive sort. She never just plain said anything; she always at least asserted or declared, and frequently asseverated, reserving the latter vehemence especially for denouncing the pillars of the church-of-the-moment and their shortcomings and longgoings. By the attraction of opposites, perhaps, her husband was mild, scholarly, affable, and played the violin. We had some pleasant evenings with the easy duets I could manage. (This was before the merger with Daisy.) Mrs. Parson played the piano as forcefully as she talked. She had a sense of humor, though -- she told me that their daughter, distinctly urban by preference, used to say, "I don't like cows. They look so immodest." Once she was funnier than she realized: when talking about playing the organ, she mentioned the "Bourbon bass stop." I wondered privately if this was the low-voice equivalent of a "whiskey tenor."

\* \* \* \* \*

A tradesman working independently needs to develop qualities that are not needed in as great a degree by persons in more routine employment. Besides planning, as in the matter of travel, it is of course essential to meet dates agreed upon and to be responsible about the property of customers, since the trade work is done where there may be surroundings and furnishings of considerable value, and lacking these, each place has nevertheless a basic significance for the owner. The home that looks sparsely furnished and hard-bitten may also have been hard-won; the lodge room that seems stuffy and dated may have furnished a number of worthy people with opportunities to hold office and have a social life which they would not have enjoyed in any other way. So it is important to put the camp key back under the same flat rock, or to make sure the windows are closed where a shower might drive in. In over-furnished rooms where people move in little trails, it is necessary to watch both ends in handling removable boards and lids. Klunking heirlooms is decidedly unpopular, as I learned the hard way.

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Another essential might be termed financial sagacity. A single day's earnings may sound ample, but the actual take-home pay is a lot less, with automobile expense, visible and hidden taxes, and the upkeep on one's property taking all the way from a nibble to a big bite. Hence trimming a sirloin appetite to fit a hamburg pocketbook comes prominently into the picture. Schools and organizations have a lot of pianos to tune, but they also process bills in a leisurely manner, so the eras of good eating had better not be too extended. People want a tuner when they want one, but at other times he is like the old horse on New Hampshire farms of an earlier period: after the hay was all raked, he was turned loose for the rest of the summer with a slap on the rump and a, "Go pick up your own livin', you old devil."

\* \* \* \* \*

A very helpful device in dealing with people is the quotation: it serves well the purposes of impudence by enabling the quoter to comment with the pertinence of impertinence, while Pope or someone else shoulders the responsibility. More than one mother, sighing over the impedimenta strewn in the wake of her teen-ager, has been pleased to hear

Behold the child, by nature's kindly law,  
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw:  
Some livelier play-thing gives his youth delight,  
A little louder, but as empty quite.

The quotation also makes possible the decking out of one's homespun thoughts in the neatly tailored garb of another's phraseology, and the packing with special meaning of even the most familiar phrase, to suit an occasion.

\* \* \* \* \*

The little tots are never as much of a bother as their mothers imagine them to be. I never discourage them from looking on, assuring anxious parents that I have had a great many elbow audiences. If youngsters get too eager and start sounding the bass notes just to watch the hammers strike the strings, I have found a method that works. As the child stands at my side, fascinated to watch the hammers move, I place a hand gently on his head and say, "Honey, how do you suppose the man can hear when you are doing that?" Usually they smile back at me, twist away a little self-consciously, and desist. One boy did inform me that his name wasn't "honey." I could only say "It seems like 'honey.'"

\* \* \* \* \*

There is a lot you can't tell people. Commenting frankly on the condition of their premises, if the comment would be unfavorable, is barred, but euphemisms are permissible. The most piled-up houses I have been into did not contain pianos, so if the customer half excuses the looks of things, I can truthfully say, "I guess you haven't been into as many places as I have... Yes, I have seen worse-looking places." But some people who might well do some excusing seem blandly unaware of a need for such lip service to an acceptable standard.

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Anyone who is serving the public needs to orient his occupation in relation to other trades and to evaluate his work accordingly. A piano tuner is a skilled mechanic and as such deserves a decent fee for his work, but on the other hand, he is not painting a masterpiece that will deserve to be hung in the National Gallery, nor carving a memorial in enduring rock, so there is a need to arrive at a temperate estimate of one's place in the scheme of things. I have had people ask me in recent years if I still tune for a price that prevailed in the 1930's -- people who would be the first to howl if their rate of earning were pegged at that level. My usual reply is, "I would be glad to work at that rate if you can bring butter back down to 33 cents and gasoline to 17." This conveys the economic situation. There are, however, those who prefer to be taken for a fat fee, thinking that such a deal automatically guarantees better work. My problem is somewhat like that of the eager schoolboy who heard a talk by a successful businessman, who summarized his talk with, "In conclusion, let me emphasize that I owe my success to pluck, sheer pluck." The boy asked, "How can you tell which ones to pluck?" Oh, to find a sure-fire formula for identifying the pecuniarily pediculous!

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Early in my career I became prejudiced against square pianos: why did people keep the old things, anyway? The strings are often rusty and brittle, the actions delicate and finicky. But I outgrew that, and can now see a lot of merit in some of them. The superb handwork in many of them is to be admired; it belongs to a period in human endeavor that will not return. I met a man in his nineties who, in his youth, had carved square piano legs on a piecework basis, which had brought him very good wages for those times. My friend Lothrop Herrick, who thoroughly knew antiques, used to say that although a slatback chair is not rare, beautiful, or even comfortable, somehow hardly anything else looks so quaint and old-fashioned. In a similar way, a square piano has its own

connotations of quaintness and atmosphere, and when nicely kept in a proper period front room, yielding a faint fragrance of rosewood in summer weather, it conveys a sense of having been intimately associated with some of the choicest occasions in human experience. When correcting its thin tones, I have had fanciful glimpses into the past, its people, their costumes, and pastimes.

After I had worked ten or twelve years at my trade, I was called to tune a square piano for an elderly couple in Henniker. I told them right away that I could not remedy everything that ailed it, but could bring about some improvement. That was all they wanted; it was only used for playing a few songs when the sewing circle met. So I did what I could, was paid, and departed. A few days later I was in the neighborhood again, and my customer referred to the elderly couple and said, "They were real pleased with what you did for their old piano. They hadn't thought there was much hope for it. They were almost ready to give it to the church!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Certain inconsistencies in the administration of schools have become glaringly apparent to me. A city school system became blessed with a spanking new junior high building at a cost of over a million. New equipment of the latest design appeared all over the place; I doubt that even a used basketball found its way into this gleaming palace of learning. By the time all this was done, Music, the poor dependent relative of the curriculum, was accorded typical largess by trundling in two old upright pianos, and a vintage grand that swayed uncertainly on its legs like a groggy prize fighter. All past the half century mark, one upright and the grand were usable; the other upright was a cheap half-plate piano, and the years had not been kind to it -- but it still had good-looking varnish. I advised discarding this latter specimen, and the music director felt that his judgment was vindicated. He had fought valiantly, but in vain, for new pianos -- a matter of pennies, in relation to the total outlay.

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Anyone working in hundreds of places during a year has to make up his mind that variable atmospheres are a part of the day's work, and he had better take with him a mental atmosphere that will serve as insulation against anything. People have vastly different ideas as to what constitutes a comfortable house. There has been a marked improvement in standards during the period of my recollection, but some things that pass for progress scarcely measure up. Oil fumes saturate the air in some homes; in others, with modern heating plants, the people set the thermostat low and wear sweaters. Then there are still old houses where the living room is a crossroads, with poorly fitting doors leading into half a dozen cold places; the temperature at eye level may be 89 degrees while the floor, in winter, is barely above freezing.

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A tuner has to work in a country church once in a while, generally in warm weather. This involves going to a house in the neighborhood for the key, passing the time of day with the householders, and giving them a chance to size up the mechanic. Country churches are most agreeable to work in. They have a recog-

nizable smell -- a bit woody, a trifle closed-up, and highly respectable -- the very odor of sanctity. I speculate on the human drama of the community in which the church played a leading part. I enjoy studying the furnishings and woodwork -- pews of native chestnut or virgin pine, perhaps, which could never be replaced. One chapel, in East Washington, still has oil lamps with reflectors. A "lamplight service" is held there occasionally.

A fine example of simple meeting house architecture is the church at Deering Center, with its white-painted interior and unpainted box pews, which stand as left by the smoothing plane of a good early craftsman, but mellowed with age. On the rear wall is a plaque in memory of Clark Vandersall Poling and the three other Chaplains who went down with the transport "Dorchester."

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A parish, at the close of Lent, was to hold an entertainment, and I was to tune the old upright in the recreation hall. It was a cold day outside, and I was dressed for it; inside the hall the glass stood at 34 degrees. The churchman who let me in did not inquire about my personal comfort, but left me to work free from such mundane considerations. I kept on my gloves and the rest of my sub-zero outfit, and got along quite well, but few pianos were ever tuned as fast as that one.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some downright frankness is helpful in arriving at an understanding with a customer. I find a good many reasonable people who state that they are not expecting miracles, but would like to know if their old piano can be put into fair using shape for less than a certain figure; this furnishes a working basis. People have a right to know how much they are going to have to pay. I ran across one family of working people who didn't know, didn't ask, and some operator who was working the town just once soaked them a preposterous figure for removing part of a player action and cobbling under the keys with old hat felt. Besides the customer's right, the tuner has a right to inform customers how much they can legitimately expect of a journeyman mechanic. Hollywood can process a Sally Sow's-ear into a Sylvia Silkpurse, but a tuner does not possess as magical or as Midas a touch as the celluloid capital.

Anyone who is going to stay in business in the same area has a lot to consider besides his immediate day's pay. A customer of mine in Bradford summed up the situation in telling me of his experience in selling his large old house after he had built a smaller home. The old place did not have a dependable water supply, and he sold it with that understanding. Some of the fellows around town said, "Aw, why didya say anything about the water? You could ha' got more for it 'thout sayin.'" "Sure I could have," he replied, "but this buyer is going to be my neighbor, and I want to be able to go into his house, and have him come into mine, and be able to look him straight in the eye."

\* \* \* \* \*

Some instructions go against my grain. As I was about to start on some school tuning, I was told that the music teacher said all of the pianos were too

high for the children to sing to, and please to lower the pitch. I replied, "That would be like lowering the standards of morality for the aid and comfort of sinners. She had better transpose the songs into lower keys, or divide the children into parts according to their voices." Those pianos were nearly all below standard pitch, varying a half tone or more from one another, and all too old to risk drawing up very much.

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Noticing the speech of certain people as differing from my own, and remarking on the fact, has led to some lively conversations. What with boys in the armed services bringing back wives from Alabama or Coventry, and the influx of young executives from all over who have come to work in the light industries that have been started in this locality, I do not come across many who are recognizable as native Yankees. So it was with keen enjoyment that I heard the remark of a grade school boy in Temple who watched me working, then remarked in a nasal drawl, "You must have a good time drivin' araound all over creation."

\* \* \* \* \*

It is hard to tell people that an old piano that has been in their family too long is hardly worth keeping, but some know it without being told. A Mrs. Garland of Henniker, alert and interested in affairs of the day, asked me for a frank opinion of the condition of her piano, and I gave her just that. She responded with, "I'm not surprised, and I don't know as it makes much difference to me, but sometime somebody else is going to own it. I'm ninety-six."

\* \* \* \* \*

Those who obtain old pianos to have them fixed up do so at their own peril. A woman who had bought a long-neglected piano on the basis of its good name began to suspect, during my second effort with it, that the process was only well started. So she asked if the piano really merited reconditioning. It was my honest opinion that it did, and I continued with a story that I reserve for my most select and perceptive customers:

A Scotch doctor had kept at his practice for years without a break while educating his son for the same profession. Finally the son became qualified to practice, and took over the office while the father went on a long and well-earned vacation. Upon his return, the father heard glowing accounts of the cures his son had effected. "Why, I even cured Mrs. MacGregor's stomach that you have been treating for so long," the son finished. "Weel, laddie, ye may be smarrter than your auld dadder," the old doctor replied, "but I wad have ye to know that Mrs. MacGregor's stomach put ye through college."

My customer's face developed an expression of growing comprehension.

\* \* \* \* \*

How to head off reed organ jobs is one problem a tuner has to meet. To be sure, I have learned a little about them by the empirical method, but they are so loaded with debris, such as acorn shucks left by squirrels, coupled with evidence of elementary physiological functions performed by these and other rodents, that I prefer to let the old wheeze boxes alone. A complete cleaning is what most of them need, and the taking apart necessary to accomplish this is a major operation. So if someone insists, and I am not too busy with pianos, I prepare the customer for the worst by stressing that I always start such jobs in the morning. Reed organs and melodeons work on a suction principle: the tiniest speck of dirt stuck in a reed will keep it from sounding. These instruments cannot be showered with balsam needles from Christmas greens or with phlox and delphinium petals from bouquets, and still keep sounding, as a piano does.

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Extra-curricular jobs crop up that call for some decisiveness. When there is no one around while I am tuning, I let the telephone ring, but a few times it has seemed right to answer and take a message, which in more than one instance proved to be important.

An Antrim customer told me as she left the house, "I'm just going to the store for a few minutes." I had been smelling chocolate cooking, and after the woman went out I had not progressed more than two octaves when I smelled burned chocolate. In the kitchen I found a mixture boiling over on the range, so I pulled it off the heat and swabbed up what I could with paper towels. As soon as the woman returned she said, "Oh, the fudge boiled over. I didn't expect to be gone so long."

"Maid and secretarial service at no extra charge, madam."

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Quite often I am asked how long I have worked at the trade, which is understandable, as people like to know if they are turning a beginner loose on their piano. One such was a quick-spoken toothless woman past middle age. I formed the opinion that she had not secured artificial teeth for the simple reason that she couldn't stop talking long enough to have an impression taken. When I told her how long I had been tuning she was incredulous: "Land sakes! Did you learn it when you was a little boy? I've got a son thirty-five who looks a lot older than you do."

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Through the years I have met very few piano tuners, and never got to know any of them well except my teacher. Some tuners leave a date inside pianos they tune, but "E.B.B. May 1906" does not furnish much information. It may even have been tuned a time or two since then. In one piano I came across a wire that had been put in as a replacement and clumsily wound up on the tuning pins. Later, another tuner had expressed some professional pride by writing this disclaimer over his initials: "Not my coils!"

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One summer evening about quarter of seven Daisy and I were just finishing supper and watching the newscast, when a telephone call came from one of the mansion people in Dublin. She had just learned of my existence. She had had her piano tuned the week before by a very fine tuner, but had been unable to get him to come back and fix the note that didn't work, and some of the tuning had slipped a little in the week of humid weather we had had. She was going to have a piano recital at her house that same evening at quarter of nine, and could I possibly come up and see what I could do? I knew the place through having worked for the former owner, and assured her that I would come right up (although not exactly complimented by being called in as a stop-gap). I got there promptly, fixed the bass note that wouldn't repeat, and retuned the bass section to the satisfaction of the charming young lady who was to play the recital. As I was putting the fallboard back into place, the lady of the house came over and inquired how much I would charge to come up there and tune a piano. I told her, adding, "Of course this was not a complete tuning job, but on the other hand, it was an accommodation, and I was taken from the bosom of my family at a most unseemly hour." This last, with all the severity I could muster, managing to keep a straight face. She retreated to the other end of that huge room and wrote out a check, then sent the butler back with it. She had added to my fee a generous bonus to assuage my separation.

## XLIII

### HEW TO THE LINE

In a customer's library I ran across a book on architecture which emphasized fitting design and materials to the purpose of a building. The author stated that the keynote of field stone is informality, so the Chases were working in the right medium before they were aware of it. Daisy and I could see, by the time the principal stone walls were finished in the fall of '56, that we should have hand-hewn beams in our living room ceiling. Dismantling an old tree-nailed barn frame did not appeal to us; they were getting hard to find, and one does a lot of work to get a few timbers that are mortised in the wrong places, and perhaps smell horsey. So we figured out a schedule of timbers that we would need. When cold weather came I put in a day now and then cutting suitable pines and rough-hewing them, leaving them up on skids until they had dried enough to be smoothed with a slicking chisel. Door and window lintels were also needed, which I hewed from one large red oak. In spring, when the bark would slip, I cut and peeled straight fir balsams for rafters; left round, they are strong, and light in weight when dry. We also decided to make one side and one end of our bedroom of peeled logs, and these had to be gotten out. This proved to be at least as much work as building an equal area of stonework, but in riding around the country we had observed that a lot of new houses had two or three kinds of material used for the outside walls, and we are not immune to the appeal of fashion, adapted to our situation.

The summer of '56 saw the one stone wall of the ell completed, footings in for the log walls, and low stone walls built for the sidewalls of the porch. We left the end that includes the fireplace chimney until last, and before starting to close it in, had several large loads of sand and rocks dumped inside the house area. In this way we had enough material to complete the mason work, the gable end and chimney being built up together, and this kept the clutter on the inside.

After one slushy snowstorm, I marked the outline of our baby grand in the soft snow in one corner of the living-room-to-be; the slush froze, and these marks were visible for many days. Daisy plodded up the knoll pretty often to see the view and to oversee its improvement.

Toward spring, in 1957, when there was no longer any snow to bother, my nephew Herbie Flanders and his two big boys came to help carry up the hewn timbers, which were in the woods at no great distance. We got them laid from wall to wall, then the spacing of them began. Daisy looked at them from underneath, and after some study said, "I think we have one too many for the space." After eliminating one, the proportions were better. Teamwork. But she had become so accustomed to having blue sky and pine branches overhead, that as soon as we had the hewn timbers in place spanning the parallel walls, she said, "I don't think I'm going to like this, having it closed in overhead." So I had to persuade her a little: "Well, woman, most places that people live in have

roofs." Then she became engrossed in the details of building and dropped her misgivings. I had hewn a pine 8 by 8, 23 feet long, that was to span a picture window opening and a kitchenette alcove; it was to rest on stonework on one end, on a hewn post at the other end, and would be supported midway on the masonry walls of a dish cupboard. Daisy and I raised this to the required height by using a variety of mechanical aids, building up blocking in cobhouse form as we progressed. I would raise one end with my hydraulic auto jack, Daisy would build up the blocking, then we would shift to the other end and bring that up, until we could slide the timber into place.

At about this stage of construction of the stone house, the State Highway Department bought a strip of my woodland a half mile in length for right-of-way when a portion of Route 202 was to be relocated. The proceeds came in handy for buying windows that were in keeping with the permanent character of our building effort. Brother Steve, learning of this transaction, remarked to me, "You must be heartbroken to have the State pay a thousand dollars for your swamp."

Also at about this stage of building, I proposed my prize name for the new domicile: "Heavy House." My good wife kept on picking up wood chips and mortar scraps without comment.

## GENUINE PEOPLE

Even more than the scenes and places, the people I have met keep coming to mind. They go on in human experience and develop in various directions, even as you and I. Some of these acquaintances have been renewed periodically through the years; others have been solitary encounters marked by sheer delight.

When tuning in a private school, in a cubicle of a practice room, I looked up and saw a boy watching me, a presence I had felt rather than heard. He was musical -- played the piano and the violin. He had a lively sense of humor without being loud, was friendly without being forward. He had worked during the summer vacations, one year as a bait boy for a lobster fisherman, another summer helping a building contractor. I detected just about every mark of a good upbringing that one might expect of a human being at that stage of experience. His family name was Dodge; when I saw him a second time a few days after our first encounter, we had a lively bit of conversation, during which it came out that I had hoped to see him again, but knew it would be useless for me to chase him, as he could always dodge me.

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Upon entering Francetown village school to do some tuning, I was met by the head teacher, whom I recognized, but could not associate with that type of work. He directed me to the lunch room in the basement for the first piano, and as I made ready to work, I thought about this man whom I hadn't seen for years. He had lived in a town near mine, worked in a mill, operated a filling station, made a marriage that didn't last, played on the town's athletic teams, took his share of drinks with the boys, in general was well liked, but was without much serious purpose in life. He must have felt my surprise at finding him teaching school, because after I had been working a short time he came down and talked with me.

"My kids are upstairs taking a test. I can walk out and leave them any time. We are on the honor system. I have convinced them that anything they might get by cheating will do them no good. The thing that started me on this work was my experience with the Marines in Korea. I was thirty-five at the time, and I kept seeing boys half my age getting picked off all around me, while I was spared. So I did some serious thinking, and reached the conclusion that God had something for me to do in life, more important than I had done up to then." He paused, a little self-consciously. "I don't often mention this. I hadn't finished high school, so when I came back I completed the credits I needed to enter teachers' college." He went on to tell me of completing a teacher training course in much less than the usual time, and of landing a job in that small town where he could know the people and start his work.

"They never had another teacher like me. I am entirely frank with the

children and their parents. Some of the parents couldn't take it at first, but they're coming around; the kids have been with me right from the start. I tell them, 'You can't try anything that I haven't tried, but I'll tell you what happened to me when I did such-and-such a thing.' They get the point about what works in life and what doesn't. I tell the parents things they need to know about their children. I say to one couple, 'Your child needs help at home with his reading,' or in another case, 'Your child is not getting enough affection at home.' A few of them resented this at first. One of my boys went on to high school and dropped out after a few weeks. I went and talked to him and his parents together -- told them things out of my war experience. Pretty soon I had them all crying, and I was, too. The boy went back to school and has been getting along all right ever since.

"I take two children home with me each weekend -- boys one week, girls the next. My wife and I have no children. We go on a hike Saturday, or to a sports event; we take them to a movie, and we go to church on Sunday. It's their first experience away from home, for most of them."

The children adored this man. He went on to larger teaching positions, but they haven't forgotten him. I haven't.

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Upon entering a residence one summer afternoon, I found my customer seated at her grand piano, playing, while her house guest, obviously a skilled artist, was doing an oil sketch of the interior, with the instrument and player as the central subject. The player arose and said to the artist, "You will not object if Mr. Chase tunes the piano while you work?"

"Not at all. I shall keep on."

So, for the first time, I substituted for one who was sitting for an artist, and was recorded as a lady of graceful proportions in a long yellow dress. The tuning and sketching ended almost simultaneously, and I was invited to stay for iced tea. There were present my customer as hostess, her sister, Mme. \_ \_ \_ \_ , the artist, and I.

The artist held my attention. She was past middle age, spoke with an accent, and by her deft and sure command of the brush was obviously a painter of distinction, an estimate which was later confirmed when, by request, she brought out a portfolio of photographs of her recent works. Her seamed face and gnarled hands indicated that her life had not been an easy one, yet I felt in her manner a great kindness and patience, rather than bitterness. We all had a most agreeable visit over the tea, and the artist shook hands warmly as I was taking leave.

A few days after this, I saw the caretaker of the place, whom I knew slightly, and mentioned sitting for the painter.

"Did you hear the artist's story?" he asked.

"No, but I did observe her closely, saw photographs of her work, and I could see that she has a fine talent. She has had some good commissions."

"Yes. These people I work for are in the diplomatic service, and they have been able to help her to get established here in America. They were stationed in Egypt, and found this woman barefoot and in rags on the street in Cairo. She had been robbed by the Germans in World War I, and by the Russians in World War II, who also killed her husband, and herded her with many others into a box car for twenty-five days of travel. Her wanderings brought her into contact with these people I work for. I could tell you a lot more about them, but what they have done for this one person is all you need to know in order to understand what kind of people they are."

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Told by telephone how to reach a place in Dublin, I arrived at a house perched high on a craggy hill. Large and sumptuous, it appeared to be an estate, but as I stood waiting for someone to answer the bell, I got the feeling of a most untypical atmosphere. There were sounds of carpentry, and people talking back and forth within. A white-clad chef swung open the door and called to a woman upstairs, "Oh Kasha, here's your piano tuner." The piano, an old painted upright, stood near the door, so I went to work. Soon "Kasha," who had called me by telephone, came downstairs. She spoke understandingly of music and pianos, remarking, "I have two Steinways standing neck-to-neck in my living room at home."

"Then this is quite a come-down," I said, indicating the object of my ministrations. "You must have had a lot of music study."

"Yes, I studied for some time with \_\_\_\_\_," she replied, mentioning a name familiar to concert-goers, "until my family found out that the 'lessons' consisted less and less of music and more and more of eating caviar and drinking vodka, then they put a stop to it."

"Who operates this place?"

"A.A. -- Alcoholics Anonymous. But you can't come here when you have a drink in," she added vehemently. "You have to go to a hospital and get properly sobered off, then you can come here, if you're a member. The members can come and get built up if they slip a little, and some bring their families for vacations, in order to stay away from temptation. We help one another by telling of our experiences."

This I observed to be the case. I overheard a woman with a Scotch accent, who was working around the rooms, telling another some of her story: "I did domestic work, and earned very good money, but it got so I was paying more for doctors and hospitals than I earned. A friend got me to come up here and paid my expenses for two weeks, then when I thought I would have to leave, she sent enough money for two weeks more, and by then I was able to go back to work, and they gave me a job here. The work is light, the members are wonderful to me, and I can stay sober." Everybody was on an informal first-name basis -- part of the anonymity. I heard "Don" telling "Izzie" about the breakup of his marriage: "And she wanted the solid mahogany living room suite and the Oriental rug that was under it, and got them, and she wanted the mahogany bedroom set, and got it. So I went through all that."

The esprit de corps was inspiring. Everybody was cordial and friendly. They insisted upon my having lunch with them. You just took your plate from the chef at the kitchen door, sat with a group at a table and visited, or read a paper during the meal if you preferred that.

Later, at another place kept by the same organization, I again saw "Kasha," who told me a lot about the workings of A.A. "Our whole effort is based on prayer. We always think of ourselves as alcoholics, and ask God for strength to meet temptation just one day at a time." I expressed the conviction that anyone who has experienced benefit through prayer should not accept it as a selfish gain, but should clinch that gain by helping others, pointing out that St. Paul says, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." (Romans 15:1).

"That's a lot like our teaching," Kasha said approvingly. "We are always on call to go and help another member who has gotten into trouble. We alcoholics help one another. We can feel another person's problem because we have been there ourselves. That's why it's so hard for a non-alcoholic to understand us or to be of any help to us. We talk straight from the heart, and that reaches another person where theories fail. I have heard people speak most eloquently who had no reason to do so, as far as their education would account for it.

"We have twelve steps to take. One of these steps is to take a complete moral inventory. Drinking is always a retreat from actuality. My husband is very successful in his profession, the children are swell. I had to face the fact that when someone crossed me I would start on a binge; then I would fall flat on my face, feel very penitent for a day or so, then, back into the harness again. The time came when I fell flatter and harder than usual. I had to face the situation, and that brought me up here. We just can't go back and pick up where we left off."

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A family well out in the country had a piano that had been wet. It took a long day to put it into even passable shape. A tuner doesn't like such an assignment, but in this instance the people were worth knowing. At dinner time they asked me to sit down with them. "Everything was grown on the place except the bread," the woman explained. It was a good dinner. We talked of dousing veins of water, and I heard of their convincing experience.

I commented on the old house with exposed hand-hewn timbers in the ceilings. They had bought the place during the depression of the 1930's for \$400, most of which they had, and they made up the amount by borrowing from a friend for a short time. When they tore off a ceiling, they found authentic hand-dressed framing underneath. "We just had to leave them exposed," the woman explained, "they're just the sort of thing people are crazy about nowadays."

Her husband and I mentioned a man we both knew who had come originally from Vermont, and this brought out a remark that I could not entirely endorse, but which ought to be recorded in the annals of interstate sniping: "All the Vermonters I know are very loyal to Vermont, but they all left there because they couldn't make a living."

\* \* \* \* \*

Always of interest to the native is the degree of success achieved by people from cities who settle in the country. Some give up after a trial period and return to their cities. One fine woman, Minnie McKnight, who came with her husband to live in retirement in Francestown, said after twenty-five years, "None of our people back in New York can understand why we still love to live here. But then, they are all sidewalk people."

The matter hinges on the resources the individual has within himself, and on his ability to adjust to the local environment. This does not mean to "go native," for scarcely any traditional native way of life remains. New settlers, retirees, frequently tell me, "Our friends back in the city ask how we can find enough to do up here. We laugh. We were never so busy before, there are so many things to do -- clubs, the Sharon Arts Center, plays, Great Books. We just have to call a halt."

Not that New Hampshire has what everyone wants. One fine spring day I saw my neighbor, Jim Dechert, who had put in one very easy winter here. I commented on the pleasant day. "Yes," Jim said tiredly, "it's fine today, but you know very well it won't stay this way." He sold out and moved to the California desert.

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A couple whom I had seen occasionally at auctions when I did part-time work for an auctioneer, were otherwise unknown to me. They were good but judicious buyers, and reserved in manner. The woman approached me about fixing up an antique piano they had bought at an auction, and I made an appointment to look at the piano at their summer home. Following from Hillsboro village the road directions given me, I came at dusk in early October to a fine old brick house where a post lamp lighted up the flaming maples overhead. It was all New England-y enough up to this point, so I was a trifle taken aback when my alarm at the door brought a dignified French-speaking black houseman, a Haitian, as I later learned, who conducted me to the instrument I was to see.

On the way through the rooms, I could see that the place was furnished in choice antiques. The piano proved to be of English make, by James Henry Houston, and had a fine Sheraton case, but was musically unpromising. The tension of the strings had pulled the pin block loose from its anchorage, and the sounding board had been hopelessly broken up in the process. The strings were fine, like zither wire, with tuning pins at the right-hand end of the case, practically opposite to the layout of the early American pianoforte. The instrument was mostly scenery; it looked just right in that setting. Not much of the action acted. After sizing up the situation, I told the lady that even if put into working condition, it would never have much tone, due to the small sounding board area and the delicacy of the strings. But she would have me do what I could to improve it. So the following spring before the owners returned from Haiti, where their business was located, I made several efforts to locate Joe Garofoli, who took care of the summer residence, as I would have to have the instrument moved to a shop near my home in order to do such extensive repairs. So I wrote to the lady in Haiti and told her that I had not been able to find her caretaker, and would rather not



undertake the job anyway. Evidently she wouldn't take "no" for an answer, for about three days later Mr. Garofoli appeared at my door early in the morning, gesticulating, with his mercury at an all-time high.

"Can't-a find-a Garofoli in-a Hillsboro! Dass-a nonsense! You get-a dat woman scare to death!" And so on, through quite a tirade. Then I told him, calmly, that I had tried three times to find him, and couldn't; that I didn't want to do the job anyway, but they were such nice people that I would work on the little piano as soon as he could move it for me. The next minute, we were friends; he simmered down, then expanded genially and assured me, "They're more than nice people. They are WONDERFUL people!"

So we got the antique moved to my neighbor's shop. I worked days on it. There were only about four moving parts to each note. The hammers were wooden, leather-faced, and they swung on rawhide hinges. The old damper springs were of whalebone, mostly eaten away, and had to be replaced with metal springs adapted for the purpose. I replaced the sounding board with part of the board from a square piano I had dismantled earlier. When it was all put together, it tinkled pleasantly, and Mr. Garofoli moved it back again. The owner seemed pleased, and paid the bill without wincing a bit. As Mr. G. had said, "Wonderful people!"

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I could not discourse under this head without mentioning my admiration for schoolteachers in general. Often forced by the conditions of a rapidly changing society to serve as stand-ins for both parents and policemen in addition to their regular duties, I see most of them doing a grand job, and better still, enjoying their important work.

Waiting in a school until I could work on a piano, I was impressed with the work of a young teacher drilling a class of beginners on wind instruments. The trumpets gave forth "an uncertain sound," and the tone of the clarinets was anything but clarion, but the young man kept on resolutely beating time, teaching the note values, and encouraging a better consciousness of pitch. I loved him for the patience and long-range hopefulness he expressed, but rather than say so frankly, I remarked, "Evidently you can see in these gawky seedlings the promise of a fine tomato salad some time in the future." He looked pleased and replied, "Thank you. You have set me up for the day."

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Going over a period of years to a residence in Peterborough which conveyed a sense of settled affluence while avoiding anything like ostentation, I came to know Mrs. George E. Clement. She painted well, but was not immersed in her art; could move in the most select social circles, but chose to spend an occasional holiday helping at the local hospital in order to give some of the regular workers a day off. An active Director of The MacDowell Colony (she was the "dear Margaret" often mentioned in Mrs. MacDowell's letters to mutual friends), once when driving through the Colony grounds she noticed me about to enter a studio, and stopped to speak kindly about a small part I had recently taken in a play. If I were working in her home when lunch time came she would invariably ask me to have lunch with her family, or would bring me a tray if they were not getting together.

It is not one's privilege in a lifetime to know many people so reticent about their talents, so unassuming in a secure social position, or so quiet about their charities. In her later years, I once asked Mrs. Clement about her painting. She replied, "I have not been doing any painting for a long time. It takes a certain amount of energy to get the materials together and go out and paint, but since my husband passed away and one of our sons was lost in the war, I have not seemed able to muster enough energy to paint." However, her other activities continued for several years after she made this reply, in fields where she could do good, and uphold standards. After her passing, the weekly newspaper in her town had to exceed its usual conservatism in order to do her any sort of justice, and referred to her as "a very great lady."

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I learned that a family for whom I was doing some work had lived in a neighborhood I had known, and at nearly the same period, some years earlier. The mother in this family, a person of poise and distinction, talked with me of people we both knew. One family that had some pretty daughters came into mention. "Yes," she remarked, "they were pretty children, but it takes more than a pretty face to make a beautiful woman. Character, dignity, and graciousness are also needed." The mother who made this remark had daughters of her own, and I felt they were fortunate.

\* \* \* \* \*

A pert oldster, Dad Broeg, a member of the family, came in as I was tuning in a residence, and struck up a conversation, mostly one-sided: "I used to be a musician -- played French horn in some of the best bands in the country. I've moved around a lot. When I was a young fellow, a bunch of us used to run from East St. Louis to Belleville every Saturday night -- sixteen miles. We had a wagon sent on ahead with a lot of sandwiches and beer, and we would have a picnic. I haven't played for years now. I'm eighty-seven and a half. People ask me how I have managed to live so long. I tell them I don't know, except that my parents gave me a strong body and taught me how to take care of it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Memorable utterances about music have not always come from the musically famous. Winnie Stevens, who by practice, observation, and hard work became an excellent bandsman, had this to say: "Anyone who starts in with music has a long row to hoe, and he needn't think he is ever going to reach the end of it." Winnie used to help several of us boys who played band instruments, and in only one respect did he ever get out of patience: When we were trying to get the horns into perfect tune with one another, and knowing how much the instruments could be lipped into tune or out of tune, he would endure our maneuvers a little while and then say abruptly, "I guess that's as close as we'll play."

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Trevor Rea, a fine musician whom I met through his teaching in a public school system, made some statements that have remained with me:

"When I was a boy growing up in small towns in Pennsylvania, one of the attractions of the summer season for the small fry, besides circuses and carnivals, was the medicine show. It is now a thing of the past, but I am convinced that a lot of the charlatanism formerly attached to the medicine show has been transferred to the field of music.

"After getting out of Special Services at the close of the war, I decided to take some graduate courses in music. I went into a university office and mentioned my intention of working for an advanced degree. The man behind the slab said, 'Oh, you're after a Master's -- or would you like a Doctor's? We can give you a Doctorate.' I made up my mind that such a degree could be just something sold over the counter, so I took graduate courses for four years without taking any degree.

"It is regrettable that the best composers of the present day are not writing for the church.

"One day at the close of one of my periods in a special class, a little girl who might have been thought one of the least attractive children in the class ran up and threw her arms around me. I was so pleased that my teaching had reached her."

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In response to a call to work at a home in the country, I found the house and was admitted by a slender, quick-motioned woman. Her manner conveyed a great sense of alertness and perception. I immediately thought of her as birdlike, and to my satisfaction I learned that her given name was Avis -- Avis Turner French. As I tuned, I noticed about the room many indications of an interest in poetry, and when I mentioned this to the lady, she opened a chest and took out scrapbooks for me to look through. These contained clippings of her many published poems, often mounted with a picture that expressed something of the thought in the verse. She called them "heart poems," and I found this true in a distinctive way. She deprecated her vocabulary and disclaimed having much originality, but I was impressed by her talent for conveying true feeling and expressing good sentiment. I met the poet's husband, and could sense his appreciation of her attainments. I left with a warm invitation to bring Mrs. Turner and read more in the scrapbooks. This meeting was one of the most rewarding of my years of dealing with genuine people.

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Atop a high hill in Deering with views in every direction is an old farmstead long used as a summer home by a New York physician and his family. There was a garden consisting of an inextricable tangle of tiger lilies and asparagus. The house, comfortable for summer use, contained a suitable period piece in the form of a square piano. In this piano I found a large mass of blue shreds.

"Oh," said the doctor's wife, "that's what became of the fringe on my rug," pointing to an edge where the fringe was missing for a few feet. "It happened when we were away for a few days one summer. We caught the mouse, but until now I never knew where he had carried the fringe."

"You must love to spend the summers here."

"We all love it, although my husband is back and forth a lot. It's good for him to come up here and get away from his practice. Even if we go to a social gathering in the city, he gets off into a corner with another doctor and..."

"Talks shop."

"Exactly. My husband is a medical man, and when he meets a surgeon, they compare notes. My city friends wonder how I can stand it to stay up here, alone some of the time, but actually, I need six months up here to enable me to live the other six months in New York."

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A customer of mine over a period of years was Bernard W. Shir-Cliff of Sutton. Obviously urban in background, he and his wife nevertheless responded to the appeal of their place overlooking Blaisdell Lake and surrounding mountains. I could say of him as was said of a noted American jurist, that he never allowed his reserve to become thawed nor his geniality to become frozen. After I had known him for some time, I thought to ask him how hyphenated family names came about. He replied with a glint of a smile, "I'm sure I don't know. I got mine from my father."

## AROUND MONADNOCK

Long esteemed by people of means for its pleasant summer climate and high elevation, much of the country around Monadnock has been built up by people of good taste and sufficient means to express that good taste attractively, or even lavishly. Hence Dublin is extensively blessed with fine estates, many of which look toward the mountain, over Dublin Lake, or both. There are also extensive views in other directions. Most of the largest places were built when guests came from the railroad stations in Keene or Peterborough in horse-drawn rigs, so that many guest rooms were needed. A few of such estates are kept up and enjoyed.

One place has seven acres of landscaped grounds around a house that it takes minutes to walk around. Entering through a reception hall, I was conducted through a dining room of banquet hall proportions into a library where grandmother's old Steinway upright stood. As I worked, I observed the details of the room. Along most of one side were a few continuous steps leading up to a series of full-length windows that overlooked a sunlit terrace and another wing of the house. This library I estimated to be 36' x 40'. Along the side opposite the windows were book shelves and a suitably massive fireplace. Across the end opposite where I was working were more book shelves and a stand-up reading desk under a window placed high in the wall. Groups of rather distinguished furniture made the room livable and attractive. One piece I remember was a large coffee table in glossy black, just a wide board supported by two trestles like little carpenters' horses. Toward one end of the top was a painting in gold of bamboo stems and foliage, the whole adding up to something simple, striking, and elegant.

There were, on the wall where the piano stood, a number of paintings that I admired. One canvas by Joseph Lindon Smith depicted a detail of Egyptian sculpture against a vivid blue sky.

The ceiling of this room was a study in itself, with an overall decoration of deep plaster moulding in a magnified cloverleaf design. I later learned that Italian artisans had been secured to do this work.

The lady of the house crossed the far end of the room and paused to speak pleasantly. I commented on the size of the house and the furnishings and pictures. "This painting of Joseph Lindon Smith's must have been done before he developed the dry pigment technique that represents stone so faithfully." "Yes," she replied, "that is one of Uncle Joe's earlier works, and is not one of my favorites.

"My husband's parents had this place built; his mother superintended the building of this wing, using lumber cut on the place and seasoned two years. My friends used to wonder how I could live with my mother-in-law, but I told them, 'She is like an aunt of mine; she has the same prejudices, and the same virtues, which are many.' Recognizing that her attitudes belonged to her generation, we

got along fine. We'll keep the place as long as we can keep it up; I wouldn't allow a place to run down. The children love to come back here summers and weekends. We couldn't give it away -- even an institution wouldn't want it, it would cost so much to heat it in winter. We do the cooking among ourselves. During the war time, we would often have fifteen or twenty of family and friends over a weekend, and after they left I would wash the sheets in a bathtub, but since the war we have been able to get a washer, which is a big help."

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Another Dublin mansion provided an opportunity to study a subtle color scheme in its living room, perhaps fifty feet square. Soft grays and gray-greens predominated, on walls, finish, rugs, the fine Italian gold-decorated furniture, and a large landscape in oils "done by a friend of ours especially for this room," I was told. Two large framed mirrors on opposite sides of the room were ornamented across their tops by intricate carved or moulded festoons. The general effect was one of cool elegance, but in no sense cold; the room was amply lighted by French doors on three sides, some of which stood open and afforded glimpses of a lovely rose garden. Two matching pier tables symmetrically placed against wall spaces each bore an Italian ice-pail -- attractive ornaments, with their fluted rims and bold designs. Nothing appeared to be superfluous.

The lady of the house kindly invited me to lunch with her and her children. It was a pleasant, informal meal with conversation about things familiar to all of us. My advice was asked about a trumpet teacher for one of the boys. During the talk, some mention was made of a local builder who had been very active around Dublin during boom days. A teen-age boy remarked rather disdainfully, "Now he's living in that little two-room house he built for himself." His mother eyed him coolly and asked, "Could you build even a two-room house? I couldn't." "No," he replied quietly, obviously set down a peg. I felt that those children would grow up with some sense of values.

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A house that gives the impression of a chalet hugging the crags, but actually a rather elaborate one, is reached by a driveway that climbs by switchbacks up and over a steep ridge. This estate affords the closest, most rugged view of the mountain as seen from the Dublin side, and also looks over many New Hampshire hills to a far horizon of mountains in southern Vermont. The grounds about this place are a tribute to years of thoughtful care, planning, love, and expense in fairly equal proportions. During azalea time it is a place of special distinction. The phrase "the idle rich" has no application here, where the hands of a very capable lady may preside over perennials, teacups, and the keyboard, all in the same afternoon.

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In Jaffrey Center, where one gains some of the finest impressions of the bulk and ruggedness of Monadnock, during the week after Christmas I tuned for a genial mother, Margie Shattuck, who has two very rangy sons, of high school age at the time. "Those boys climbed the mountain and slept up there last night," she told me. "There is a cave up there where they can sleep. They took along a

steak for supper, and other food. They're always climbing that mountain. In the summer time, when they work at the State Park, they climb it on their days off!"

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By telephone I was directed to take the road that loops around Dublin Lake and enter a driveway flanked by a pair of cement urns. This drive wound through a bit of woodland, then among gardens ornamented with Japanese stone lanterns and other ponderous sculpture. The paino was in a studio building near the lake. During the process of raising a small upright a half-step or more to the specified orchestra pitch, I took an occasional breathing spell to look around. I was in the studio of Joseph Lindon Smith, who early in his career gave up painting portraits and turned to depicting ancient sculptures. He was reported to have explained that the statue of an Egyptian king was punctual, kept still, and had no relatives present to criticize the treatment of the nose or chin. A few paintings in this studio were of sculptured figures, but more represented bas-reliefs -- portions of a frieze which appeared to be a ceremonial procession of cattle and humans. Each work was labelled "XXIst Dynasty," or the like. The artist's dry-pigment technique represented stone with the utmost fidelity both as to color and texture; every chip and crack was faithfully portrayed, as were also streaks of discoloration.

There was a lot going on around the place that day; preparations were being made for an anniversary celebration which was to include musicians from Symphony, and dancers. A platform was being built outside. Yet whenever I took a break and toured the inner rooms of the studio, I was fascinated by the sense of eternal peace and tranquil beauty those paintings evoked. The carpenter work and bustle went on outside, but I could "stand amid the eternal ways." It would be worth a lot to be able to attain that mental state at will, when in need, and without a noted artist's work at hand to inspire one.

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Some work, tuning for a plant grower on the Brewster estate, led to an opportunity to see some distinguished and extensive gardens. Daisy and a friend, Ethel Alexander, went along on this tour. Below one end of the large residence was a terraced area with a large ornamental tree in the center and floral borders around the ends. At that season, late summer, exotic lilies were conspicuous. A few steps led from the edge of this terrace down to the next level, where at either side was a pleasant outdoor living room with elegant metal furniture; each of these rooms had its lawn areas and floral borders, semi-shaded by nearby trees. Below here, the layout was in pairs. A central slope of fine lawn led down between perfectly clipped evergreen hedges, with entrances at either side which led into the formal gardens. Each of these was perhaps 18' x 36', and was surrounded by the high hedge. Each had a long central pool with a flagged path around it, and a stone bench or other appropriate seat at the end opposite the entrance. Around the area outside the pool and path were plantings, all perfectly regular, with scarcely a withered leaf, nor anything out of place. We had been told that the upkeep of these gardens and grounds provided work for six men.

The plantings in these pairs of formal gardens were all different. One had tree-type fuchsias at intervals, with a bedding of begonias between. Another had the same arrangement, but in different colors. One was all tuberous begonias. Upon entering one which was all heliotrope, both low bedding type and tree-type, Ethel held up her hands in utter astonishment; coming from New York, where flowers are mainly a florist shop proposition, the impact was overwhelming. "Why," she exclaimed, "I never expected to experience such richness in this life!"

At the foot of the sloping lawn and the paired formal gardens, the whole area was bounded by a high stone wall banked with laurel and rhododendron, with a lion's head fountain in the center. The lawn at this bottom level extended beyond the hedges in either direction, so that one could take a woodland path up the slope outside the formal gardens and enjoy wildflowers and naturalized plantings while returning to the point of beginning.

We also strolled along the edge of a large acreage of lawn, and enjoyed a great variety of colorful annuals in a border about three hundred feet long. The mass and vividness of colors in this planting were such that I was able to locate it with the naked eye from the summit of Monadnock a few days after our garden tour. We felt highly privileged to have been permitted to see these gardens.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is not always beautiful landscaping without, or rare furnishings and distinguished people within that leave the most lasting impressions. A single picture is what I recall most vividly in the residence of W.R. Brown, which was by no means lacking in other outstanding features. This was a large canvas representing in detail a gnarled old beech tree in newly fallen snow. Enough was indicated of other trees to suggest a grove, but the principal subject held the attention. Each limb and rough bump, of the characteristic bluish gray color, softened by the clinging snow, was most faithfully represented. The touch that saved the picture from monotony and elevated it immeasurably in the realm of art was a faint flush of sunset sky that was revealed among the upper branches.

As I arrived to work at this house on one occasion, stately and agreeable Mrs. Brown, in passing through the room, indicated a dish of delicious-looking chocolates on a table near the piano and said, "Oh, Mr. Chase, won't you eat some of those chocolates and help to save my figure?" So, feeling nobly chivalrous that day, during my tour of the 88 notes, twice over, I saved her figure several times.

Some of the good people of Dublin have been such models of correctness that their neighbors have seen humor in their very propriety. Once when tuning at the Dublin Lake Club -- romping and stomping ground of tycoons and their satellites -- I was privileged to overhear the assignment of bathhouses for the season by a matron of unquestioned authority. She marched in at mid-morning, clad in black from her plain squarish hat that would have done credit to the Plain People of Pennsylvania, to her flat-heeled, practical shoes. She was attended by a young woman, possibly a relative or secretary. After adding the club hostess to her train, she swept along with the intrepidity of a battleship with destroyer escort. As one of her assistants read off names, the commander delivered de-



crees, firing an occasional broadside of disapproval: "Yes, they are entitled to No. 18 again this year -- they are still in good standing -- but I am moving them to No. 6; the people who were next to them last year requested a change....She and the children are in good standing, and may keep the same bathhouse, but it will be a long time before he is a member of the Club again, if ever; I don't like the kind of divorce he got."

A fine gentleman and a cultured musician was the late George L. Foot, who used to have his large Mason and Hamlin moved from his studio into his dwelling for the winter, then moved out again for the summer. I once asked him to compare the relative merits of the Steinway with those of the Mason and Hamlin pianos. He responded with, "I think the Steinway is a very fine piano for one who likes to play emotionally -- who likes to bring out a strong melody in the middle register -- but to me, the Mason and Hamlin is much evener throughout, and I am interested in acoustics, not in emotion." I thanked him, and came away with the feeling of having heard a decree of the first rank from a standpoint of the most impeccable orthodoxy. Later, in talking with a Dublin woman who knew this man, I attempted my best Yankee imitation of his near-British, exact diction. She appeared vastly entertained and inquired, "Do you mind if I use that for the punch-line for my next party?"

## TO -- AND FROM -- THE LADIES

Upon entering Robb Sagendorph's house, I noticed that the cook was a rosy-cheeked little woman who got around the room by using a tea wagon for a walker. On the way out, after I had finished my work, she struck up a monologue in a British accent: "People ask me what I do for my complexion. I tell them nothing but soap and hope -- soap to wash with and hope I get clean. I don't use lipstick because it calls attention to the teeth, and unless one has beautiful teeth it shouldn't be used. I don't wear jewelry because jewelry draws attention to the neck and my neck is bony, and being a cook, I say the place for bones is in the stock kettle."

\* \* \* \* \*

An advertisement had been entered in a nearby paper by a woman who stated that she would accept pupils, and that she taught "the art of singing in all its branches." When a call came to tune for this party, I was interested to see what sort of person proposed to fill this large order. An active elderly lady conducted me to a Chickering grand in golden oak. "This piano was used by Symphony on tour one season, about 1904, and when we learned that it was to be sold at auction, my husband arranged with someone who knew all about such things to buy it for us."

This was all very Bostonian -- the reference to "Symphony" only, and the idea that it would never do for people of quality to bid at an auction for themselves. Everything in the room bore this out; nothing was new -- having new things simply isn't done. Another customer of that background once explained to me that the furnishings in her newly built living room were "all inherited, nothing is new; these things have been in storage until we could get this room built." Still another Bostonian explained to me that her Steinway had been "owned by Louise Homer's sister, and we bought it from her estate, so it has been in only two ownerships." Even piano genealogy is important to these people. One doesn't even smile; it is one of the fixed facts of nature, like the wetness of water.

But back to the Chickering, which had been bought "in preference to a Steinway." Steinways were not built in Boston. She still saw it as the same piano it was when Symphony had disposed of it 40-odd years before. As I prepared to work on the piano, I saw that I would have to raise the lid. An oil painting hung in the way. This old lady, agile as a chipmunk, climbed up on top of the piano and passed the picture down.

Part way through my job, a voice pupil arrived, so I knocked off for lunch, within hearing distance, while the lesson took place. Such a mixture of cajolery and praise I had never heard. The phrases sung by the teacher, in a quavering tone that had once been a voice, were nothing short of pathetic, but she got the points across somehow by so doing.

Everything about the room expressed discretion. Even the moth nibbling in the piano had been done in discreet places. The total effect was considerable damage, but I found that I was expected to restore it to the condition of forty years earlier, and at a price that would have been current at that period. Mme. Molto Agitato and I didn't see alike; there was a conflict between our different class outlooks and periods of thought. The older upper-crust Bostonians, or at least the uppish and more crusty among them, recognized no kinship or sympathy with a tradesman. The ichor that coursed in their veins had an exalted status not to be confused with the mere blood of the masses.

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In Henniker village I had to look at an early upright first, then arrange to tune it at a later date. There was a reason for this procedure: in this way Mrs. Huntoon got an additional chance to talk. Keen, bright-eyed, somewhat confined to her chair, she launched into a play-by-play account of her hip injury.

"I had to go back to the hospital to have the pins reset. As I was being wheeled to my room, we were stopped by a nurse who wanted some case history; I told her they had all that from my earlier stays there. The man who drove me in was following along. He shouldn't have been, but then, he was a good man, but, I always said, good for nothing. The nurse said something about my husband. I told her, 'This man is not my husband,' and she asked, 'Where is your husband?' I replied, 'In heaven,' and a voice from a nearby room inquired, 'How do you know where he is?' I said, 'Because he was a good man; I lived with him for forty-two years, and I know.' Later, after I got to my room, Doctor \_ \_ \_ \_ , whom I have known for a long time, came in and apologized for asking that question, but he said it was too good a chance to miss.

"As they were putting me to bed, they drew a screen around. I saw there was a rubber sheet on the bed, so I told the nurse 'I want a regular sheet, I can pay extra for the laundry, but if I lie on a rubber sheet, my bottom gets all par-boiled.' I wouldn't tell you this if you were a very young man, but you're not. I saw Dr. \_ \_ \_ \_ looking over the screen while this was going on. A year later, when I returned to the hospital again, he came in to see me, and asked, 'How's your parboiled bottom?'"

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A dignified elderly lady, Miss Abbie Wyman of Hillsboro, who, I had been informed by a mutual acquaintance, had taught the piano very well, had on her table an autographed photo of Isidor Philipp, inscribed, "Pour Mlle. Wyman, avec bien sympathique souvenirs." She was obviously one of those who would benefit her pupils in manners and morals as well as in her special field of teaching.

It was a wet day in early summer; she lighted an open fire in the room "to keep your back warm," she said. Everything in the house expressed quality. The grandfather's clock had actually been built to order for her grandfather, which dated it as definitely "early American." The other furnishings were mainly antiques which had come down in the family. When leaving, I noticed a little primitive iron lamp, and asked about it. "Oh, I bought that when I was living in the Latin Quarter in Paris, when I was over there for study -- about a hun-

dred years ago," she finished, with a smile. She had me wait while she picked a bouquet of roses for me to take home. The fragrance of her thoughtfulness, symbolized by the flowers, lingers in memory.

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Two retired teachers in Jaffrey, the Doran sisters, gave hearty hospitality. Just before noon, one came to the doorway and said, "Come and wash your hands, Mr. Chase, and then you'll be ready to have dinner with us. We're farmers, and have our dinner at noon." So I quit work and did as directed; my mother had been a schoolteacher. At the attractive table, one of the sisters explained, "We grew everything that went into this meal except the meat and the flour. We grow a big garden over in Rindge, and can and preserve all summer, then come down here to the village for the winter and eat it up. We built this place for our old age." It was wonderful to observe that old age was still considered to be far in the future. The large, friendly collie, waiting not very patiently near the table, came in for frequent remarks and endearments, and finally received a reward in the form of a plate to lick, out in the kitchen. "When we go to service at All Saints', Tippy just has to ride along, and she waits in the car during the service. So after church, she just has to have a run -- don't you, dear? -- Yes -- and near where we park an auctioneer lives and sometimes she runs on his lawn. One Sunday he came out and said very gruffly, 'Hey, can't you find any place to run your dog besides on my lawn?' Now (very much hurt) I'm going to put instructions in my will that after I die, that auctioneer shall not sell my goods. He didn't love our dog."

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Noticing some good classics on the piano of an elderly lady customer, I asked if she played that sort of music. She replied, "Oh, I just play for my own amazement and other people's despair."

\* \* \* \* \*

A young woman in Weare had a baby grand of the period of the 1920's. She told me, "I started buying this piano by installments just before the depression, and had an awfully hard time paying for it. Before I was done, I felt like the Ancient Mariner, and this piano was the albatross around my neck."

\* \* \* \* \*

A grandmother on the outskirts of Concord called for me to work on the family piano, and was very insistent on my coming promptly. I found out why when I got there: she had removed the keys in order to clean out the dirt under them, had put them back in the wrong order, and had one left over. My first step was to get them back where they belonged -- not difficult when one knows where to look for the consecutive numbers or witness marks. The grandmother looked on and inquired, "How come they go in place so easy for you, when I had such a hard time with them?" She had waded far beyond her depth and then hol-lered for help, so I felt impelled to rub it in a little and replied, "There's such a thing as knowing how."

## ROADSIDE GARDENS

One of my never-ending delights is the plant life along the verge of country roads. The first conspicuous signs of growth in spring are the neat coils of fiddle-head ferns, as typically associated with New Hampshire as the classical acanthus with lands of antiquity. As the coils unfurl and a general greenness spreads along the irregular strip between road's edge and stone wall, a great variety of blooms appear in a succession that continues until late fall, although nature, skilled at effective composition, does not present fortissimo passages throughout. The display crescendoes and diminuendoes with artistic finesse.

Two observant teachers, one of them a botanist who summered in our neighborhood in West Campton during the 1920's and '30's, took a walk of a mile or so along country lanes at a time when local people did not expect to see things in bloom -- in the lull between the flush of spring flowers and the showy blooms of autumn -- and found and identified 32 species of wildflowers, most of them inconspicuous enough to escape the notice of any but the trained observer. I would not aspire to scrutinize the scene so minutely, but just to comment on the effects that impress the relaxed driver who would not wish to have every road "improved." The present natural condition of the verge has enabled me to store memory with unforgettable scenes: down a run in a neglected hayfield flowed the strangest river ever seen, between banks of robin's plantain -- a million or so blossoms of foamy caraway, tossing up creamy spray with every passing breeze; tall Solomon's seal nodding in stately groups under over-arching trees; on sunny banks in June, drifts of blue vetch vieing for attention with stands of devil's paint brush and its taller cousin, the golden hawkweed; the mauve fuzz of rabbit's foot clover edging the wheel tracks, with other clovers -- yellow, white, crimson -- a little farther back in the verge, gracing the roadside in artless abundance. Come July, an elegant Canada lily rears proudly above the surrounding growth, with bouncing bet and yarrow supplying humbler accents.

I think back to the days when old white Dick plodded up the West Campton hills, and could be reined near enough to the overhanging blackberry canes so that I could pick luscious fruit by leaning over the buggy wheels. Often the musk of milkweed bloom was wafted pleasantly during those leisurely trips, a change from the horse smell that was never far away.

And let us not neglect the escapees from country gardens that have naturalized in the verge, often attaining a size and perfection seldom seen under cultivation -- veronica, coreopsis, sweet williams, harebells, to mention only a few.

What a blessing that many wildflowers, unconscious that they are classed as weeds, are left free to express whatever beauty they are endowed with!

## XLVIII

### DR. BRADFORD'S REPROOF

Years before I got to tuning full time, I was asked by Carl Abbott to help him yard out some pole wood for a woman named Nettie who lived in the neighborhood. She had been quite a bird in her day, but in later years had become quite pious, had joined a church, and some neighbors carried her to Sunday church and midweek prayer meetings. In the exchange that follows, my greatest entertainment lay in watching Carl's suppressed amusement at her show of late piety, knowing as he did all the old neighborhood lore.

It was a cold, blustery day in February, snowing a little, and when we met at Nettie's place in the forenoon, Carl and I put our dinner buckets into the kitchen to keep them from freezing. We yarded out wood until noon, then Carl headed the horses up into the lee of the buildings, blanketed and fed them, and we went into the kitchen to eat our dinners. Nettie flitted in and out from time to time, and we had bits of talk. One of her remarks was, "It's so kinda cold and mis'able I dunno's I'll be able t' get t' prayer meetin' tonight."

"Well," sez I, meanin' to be helpful, "this 'ould be a good night t' do your prayin' t' home."

"Why," sez she, sort of startled-like, "I can't remember when I've prayed t' home!"

Being on the subject of prayer, I thought it might be of interest to one of my customers, a highly esteemed retired minister, Dr. Arthur H. Bradford of Jaffrey Center. He heard me through attentively, obviously enjoyed it as a native story, then remarked in his quiet way, "No doubt she felt the need of the fellowship."

## SLIGHTLY TECHNICAL

Tuning is most practically learned by rule of thumb. Some manuals on the subject would apply so many tests for accuracy that one would never get a job done. One person who thought he might learn tuning had read something about acoustics and could always catch me on questions of theory, but he never got as far as actually tuning a piano.

Even temperament is the only system now considered. Briefly stated, this is the scheme of controlled acoustical compromise which makes possible a workable keyboard. It would obviously be impossible to provide for every tone that exists within the octave, if recognition were taken of the slight difference that exists between C# and D-flat and so on, in playing perfect scales, as this would result in an unwieldy keyboard and an impractically complicated mechanism devoted to minute distinctions of pitch which would be lost on the average listener. Even temperament is the practical solution; it enables the performer to modulate into all keys with an equal-sounding effect. Bach produced his "Well-Tempered Clavichord" to prove the practicality of even temperament or a similar system of tuning. This puts the tuner into the position of having to maintain a falsehood with the greatest possible fidelity, or so it would seem, from the standpoint of pure theory, but actually, the original sound of the string is just a starting point. The tone is so amplified and altered in quality by the sounding board, the resonance of the casting, and the sympathetic vibration of all the strings, that the resulting effect which we hear is much pleasanter or at least more bearable than a perusal of a work on the theory of the subject would lead us to believe.

The "beat" or waver in the sound of an interval is what the tuner works by; it slows to the vanishing point in tuning unisons and octaves. The octave is the only perfect interval in piano tuning, and some octaves may be stretched a little. In general, the temperament requires the narrowing of the fifths and the widening of the fourths in the temperament octave, the fifths being not far from perfect, with a long, slow beat, and the fourths having a countable beat, but not rapid. The remainder of the piano is tuned by octaves in both directions from the tempered octave, checking for accuracy by sounding certain intervals. The bane of the tuner's early experience is the false string -- a wire that is not perfectly cylindrical, so that its partial tones are given off in an improper mixture which produces a beat all by itself. It not only fights with itself but also with any other wire that one attempts to tune with it. One of the advantages of having unisons of three wires above the bass section is that this makes it possible to average the disagreement of false strings so as to bring about a bearable compromise. In many old pianos the wires are so rusty and stretched out of true that there is a long, slow beat in the tone of many of the individual wires. It takes the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job to distinguish between the unavoidable inherent beat of false wires and the beat that is required by the temperament.

If you had some little rods of even length and should arrange them in a staggered line thus: \_\_\_\_\_, and other rods of even length, but longer, that you might lay out in a slightly staggered line thus: \_\_\_\_\_, you would have a rough visual representation of what the tuner does, directed by his hearing, in tuning fourths and fifths. The same comparison could be extended to represent the tuning of octaves, in which case the rods would be halved in length with every ascending octave, and doubled in length in descending.

In the tempered scale each interval has a distinctive rate of beat, and this gives to piano music its peculiar character. Dissonances which are lovely on the violin because of the possibility of playing them in perfect tune, are less agreeable in the tempered scale, but this makes the piano especially adapted for the expression of certain moods.

Added to the imperfect condition of the wire in most old pianos is the fact that old hammers are generally worn off flat at the striking points and beaten down hard, which contributes to a metallic or "tinny" quality of tone. But it must not be assumed that everyone wants this condition remedied, as I learned the hard way. I was called to tune a piano for a concert -- a mediocre grand with a most unpleasant, hard tone. I decided to do the noble thing and reshape and needle the hammers to bring out a more gracious quality. I got it into much pleasanter-sounding shape, only to be called a day or so later by the player who was to use it. He was in great consternation, and wished to have the voice right back where it had been before. So I went back before the concert with Daisy's flatiron and ironed the hammers down hard again. This player had a very delicate touch, and was lost unless the piano was brilliant. So now I let the hammers alone, unless a change is requested.

The scale, in piano designers' terminology, is the complicated mechanical plan of the harp or casting and supporting frame, graduation of string lengths and wire sizes, balance of stresses, and other technical features of design. Scales may be faulty in several ways. The bass may overbalance the treble in volume, for example: I had a customer with an upright in this class. He had me sharpen the tuning progressively all the way up the treble, and flatten it all the way down the bass. The effect was better than normal tuning with this particular scale. Another fault is improper graduation of wire sizes in relation to the tension. This results in a strained effect, so that the instrument never tunes with a good blend -- it is ungracious, apart from the condition of the hammers.

Added to these problems is the matter of regulating the touch evenly, often necessitated by extensive moth damage to a piano action -- due not so much to damage to the larger parts which are fairly easy to replace, as to smaller glued-on felt pads and punchings, the replacement of which is very time-consuming.

A fairly good grand that I worked on for years used to need three tunings a year to keep it decently playable. Then it began to hold up much better, so that two tunings a year kept it in playable condition. I learned through the housekeeper that a humidifier had been installed in the heating plant for the benefit of the health of some member of the family. It did have a beneficial



effect on the piano.

A small modern piano had kept playable on a tuning a year, until one winter I was called back about three months after my regular visit; tuning was very much needed. I found the piano dried out and let down in pitch. I asked if the heating plant was equipped with a humidifier. "Yes," the owner replied, "but it was out of order all winter until a few days ago, when we had it fixed." This explained a lot.

A good many times I have had to tune pianos swelled up with summer dampness, which had to be let down to pitch, in the tenor area particularly. Then, when the early winter shrinkage took effect, I would have to re-tune them, sometimes for free. But it is impossible to do all the work at the ideal time, and people are not pleased to be told that the condition would right itself somewhat in a few months, after the uneven sharpness had a chance to subside. Oh, the heat and the humidity! But what would we do without them? They're the best little old explainers in the whole bag of tricks.

## IN SCHOOLS

It gives one who has been out of school for some time an improved perspective on progress to see what school buildings are nowadays, where located, how equipped. Daisy especially likes to go along on a Saturday when I have work to do in schools. She marvels at the sense of abundance represented in them, and admires their attractiveness and convenience, books and equipment. A schoolroom on a Saturday is like an Andrew Wyeth painting -- full of suggested activity that doesn't take place before the eyes.

A contrast was furnished until recent years in a town of considerable wealth that got along with an old grade school building after less affluent communities had built modern structures. Working on a piano in the lower corridor of this venerable edifice just after the afternoon session had started, I observed the constant passing of little boys going one way, and little girls going the other way, toward their respective basements. This involved a flight of about twenty stairs, or, if they came from the second floor, two such flights. I suppose a teacher's day is made up of a multiplicity of such interruptions. I can even remember when playing outdoors seemed more important than making these necessary trips during the noon hour. In one school I dipped into a teacher's book on child behavior, wherein this phenomenon was termed a sort of internal perspiration. Nowadays, with plumbing accessible to most lower grade rooms, the attractions of dawdling on long journeys are eliminated, hence the elementary physiological functions are not worked up into as much of a production as formerly.

While working in the same corridor just referred to, two incidents occurred which illustrated a shift in teacher attitude that is as radical as the shift from old buildings to new, and even more commendable. One teacher, an old style disciplinarian, stood by her room door at recess and shooed the children past me, saying over and over, "He doesn't need any of your help." The children's natural curiosity was squelched, and they looked downcast. A more progressive teacher asked if she could bring her class out to watch me work, as many of them had never seen a piano tuned. I was glad to have them look on quietly and interestedly for a short time. They all looked happy, and at no extra cost.

The displays arranged by school children often indicate a commendable sense of values, as well as ingenuity and imagination, not only in art, but in nature study, manufacturing, and several other fields. These exercises in discrimination are bound to have a leveling and balancing effect on a generation growing up amongst a bewildering array of products, many of which are advertised for the wrong reasons.

"A little nonsense now and then is relished..." even by a piano tuner. Working in an intermediate grade room in the old Hillsboro school on a Saturday, I noticed that the teacher had listed on the blackboard a schedule of classroom chores, with a child's name opposite each. Probably with children at her elbows taking half her attention, she had printed "SHARPNER" as one duty, so I

was persnickety enough to take the chalk, make a caret, and insert the "E" where needed, giving it no further thought. The following Monday I returned to this school to finish some work after classes had been dismissed for the day, and was met at the door by a very determined Mrs. Hutchinson who inquired, "Mr. Chase, do you know how to spell 'sharpener?'"

"I hope I do," I replied. "At least, I know how it used to be spelled when I went to school."

There was a gale of laughter from several teachers, all listening for this exchange. Later, one of them told me, "We have been trying all day to pin that onto someone. The janitor and the superintendent were the only other people in the building during the weekend, and it was neither of them, so we decided it must have been the piano tuner."

What the art teacher would do, in the early grades, without our traditional symbols, I cannot imagine. The succession of painstakingly colored pictures and cutouts that dangle against windows and walls serves as a reliable calendar of seasons and holidays. You never see pussy willows in September, nor rotund Santa Clauses when it is time for hatchets and cherry trees. Possibly a teacher who has been at the trade for some time recognizes an element of periodicity in all this, but, as in my own trade, success is measured by results brought out, not by supplying fresh material for the onlooker. Still, a kindergarten teacher in Eastman School, East Concord, brought out welcome freshness by listing what the children thought of spontaneously as a Thanksgiving season approached. A placard was headed:

#### I AM THANKFUL

That God made me and I can see much of the world.	Matthew
for my dog	Jean
for a kitty	Dorothy
I can see so much of a view	Steven S.
that I can play	Roger
for TV	Cynthia
for my big jacket	Diane
that Daddy fixed my gas station	Paul
for steak and eggs for breakfast	Wayne J.
that I have Brian	Terri
for my warm bed	David
for my Daddy	Charles
because I eat hot dogs and beans and corn	Steve V.
because I have a house	Beth
and glad I have Fluffy and Roxanne in my big bunk bed	Scott
for clothes to wear	Billy
for chicken, steak, turkey, pork chops and corn	Mary Lou
-- and my mother and father	
that I can see	Roger
for beans to eat	Dennis
for toys	Joseph
that nobody died	Jayne

for cows because they give milk  
for our baby we're waiting for  
for horses  
for kids to play with  
for my house  
for our hands  
for feet  
for snow to make snowmen

Peter  
Julie  
Jo Anne  
Robert  
Patty J.  
Tommy  
Patty H.  
Wayne D.

\* \* \* \* \*

One spring day, as soon as I had finished tuning in a classroom in Lyndeboro School at recess time, the teacher sat down at the piano and started playing the accompaniment of "Trees," which the children were to sing at their forthcoming graduation. I sang along with her, for fun, and afterwards she said, "I'd like to have the children hear you sing that. Would you mind?" I was glad to, so she called in her class and we went through the song again. The children gave me a big hand, and were unanimous in voicing the highest compliment within the grasp of the modern child: "You ought to be on TV."

## SMALL FRY -- AND THEIR ELDERS

Children are a source of endless interest and delight. Sometimes they are pests, but suddenly their interest turns toward something else, and they are off like leaves in the wind to follow the new impulse. Oh, there are doubtful ones who look on until I start removing lumber from the piano, then patter away to report, "Mummy, the man is breakin' our pinnano," but usually they interest me longer than my operations appeal to them. I have found that dogs manifest some of the attitudes of their owners, and this is even truer of children as mirrors of their parents.

At the Baghdoyans' in Deering, I raised the lid of the grand piano as I started to work and soon three delightful children were standing along the rim facing me -- a medium boy, a medium-small boy, and a small girl who had to stand on a stool to see over. The boys were frankly interested in what I was doing, and asked some bright questions. I asked about their pets and animals, and learned how many there were, and heard about the swallow's nest under the corn barn. The brothers let the small sister talk some of the time, and we had a wonderful visit -- over mild protests from their mother and assurances from me that I was happy about the situation. After a reasonable time they scattered, and I had comparative quiet for the fussiest part of my tuning.

Occasionally I find a child with a furtive manner that suggests iron discipline or regimented thinking, but even such a child, in the short time I am present, will respond to a different approach. Regardless of what their environment has forced upon them, children are more responsive to the way others think about them than most adults are. I drove into a customer's yard and was met by a bespectacled boy who tersely directed me, without greeting, to the scene of my labors. A prep school student, I learned. Not a very promising start, but I started thinking about the normal characteristics of a boy -- curiosity about mechanical things, friendliness, and humor -- and gradually these were manifested. As the boy passed through the room on woman-sent errands, he stopped longer and longer on each successive trip, chatted and asked questions, and by the time I was ready to leave, he walked out to the car with me and was in no hurry to have me go.

There are youngsters who are primarily concerned with what my father used to describe by the old-fashioned word antics. Two siblings attached wads of cotton to their clothing at a suitable place and sang a song about Peter Cottontail, with appropriate hoppings. Then they suddenly became chamois and leaped from chair to chair to sofa all over the big living room.

A very serious blond child asked me if I had any children, and upon learning that I have none, asked, "Are you going to have any?" She demonstrated for my benefit the first steps in ballet, with grave decorum, then reverted to type when her mother returned from the food store. She joined her sister in begging

to open all the cereal boxes to get all the "prizes," which they were allowed to do. "But remember," the mother warned, "you will have to eat this all up before I buy any more."

Sophistication appears early in unexpected places. In a home where the children were absent at the time of my visit, I saw a jack-o-lantern neatly tricked out with lipstick.

As I worked along in one family home in Henniker, my customer's sister, who lived nearby, came in. After a little talk there was a burst of laughter. One of them asked me if I knew about children, and I replied that I had seen a lot of my nephews and nieces while they were growing up. Then the woman went on to explain that her little girl had reached the stage of wearing a diaper at night only, and that her brother-in-law had come over to baby-sit the previous evening, which included putting the child to bed. In the morning, the child's mother found that the diaper had been sewed on with coarse black thread. At this point the man himself walked in, and came in for some good-natured kidding about a man's way of doing things. "Well," he said, "I couldn't find a safety pin anywhere around this place, but there was a needle and thread, and I'll guarantee the didee stayed on."

Dick Edmunds, a small boy at the time, asked me a question I couldn't answer. He looked at the jumble of stuff in my tool box and inquired, "Why don't you put those things in the neat way?"

Add unsought emoluments: a free and friendly girl of five dashed up and planted a soft little kiss on my cheek as I was leaning over to get something out of my tool box.

Katie Sprague, demure but articulate, was staying home from school the day I arrived to tune the family piano, but she was plenty well enough to show an interest in what I was doing, and why. I asked how her younger brother was getting along with his piano lessons. She replied airily, "Oh, pretty well. He plays several book pieces." She herself had progressed into sonatinas. I had to remove the piano action for repairs, and the girl tried singing, talking, and squealing just to hear the sounds echo from the undamped piano strings. Then she remarked, "Those strings are just like gossips -- they repeat everything that is said to them."

A mother told me, "My daughter is inclined to be overweight, and every year when Dr.       , who is young and slim, examines the children at school, he sputters about it. These string beans don't know how hard it is to cut a child down to one half or one third of what she would normally eat. Believe me, if I ever have a problem of overweight, I'm going to hunt up an old, fat doctor, one who has some understanding."

Seeing the earnestness of many young people and the sort of interests they develop, I entertain no doubts about the future welfare of the country. One year a lengthy boy named John was playing with his younger brother and sister and their toy walkie-talkie set. The following year he was immersed in building a complicated electrical device, and knew what he was about.

An elderly single lady told me, "I let my neighbor's little girl come in and play on my piano, as long as she plays nicely. If children are not allowed to touch a piano at all, how can we find out which ones have promising talent?"

As I was doing some extensive repairs, pre-school Douglas Shattuck came in and showed an interest in my small parts boxes. He was not being meddlesome; he carefully took out one of each item, asked its use, and put it back in the proper place. I could go along with such controlled curiosity. We both had fun.

In a Jaffrey Center home well stocked with antiques, the only modern thing was the small piano. I sat on an Empire stool as I tuned, and part way through the job, the old stool crashed under me, with no harm to myself. A tuner stands -- or sits -- ready for the unexpected. The grandmother in the family heard the crash and came quickly to the door. Relieved to see that it was only the mechanic, she breathed a sigh and said fervently, "I'm glad it didn't break under one of our children."

In Marlboro, a sturdy Boy Scout, the son of substantial French-Canadian people, was preparing to go on his first overnight camping trip with his troop. His mother, very long-faced, confided in me, "It'll be his first night away from home. I s'pose we shoul'n't min', but he's our younges' one." The boy kept on reading aloud the instructions for packing eggs in cereal and how to carry the bacon, all unaware of the parental emotions. The father came home from his business, right in the middle of the morning, on some weak pretext, and hung around awaiting the boy's departure. They managed a few jokes about the boy's having to eat his own cooking, but their utter misery showed through all the while. I loved their tenderness. The boy who was the object of all this covert devotion was self-reliant, robust, frank -- just what one likes to see in a boy.

Working in a littered playroom in Dublin where orderliness did not appear to be the prime consideration, I had taken off my coat and draped it over a battered rocking horse. When the young daughter of the house entered, she took a quick look around and commanded, with a queenly gesture, "Take your coat off our rocking horse." I did so; it was her domain, but I thought it barely possible that she might eventually learn to moderate her haughtiness through contact with the workaday world.

In a farm home, two young children returned from school, watched me work for a short time, then got into their farm clothes and went outdoors. Their mother motioned toward the silent television set and said smilingly, "You can see how TV is spoiling my children. They do have a few programs they enjoy, but they have too many interests to sit and watch for long at a time. I can't see any problem in TV as long as it is balanced by other interests." I could see how this sensible approach worked out with her family, but I told her I had been in a good many homes where the children were dismayed when their parents insisted that they would have to shut off the sound, at least, while I did my tuning. A lot of grownups seem to have built their lives around the little barking movie. When arranging a day's work, I telephoned to one house where tuning had been requested, and the woman asked me to come on a different day, explaining, "My husband wants to watch a game this afternoon, and the TV is in the same room with the piano." So I did that job another day, and as I was working, the husband came in, remarking, "You could have come last Saturday just as well as not."

I wouldn't have minded. I could have turned the volume up good and loud."

A young woman remarked to me, "I took piano lessons for some time, but didn't get very far with them. At nearly every lesson my teacher would remark, "Here I am, a pupil of Edward MacDowell, wasting my time on you."

Antics of small fry have furnished backgrounds of variety for my familiar journeys up and down the eighty-eight keys. One summer day a little man-cub, the cutest thing on two feet, was having the run of his home au naturel, peeking around corners at me as I worked...a small girl was very earnestly doing dolls' laundry in a basin... A more sophisticated girl was indulging that perpetual delight of childhood -- dressing up in outlandish old clothes and parading clumpily around the house in her mother's old shoes.

In the home of art-conscious people, the Filbins, a reproduction of Botticelli's "Primavera" hung over the piano. I studied the artist's conception of Spring as a stately goddess attended by her graces in their gauzy aesthetic draperies. A daughter in the family, Christine, about nine years of age at that time, came in and made a remark that pointed to the need of nearly every generation to have things restated in terms comprehensible by the measuring-stick of its own experience. Noticing that I was studying the picture, the child said thoughtfully, "I don't see why those girls bothered to wear their nylons, when you can see right through them."

As I was tuning a spinet piano for the Johnsons in Hillsboro, Rob, the small toddler in the family, came in and was eager to watch. This lovable small boy, almost as broad as he was tall, just couldn't see my actual moves, and was impatient about it, so with his mother's consent I took him up on my knee within view of my operations. He quieted down and watched with interest until I had to move. I could not know what impression the incident made on the boy, but it brightened my day beyond measure.

Recalling a bygone day when a mother's apron strings were tied to her children, I marvel at children's ability to adjust to any tolerable situation and accept it as their norm. They may spend a good share of their waking hours with a teen-age sitter, live in modest or sumptuous surroundings, and still be normal, wholesome youngsters. The only child often has a surfeit of little-used toys, and several studio photos (generally displayed on the piano), while the large family gets along happily with a few battered playthings, and is glad to settle for an occasional snapshot. But through it all, the kids come bouncing and bubbling with amazing energy, enthusiasm, loyalty -- tireless in their pursuit of happiness. A mother of four, Moira Smith, summed it up rather well when she told me, "We haven't got fancy furnishings, nor a lot to do with, but if children have a comfortable home, good food, and love, they can get along and be happy."



## TRENDS IN THE TRADE

People have been asking me for years, "Who is going to tune the pianos in the future?" My immediate reply has often been, "That is the least of my concerns. There is no agency in our sprawling bureaucratic system that concerns itself with ensuring the perpetuation of the less common skills, especially those not related to the assembly line. I am convinced that the high value of many antiques today is not that the materials are so rare and costly, but that the skills that went into making them are getting increasingly rare -- people who can lay gold leaf, do the exquisite turnings and carvings, and who as individual craftsmen have a sense of good proportion and design."

I see this as part and parcel of the surrender of individual responsibility and initiative to the guidance system -- the computer-knows-best takeover. Actually, it began as long ago as when the individual hunter quit shaping his own bow and arrows, which had to be dependable, and he a straight shooter, or he wouldn't eat. When the assembly line firearm came along, he could do without developing some of the skills.

So when someone asks, "Why don't more young people take up this trade?" I can only reply, "I have thought a lot about that, and have concluded that it is out of keeping with the temper of the times. It requires more than most people want to put into an occupation today -- more responsibility, flexibility in dealing with people, adaptability in meeting situations. You don't get a union wage the first week, nor automatic pay raises with fringe benefits."

To be able to perform adequately in any line, and to teach the same subject, are two different things. When a boy, my first pupil in 30 years, wanted to learn tuning, I had to develop my own approach and method of teaching him the rudiments. The lad was eager, and accustomed to doing work that demanded much energy and sweeping motions, so his initial tendency was to overdo it. If a string needed to be sharpened a little, he would yank it up a lot, so in order to keep him within bounds I would say, "If you were up on a ladder picking apples and some were just out of your reach, you wouldn't go up three or four rungs and then come down again; you would go just far enough to reach them the first time." Also, "If you had a pan of biscuits in the oven and you looked and saw that they were still white-livered, you wouldn't leave them until they were burned black, but just until they were brown enough." When he got impatient and applied too much muscular force, I would say, "You're burnin' your biscuits, boy." All this was slanted toward getting the point across that we work with very small, controlled motions.

The competent, established tuner today is likely to be also a piano dealer, hence is mainly interested in servicing the pianos he sells, which is understandable. But this leaves a good many pianos with potential musical mileage left in them with no adequate service man; their owners get the brush-off-and-

brochure routine when they apply for a tuning job. It may be just one side-effect of the rise in the apparent prosperity index, but it leaves a gap -- a dissonance gap -- which I regret.

The responsible experienced tuner who has not taken a dealership tends to stay with his old customers and not spread his activities thinner and thinner over larger areas. He has little need to advertise; his customers do that for him. A party in Marlborough for whom I did some tuning years ago told a friend in Temple about me, and this drew me into a neighborhood where my services were welcomed, and so it goes.

Daisy says I can't attend a concert or shop in a supermarket without getting tuning jobs, and this proves true. What should I do, run and hide? Why not go and tune 'em up, and keep as many happy as possible?

## LIII

### CLOSING IN

We built the roof on the stone house in '57, got window and door openings covered with temporary closures, then I could have an open fire and work inside during the following winter. It had become a perennial project by that time, and we had become accustomed to certain standard questions: How many rooms are you going to have? Will you have a cellar and an attic? Are you going to have a dining room?, and so on. So we developed a standard reply: We haven't yet decided how we are going to chop it up.

Most of the details of finishing the inside we worked out together. In a stone structure, you have to decide how to treat the thickness of the walls -- whether to recess the windows from the outside or from the inside -- and some collaboration was required to reach a compromise between appearance and practicality. I laid a cement slab in the principal room, later to be covered with random slate for a finish floor. Only the bedroom floor had a wooden frame.

Besides failing to look ahead in the matter of leaving holes in the stonework for pipes and cables, we made a few errors in design, such as ending with a bathroom space 4' x 9'. Try as we would, a standard 5-foot tub would not fit handily, so we settled for a 4-foot square tub in one end of the space -- a neat fit, which cost \$280.45, nearly double the price of a standard tub at that time. But living with one's own mistakes is more fun, and far more instructive, than having a convenient whipping boy in the form of another person.

Many friends brought us souvenir stones to work into the structure. Mrs. Barnes, a teacher's wife at High Mowing School, gave me a piece of rose quartz picked from the scrap heap at a feldspar quarry in Alstead, N.H.; this I placed in a central spot in the chimney. Donn and Doris Purvis brought a smooth slab from Pictou Beach, Nova Scotia, also a stone from Jasper Beach, Machias, Maine. Mrs. Luzora Waterbury gave us a choice white stone. Hugh and Dorothy Palmer brought a piece of sea-beaten coral from the beach of Iwo Jima and a fragment of lava from Kilauea, Hawaii. Michael Worcester guided me to the site of the gold mine in Dublin, where we secured quartz-like scraps dug out by earlier generations in a feverish search for pay dirt. John and Ila Ballard sent red granite pebbles from Frankfort Coast Guard Station on Lake Michigan. Jimmy Yakovakis brought a honey-colored chip from a ruined marble at Athens. Our neighbors the Bonnells brought stones from Alabama, and Natural Bridge, Virginia. Most of these special stones, and many more, we used in the fireplace chimney and in the interior trim around the fireplace itself.

With the house approaching completion, we had to secure a water supply. A friend who had had some success with the divining rod came over to see what the prospects might be. He found a vein of water about 30 feet from our front entrance, and estimated that I would have to dig about 15 feet to reach it. So, in odd moments, I started in, picking my way through dense hardpan most of the

way. No danger of a cave-in in such bony digging. We learned later from this friend's wife that after he had dowsed for us he went home and scarcely slept that night, apprehensive lest he had given me a wrong steer. He should have rested comfortably. I struck water at 16 feet in the exact line he had indicated, and dug another three feet to make a storage pocket. Then the task of walling it up began. Good well stone are not like good wall stone; a longish, tapering stone is best for a well. You lay them with the big end out, backing with small cobbles all around, and succeeding courses wedge the structure quite securely, without the use of mortar.

It was during the time I was working on the well that Bernard Lamb wired the house for electricity, and evidently liked the whole concept pretty well, for he brought a few people over to see the effort. One afternoon I was working in the bottom of the well, when Bernard hailed me from above. I looked up, and saw that he had an older man with him. He said, "I brought my Gramp over to see your place; he came down from Vermont to visit." So I asked, "Is this your Grandfather Lamb, or on the other side?" Gramp replied, "We both blat."

About this time, Daisy found the right name for the place in her favorite book, The Bible: LIVELY STONES.

## THIS PLACE REMINDS ME

I should feel little response from living where there are no landmarks of significance to me. Happenings around the countryside linger in memory, and many a spot that would look undistinguished to you is enriched for me by associations and local lore, and I seldom pass these places without being reminded.

On the road leading from Hancock village to Bond's Corner, Dublin, is a brook spanned by a small cement bridge. At this same place, years ago, was a common plank bridge with a cut pole railing. Artist Lilla Cabot Perry saw it as a proper setting for a genre painting. She enlisted the cooperation of a boy, Robert Richardson, who lived nearby, and on summer afternoons when she wanted to paint, she would have her chauffeur bring her to the site, and the boy stood on the bridge fishing with a sapling pole, for which pleasant pastime Mrs. Perry paid him ten cents on each occasion. He was a lad about 12 years of age, bare-foot, wearing knee-length pants and an old shirt, and had an ample mane of tow hair. The boy was thrifty, and had ideas of how a boy ought to look at that period -- far different from our current shaggy vogue -- so he saved his dimes until he had forty cents, then got to Peterborough and bought himself a haircut. Mrs. Perry was greatly displeased with the change in her model's appearance, and regretted having paid him the dimes. A good painting came out of it, however. The boy's mother showed me a print of the picture and told me the story, many years later.

On the outskirts of Bennington village lived a couple who kept wood fires. One winter day along toward dusk, they took out a pail of hot ashes, set it in an unused hen coop, and put a piece of tin over it. But the tin did not fit closely, the wind was strong, and the coop was drafty. Evidently an ember was blown out of the ashes, landed in some old litter, and during the evening the coop began to burn. It was reported to the local fire department, and the men arrived promptly with the chemical tanks they used for putting out small fires. But the tanks were frozen up, so the men threw them into the fire and thawed them out, then used them to put the fire out. By that time there wasn't much left of the coop.

Down a back road out of one of our villages, several single men kept bachelor establishments, and in driving through this neighborhood, I think of these characters, individual as all get out. There was John, diligent and sober, who had a small farm and was full of dry observations. One day he was odd-jobbing for one of the neighbors, and knocked some hide off one of his knuckles. The woman he was working for offered to bandage the place, but John said, "No thank you, I heal up jest like a dawg." Another denizen of batch's hollow was Ben, the opposite of John in industry and sobriety. John's comment was, "Ben ain't much comp'ny. When he's sober he won't talk, and when he's drunk he says the same thing over and over."

Along the turnpike between Francestown and Mont Vernon is a place, formerly a farm, bought years ago by down-country folks. In the process of fixing up the barn for a rumpus room, they wanted a large stone fireplace and chimney, and Brother Steve got the job. I was working for him part-time in those days, as was also a Francestown resident, George Hoyt, a first-class mason, and resourceful in every way. As a week-end hobby, the owners of the place had planted a garden, providing for its protection during their absences by setting up a rather fancy scarecrow clad in a stuffed shirt and a pair of blue denim overalls that were only slightly worn. George had cast an appraising eye at this get-up from the start, especially so as the days of stone-work continued and his own overalls wore through in more and more spots, until one noon during the owner's absence he ate his lunch without much palaver, then got up and carried the scarecrow off into the bushes. When George reappeared and restored the scarecrow to its guardian position, Brother Steve remarked, "Now the scarecrow looks more like a scarecrow, and George, more like a man."

Francestown, like several of our New Hampshire villages, has an impressive white-painted church which faces a common. At the southerly end, giving access to the entrance doors, are two stone steps which extend across most of the width of the building. The lower step is composed of three granite slabs, the upper step of two, which were transported by ox teams from Weare, a week's journey at the time the church was built. How many people today realize the effort and planning that were required for such a project?

## WE BROKE AWAY

When it became clear to us that one year-round home would be more practical than our semi-annual shifting from Hancock to Concord, we faced the issue and admitted to each other that the stone house met our need for only part of each year. We still enjoyed it, and loved it as a monument to the effort and satisfaction we had in building it, but the character of the locality had changed over the years. The country was no longer rural, but more and more had come to be regarded as a recreational area. Most of the recreations produced new and different noises, even though no one could build very near us.

The original tract of "78 acres, more or less" had been reduced by the purchase of nearly sixteen acres by the State for highway construction, and the old meadow had been taken over by beavers; they engineered the impounding of a large body of water by constructing a relatively small dam. This increased interest in the property as a whole, so we felt it should be sold as one tract, rather than to be cut up into smaller parcels. This proved to be a right decision, as the eventual buyer wanted all of the land.

Between the intent to sell and the consummation of a sale we had several opportunities to observe human nature. What we had brought out as our ideal at the time of building was not someone else's idea at all. We put in part of a summer with agents and prospective buyers. One man walked through the stone house and uttered just one word: "Substantial." Others enthused but did not return. I had been alerted to the vastly differing outlooks of real estate buyers by a customer of mine, Guy Murchie, who had sold a country property. Being a writer, he had felt competent to write his own advertising, and in describing the tract had included mention of "three swamps." His agent wanted to change the phrase to "lowland areas," but the people who finally bought the property wanted swamps; they were naturalists interested in studying wetland life. So Daisy and I prayed over it, and were confident that the right party would come, one who could see virtues in our unique place, and in time, that occurred.

One fine couple who came were very much taken with the place, were appreciative of it, and we enjoyed them. I said that possibly the reason the property had not sold sooner was that the house couldn't be classified in any of the terms of real estate jargon; it was not a ranch, or a cape, or a split. The man smiled and said, "It's a CHASE."

## A SPECIAL KIND OF CITY

A tuner of any competence cannot stay out in the country altogether, so when a sufficient volume of work developed in the Concord area, Daisy and I started living in town during the winters. No other community has the caliber and feeling of Concord. Not a fast-paced modern city, it has more of the character of a staid village of a generation or more ago. Few places could be found with so high a percentage of native population -- conservative, highly respectable, attentive to residential upkeep, and consciously or unconsciously loyal to Concord. This is much to our liking, and we have found friends who wear well, but the Concord attitude is illustrated in these experiences:

A young man with whom we had dealings in connection with a winter rental appeared to be cosmopolitan and was certainly well travelled, having served overseas with the armed forces. Yet when I asked him, "Did you come from around Concord, or from away somewhere?" he stiffened instinctively as if affronted and replied, "Oh, Concord."

\* \* \* \* \*

Daisy and I enjoy choral singing, and have been situated so we could sing in the chorus of "The Messiah," some portions of which have been performed annually in Concord for many years. After we had warbled our way through Handel's stately phrases for a few seasons, we attended a first rehearsal for one of these productions, and I sat beside an affable chap who gave me the glad hand and introduced himself. We were "Jim" and "Howie" right away, and had pleasant casual conversation during the breaks, all of which was most agreeable, but during the following week as I pondered this unique encounter, the thought came to me, "Concord was never like this!" At the next rehearsal I made it a point to sit beside this man again and opened with "Jim, you're not a Concord native. You are from the West, or Canada, or Australia."

"Why, what makes you think that?"

"Now don't get me wrong. These Concord fellows are good fellows, under their chilly exterior, but here I am coming to chorus for the third year, and a few of them are just beginning to nod to me when I come in." After he had recovered enough so he could talk, he told me, "I was originally from Massachusetts, but I lived in Texas for seventeen years."

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When a Concord customer would ask me where I was from, and I would state that I had a place in Hancock, there was little response or show of enthusiasm. But when I added that we had been living in Concord during recent winters, there was a perceptible warming of manner which said more plainly than words



"So you are almost one of us."

\* \* \* \* \*

Every state capital is replete with headquarters of organizations, as well as with state departments and institutions. I got a little insight into the latter when I was bidden, at a period when their regular tuner was unable to work, to do some tuning for the New Hampshire Hospital (which was paid for, by the way, out of the "Piano and Pool Table Fund"). I got locked into wards all over that place, tinkered on old handed-down pianos that were graded to agree with the classification of patients in each ward, and found the most unexpected things inside them. For example, one contained the dried remains of what had been a lovely bunch of carnations some years earlier. Most of these old klunkers hadn't been worked on for years; after their regular tuner returned to work, he told me, "I never go near the ward pianos." The attendants were agreeable about letting me out after my work was finished, and they were most considerate and tactful in dealing with the patients, as I was called upon to be on short notice on one occasion:

I was working on a piano that stood in a wide corridor in a ward of aged women. One tall woman kept pacing back and forth, muttering about "down-country folks," which phrase, along with her nasal speech, marked her as a native. On one of her trips she came up behind me, parked on my shoulder with an eery clutch, and inquired, "Say, has Guy Haskins been down here to the village today?"

I turned with relaxed friendliness and replied, "I haven't seen him yet today, but you know I'm not very well acquainted around town."

"But you do live here part of the time, don't you?"

"Yes, but only during the winter."

Apparently satisfied, she relaxed her clutch and went along. Any place where she was passed for "the village" she was familiar with, but she had an uncanny shrewdness.

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Besides our State House, the building of the New Hampshire Historical Society is an architectural monument worthy of study. Its distinctive rotunda is harmonious in design, of agreeable proportions, and of sumptuous materials.

The devotion of earlier citizens to the community and its betterment is evidenced in two fine lecture and concert series which are so endowed that Concord residents may enjoy them free of charge.

Coupled with an almost unerring ability to detect a phony, Concord is deliberate about accepting change. I couldn't imagine a place more resistant to high-pressure salesmanship, or even to a newcomer who has a legitimate product or skill. Quint told me, "I've seen tuners come to town, do a house-to-house canvass for work, and they were goin' to run me out of town. They have all left, and I'm still here." He kept active up into his middle eighties, and his customers remained loyal.

## LIVE AROUND THE YEAR

You might as well sniff at the kitchen door and think you know all about hot rolls as to assume that you can really know a region by driving through it, or know its people from a single season's stay with them. Live around the year, see the scenery and observe the people under all conditions, in all weathers, and you begin to comprehend a lot that does not appear on the surface.

Thinking about the generations who resourcefully tilled the thin soil, tended livestock, and carried on the traditions of an existence that yielded more satisfactions than monetary rewards, I was reminded of a friend whose contribution to our heritage is so typical that it stands as a model, and I tried to celebrate it in angular rhyme:

His Kind of Love

'Twa'n't a word he used much --  
 few times, mebbe, courtin' her,  
 an' when the girl an' boy came, an' such --  
 but mostly you'd hafta infer;  
 ketch it or not, he'd never let on,  
 still, 'twas there, you could bet on.

Y'oughter see him lug in, gentle-like,  
 a pastur'-dropped calf when  
 a cold quick squall blew up. He'd hike  
 half a mile in the wet, but then,  
 he could stan' it better'n such young  
 soft critters. Cold never stung.

Nobody druv 'im on his fourteen-sixteen hour  
 day. You'd drop in, he could stop,  
 gaze at those hills, watch that maple shower  
 gold on the pastur' wall. P'raps he'd prop  
 a foot up on the ex, chat a bit, not melt  
 to chummy, 'xactly, but little said, much felt.

The stone walls and cellar holes now in deep woods are only a more advanced stage of the rough hill farm with run-down buildings, and back fields growing up to brush. I did some tuning, in winter, for a farm family in Weare, and noticed an extensive treeless expanse of snow-covered landscape in view of the house. "Is that all tillage?" I asked. "Yes," one of the men snapped, "but we don't till it." He had found something better to his liking than hardscrabble farming as a means of livelihood. We can be grateful that down-country folks have

bought up a good many of our hill farms and at least have saved the buildings and surrounding lots from reverting to wilderness. Never a lush countryside, it yielded reluctantly whatever could be wrested from it. My calculating, frugal neighbor, Eldred Berry of West Campton, had a sound reason for taking off a big potato and putting on a small one so that the scales would just balance when weighing out his crop for market. Living came hard, and in a couple of seasons he might gain an additional bushel to sell by saving the overbalance.

Seasons in New Hampshire never have a clearcut start or finish; they merge. I love the overlap of the seasons. The puckery fruit of a seedling apple tree, golden, hard, and gnarled, hangs to be decked with early snow and to gladden the foraging red squirrel and browsing deer. When summer seems a settled thing, a nook that was retarded because of its shaded northerly slope will offer blooms of species that have gone by in earlier locations. At the season that impresses those who like to have color thrown at them in masses, you can still find lingering blooms and bits of vivid green that are reluctant to yield to the approach of cold. Driving around this region, now gone back to nearly as high a percentage of woodland as existed in colonial times, you can feel both ways from the things you see. In the creamy bloom of wild cherries you can look ahead to ruddy riches spilling along the roadsides in late summer. In autumn, sere pods and winged seeds take you back to lazy days of summer fragrances and humming bees. In these and countless other ways, living around the year reassures you about continuity and fulfillment.

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a single foliage season. We have foliage right around the year; it is simply more conspicuous at some seasons than at others. Now take evergreens: never without foliage in some condition, they vary observably with the weather and their stage of growth. In winter, their color varies with the temperature. At sub-zero they turn grayish or duller green -- stiff with the cold -- then a mild spell brings back the usual brightness. In late winter, pines and hemlocks appear wan, a bit yellowish, but by the time of birdsong and bursting buds, they take on a rejuvenated green, to be followed shortly by the tender hues of new growth, varying in conformation and amount with each species. The new growth gradually darkens to match the hue of the mature needles, and soon after this stage is reached, the needlefall occurs, most conspicuous in white pines. The older needles turn pale and golden, making a pretty frill for a few days, then change to light brown and fall to renew the carpet.

An oak is hardly ever without a leaf, but throughout the winter the beeches carry even more of the dried foliage of the previous season, as if to show forth in these tenacious tatters of last summer's dress a cheerful defiance of winter.

You can observe in the mixed stands of hardwoods and evergreens pleasing contrasts at all seasons, but for subtle variations in color throughout the growing season, our many hardwood species offer rich material for study. Leaving with only passing comment the beauties of form, outline, and color of this class of trees during the dormant season, one of the first changes you may note in early spring is a haziness in the tops of elms, which develops into a golden tan fuzziness as the blossoms open. Several kinds of maples come into ruddy or tawny bloom directly, with poplars, butternuts, and oaks shaking out their catkins as the spring progresses. We can hardly do justice to the purple pompoms

of white ash, the many meadow shrubs, dainty shadbush, and other things of individual charm, but we can at least touch upon some of the larger effects and slight but observable day-to-day changes. From a vantage point that overlooks an area of mixed woodland, you can for a short period spot every rock maple in bloom, distinguished by its typical color, a sulphur yellow tinged with green. This phase passes, and you begin to notice the tender new green of birches, poplars, and so on through many other species.

The oaks, one of the most cautious of trees to put forth leaves, and one of the latest to attain full summer foliage, will have scarcely reached that condition, when you can discern subtle indications of approaching autumn. The foliage on a weak maple branch here and there begins to show reddish color as early as mid-July. Then, the greens by almost imperceptible degrees lighten and take on a hint of yellow, well before the swamp maples turn crimson. You have felt the approach of autumn all along in longer and cooler nights, decreasing birdsong, in the background music of insect hum. Then, suddenly, everybody else recognizes that "the foliage season" is in full swing.

When the shouting is all but over, you may find the maroon foliage of high-bush blueberries enriching the scene along old pasture walls, often mingled with glossy green mountain laurel in pleasing contrast, and nature rolls out warm red carpets where low blueberries grow under roadside pines. You may grow to appreciate lichens on rocks and tree trunks, their soft gray-greens and medallion-like designs becoming most conspicuous in late fall. In going about the countryside to some of the half-hundred communities in which I work during a year's time, I enjoy looking through naked deciduous woodlands toward extensive views which were masked out by summer green during the warm months.

November is one of my favorite months, despite the deceptive appearance of many of its days. You look out of a morning and the day seems cheerful and promising, but after you go outdoors, the sun shines mostly on distant hills; wherever you are is shadowed by cloud, and the wind has a keen edge. Still, it is a time of unhurried waiting for the inevitable; it ushers in the long evenings and times of fireside repose. As I drive home in the dusk or early dark, the lights in dwellings along the way look very inviting, suggesting food and warmth. Practically everything in human experience is appreciated on a basis of comparison; shelter is doubly welcome when the outdoor aspect grows bleak. The variety of our New England weather certainly promotes a zest for living. November brings a few mild Indian summer days, a welcome delay in the arrival of cold. The few cattle that are turned out to graze seek the sun in November as gratefully as they sought the shade in July, as if hoping during this brief return of summer to store up enough warmth to last them through the short days and long nights when they will be confined mainly to stanchions and tie-ups. The lower angle of the southward-swinging sun brings changes in accent of light and contour. It reaches farther into our houses as autumn draws on. The amber afterglow that follows a clear sunset is reflected on still ponds in a way we seldom see at other seasons.

I could not discourse under this head without mentioning the country roads that ramble among

"The hills

Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,--- the vales  
Stretching in pensive quietness between,"

to borrow a poet's apt phrase. Driving along such by-ways by preference when time and itinerary permit, I would single out for mention the intimate glimpses of roadside growth and wildlife. Anyone concerned primarily with getting from here to there is likely to miss a lot along the way, and back roads cause such drivers to chafe at the steering wheel. But being country-raised, and having ridden for years behind old horses whose method of locomotion was to make sure each foot was well placed before advancing another foot, I love to poke along and observe the scene. All summer long there are roadside riches, not only of bloom and fruit, but also of the many ferns that grace the damp, shady spots with their cool elegance during the growing season, and in autumn delight the eye with russet-golden hues, the nostrils with spicy aromas.

Taking time to meander along the less travelled roads, such as the route from Hillsboro through East Washington to Bradford, you drive with car windows open when the weather permits, and birdsong will cheer you on your way. You may glimpse a fleet hawk gliding ahead of your car along a country lane, soon to swerve expertly from sight, or pause to admire a scarlet tanager's neat brilliance. At dusk you may recognize a whippoorwill perched along the road's edge, the flashing ruby of his eyes reflecting the car lights. You may take the same delight I do in seeing deer along the way, browsing in clover patches, or disappearing into the brush with white flag up. In early summer, you will learn not to be fooled by a mother grouse "playing hurt" in front of a slow-moving car in her instinctive wile to draw attention away from her brood.

Besides these observations of nature, the human species affords some seasonal interest. You notice that the small fry hopefully drag a sled over bare ground in late autumn, while in late winter, when snow still abounds, they search out the first patch of bare mud on which to sit and play marbles. I would discourage more amply on the brave, hungry men, garbed in gaudy outfits, who sally forth in quest of the wily deer. These brighten the landscape almost as soon as fall foliage wanes, and in such number, and variety of color, that the foliage is scarcely missed. But most of them do not venture far from the travelled ways. These fellows are smart: they have heard that dragging a deer three or four miles out of a swamp is work, and they are not going to get into that pickle. So within my time there has arisen a class of "highway hunters." Their technique is to get some eager boys to beat the bush and drive the deer out so they can shoot it handy to their car and load it on. There is one village where all the traffic has to pass through a crossroads known as "the square." Here I see the "square hunters" appear as regularly as the seasons roll around. They have mostly dispensed with guns years ago. Their plaid outfits have not been snagged on the brush, just a bit faded in front from long exposure to the sun in a standing position, and somewhat worn on the seat from sliding into booths in the nearby public houses. But more deer have been shot, orally, on "the square" than anywhere else in the county.

Having a trade that is plied indoors, dates to meet that do not wait for ideal weather, and living in a state where winter roads get such prompt attention that my driveway gets filled in by the highway plow several times after each major snowstorm, winter driving is a matter of course and of necessity. I have experienced some heartwarming expressions of helpfulness. Coming home through a surprisingly "greasy" wet snowstorm, I reached a downgrade a mile or two north of Antrim, and found the road blocked by cars in all positions that

had failed to make the grade coming in the opposite direction. I had to stop by nosing into a snowbank. A half dozen or so stout fellows left their grain trucks and other vehicles, pushed cars over the hilltop, straightened out others, and finally, when there was a way through, lifted my front end back into the road, and everybody was moving again.

Memorable scenic effects reward my all-weather driving. Days that cloud in with approaching snowstorms often bring a few hours of exceptional clearness. On one such day in midwinter I was dismissed early from petit jury duty in Manchester, and as I had some tuning to do in Contoocook, I drove to Goffstown, then north along the Dunbarton ridge, always a fine road for views. That day the hills and mountains stood out with a clarity that even I, a native, have rarely seen. Beyond a few miles, the wooded areas appeared blue, varying in intensity according to the distance, the snowfields affording a great variety of pattern all the way to the horizon. A high sheet of pearly gray cloud, luminous rather than ominous, domed the scene. Toward the northerly end of the ridge, which commands a fine prospect of the White Mountains, the caliber of the view increased to distinct grandeur. A thin haze of smoke from kitchen chimneys and from factory stacks veiled the foreground, carrying attention toward the distant elevations, but at the same time relating the scene to human activity.

During a snowfall, when distant views are obscured, you may enjoy, as I do, the effects along the roadsides. A driving storm builds drifts of the most advanced streamlined design if the snow is dry, but if damp, it coats trees and other standing objects on the windward side. A still, dry snowfall piles up on evergreens, while a damp storm free from wind -- New Hampshire is one of the least windy of the United States -- transforms the commonest brush patch into sheer daintiness and intricacy. When clearing occurs toward sunset following such a storm, you may share in the rosy glow that overspreads the scene, and be thrilled by the inspiringly clean smell of the snow-washed air. The intense blue of distant hills, momentary changes in lighting and other subtleties never quite captured by brush or camera, combine to justify a preference for year-round living on the part of many who could migrate to any climate of their choice. To a native like me, this is a built-in preference.

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Dooryard flowers, of which almost every dwelling has some, are a delight all summer long. I used to pass one place that had a stained glass window incongruously placed in the cow stable, and a lot of old gear lying around in a lot grown to weeds. Most of the paint had weathered off the house, but in a shady angle between house and ell was a nook of floral loveliness, a bank of red tuberous begonias and blue ageratum, which told me something favorable about the people who lived there.

You may be sure that settled warm weather has arrived when householders move their sturdier house plants out-of-doors, or at any rate onto an open porch. Often you see an old table or bench placed under a dooryard tree bearing an assemblage of cacti, geraniums, and begonias, or an oleander in a tub, all of which produce on their own unhurried schedule blooms to repay the owner for months of tending and watering.

When I see window boxes and flower beds draped with sheets to fend off the first frosts, I think back to the days when my mother did the same. She also went through her garden at dusk and filled vases and pitchers with cosmos, peonias, and other blooms, which we placed in a cool room, whence they could be brought out, enjoyed, and shared for some days after their garden mates were brown and wilted -- pitchers brimful of summer, lengthened pleasantly by her thoughtful care.

You may find such joys as I do in weeping willows: the cheerful aura of their twigs hovering over village houses on a bright winter day; their bloom in spring; their summer rustle and sweep; but above all, if the fall is mild and free from severe freezes, the stately arboreal hula which they execute when moved by light breezes, swaying in gauzy golden gracefulness throughout balmy autumn days.

The satisfactions of living around the year at "Lively Stones" were many, but on a calm moonlight night in winter the prospect pleased us most. We would look down the frost-spangled, tree-bordered corridor which we kept cleared of tall growth and see Crotched Mountain standing serene. Under snow-laden pines, intricate patterns of light and shadow, unworldly in the bluish light that pervades such a scene, always deserved more attention than we could bestow in a moment. A Yankee neighbor who liked to roam around his house at night would sometimes be asked by his family what he did at such times. He would reply, "I look out of the windows," That is just what Daisy and I like to do. The peace of mind that we realized through indulging this mild pastime repaid us for much of the effort we had put into this unique building project.

Certain conditions of the atmosphere throw into relief the ridges and low hills that lie below the horizon -- contours that merge in the glare of day. When stillness broods over the land and a light haze, fog, or the smoke of autumn leaf-fires has settled into the hollows of our furrowed terrain, each knoll and ridge stands out in relief against the low area beyond it. Then, of all times, we feel a great sense of belonging to this land, rough, ornery, and agriculturally impractical though much of it is, and feel, too, a strong sense of kinship with the people who have lived on it, wrested a living from it and, through all, loved it.

## LVIII

### HINDSIGHT

It was a long time before I learned that the old system of tempering the scale by fourths and fifths is only one method of setting a temperament; the result is what matters. The system that Ned Quint taught me has served well during my time at the trade, as it did for Ned in his time. Doing the best job you can with whatever knack you have made your own is generally accepted.

When S.W. Farwell signed his name in Henry F. Miller piano No. 23234, he had no idea that it would be read and appreciated by me many years later. The same holds true as to A.C. Carter and J.P. Downer who signed Henry F. Miller No. 131127, and M.F. Tobey and J.B. Warren who signed No. 24484 of the same make, and J. Balogh who signed Steinway Vertegrand No. 109386. They were artisans who stood responsibly behind their work, much as an artist signs his painting; they had not been blanketed in under the anonymity of mass production. Even so, one who has contributed in a semi-mechanical way to carrying on the divine art of music finds a satisfaction that is beyond measure.

When Daisy and I toured the Bell Telephone exhibit at the New York World's Fair in 1965, we enjoyed the standard tour, well worked out on the evolution of communications, then were turned loose in a products area where several devices were demonstrated. One device tested one's aptitude in the field of musical pitch. Daisy went through the paces, and got a rating of "Amateur" on the answer panel. My effort brought out the astounding information that I was qualified to be a "Piano Tuner." At least, it was comforting to learn, after thirty years, that I was not a square peg.