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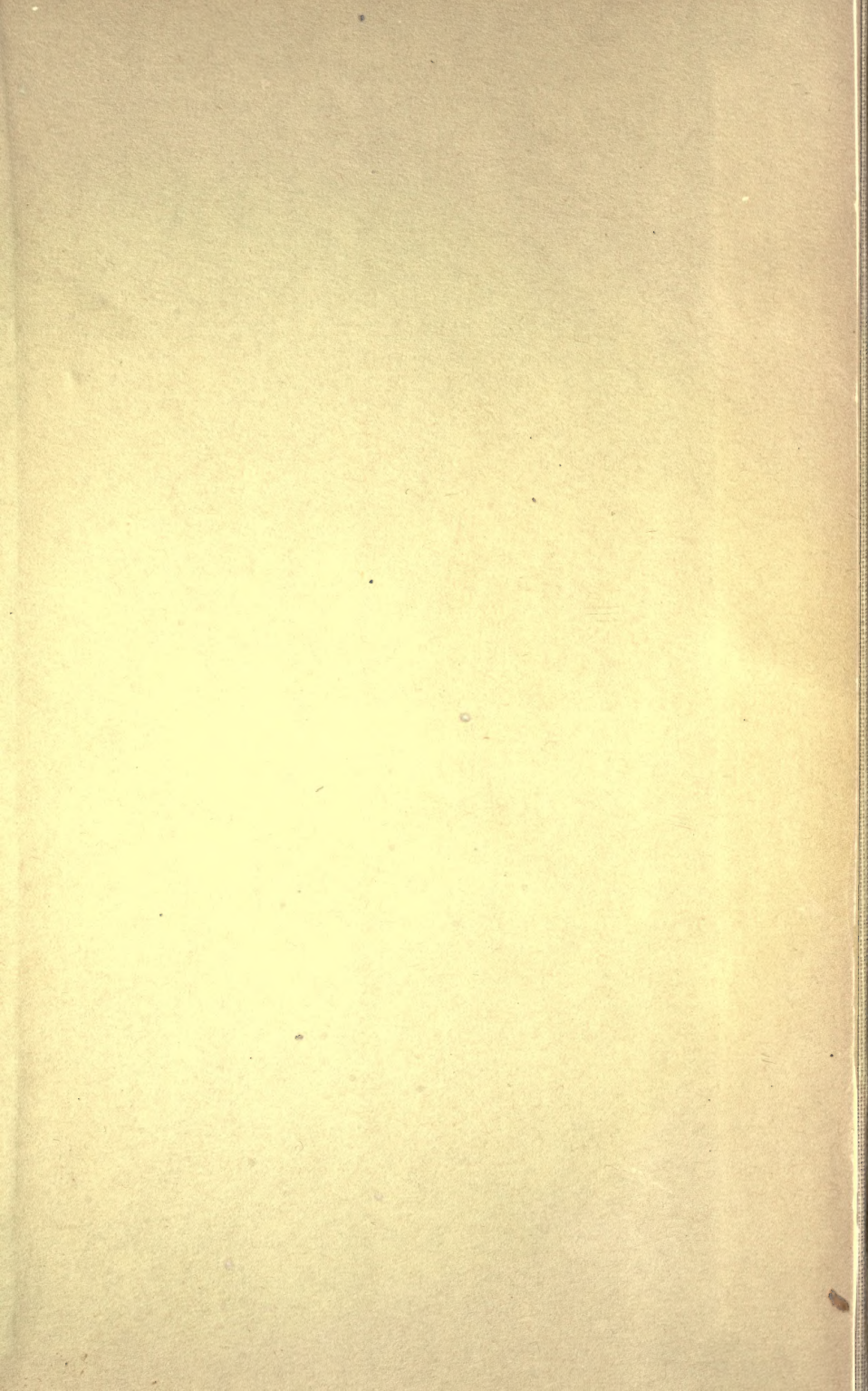
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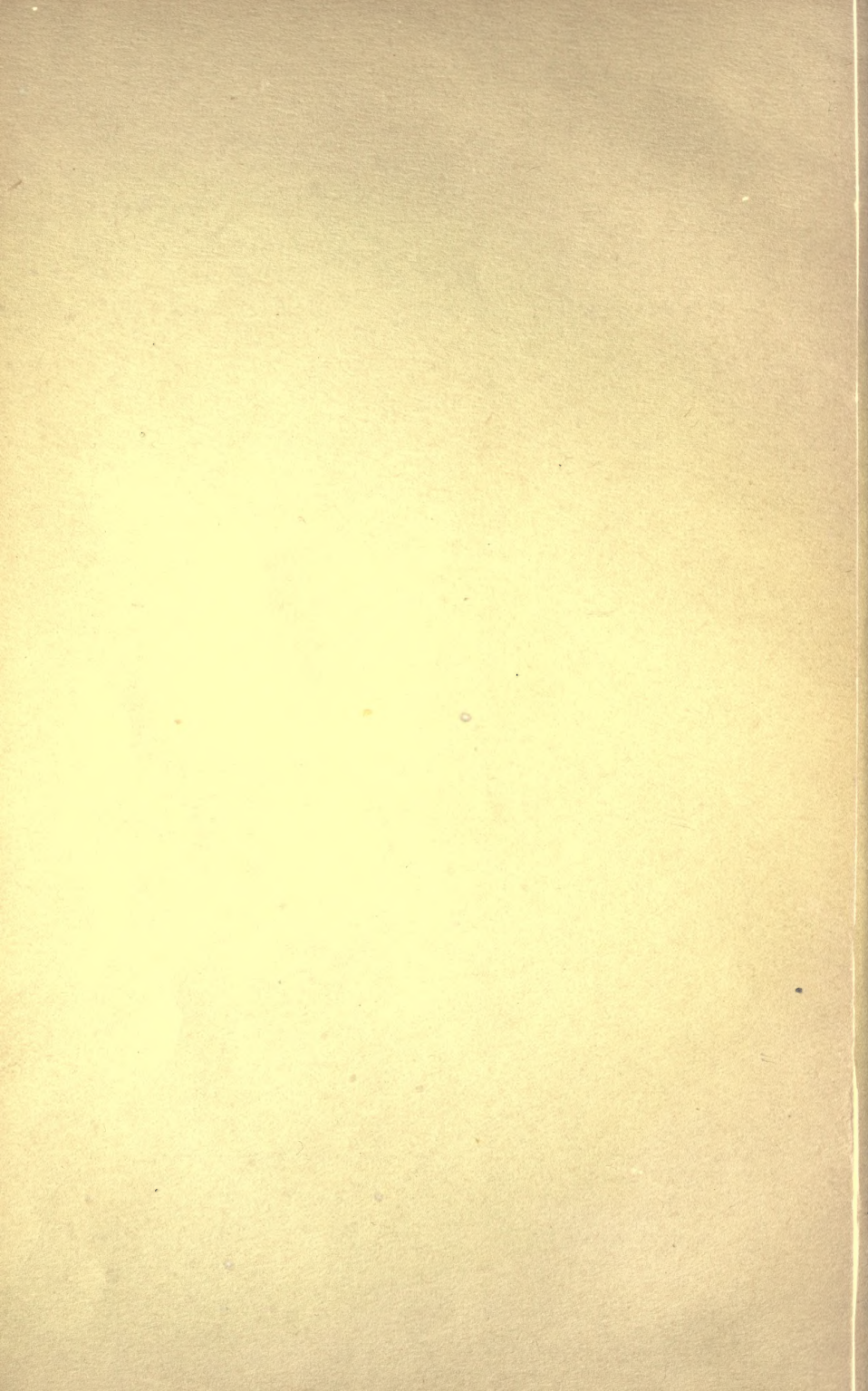
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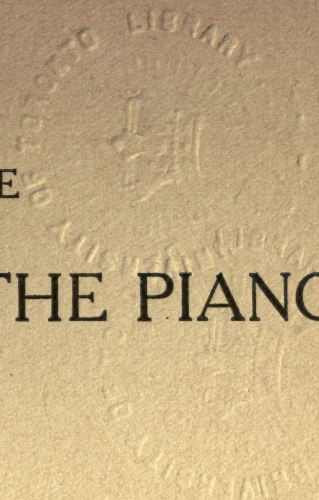
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THE
ARTIST AT THE PIANO

BY

GEORGE WOODHOUSE



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FOREWORD.

IN this collection of short essays on the art of musical interpretation at the pianoforte, an effort is made to evoke the spirit of the "higher criticism" which has done so much good in other fields. It is pitiable to contemplate the musical enthusiasms which are sacrificed on the arid wastes of matter-of-fact pedagogy. Students (especially child-students) gifted with musical imaginations and impulses, when confronted with the arithmetic tables of theoretic facts relating to the *written* statement of music, and the iron rules of "systems" and "methods," are as naturally stupid as they are talented in the Art-dimension.

From the commencement (and more especially *at* the commencement) they should be trained to see with the mind as well as the eye, else the measure of their progress may prove, by inverse ratio, the measure of retrogression on the Art-plane.

Another danger awaits the would-be artist at the pianoforte; he may be tempted to regard the very restricted possibilities of a mechanical instrument as the limit of his natural musical expression. There is an utterly mistaken idea abroad to-day in regard to the relationship which should exist between the pianist and his instrument. It has been found that artists in their methods of playing strangely

ignore the limitations of the pianoforte, and consequent on the discovery of this fact the cult of the rational pianist has become the vogue.

In parts I. and II. of this little volume the *irrationality* of the "rationalist" attitude to the art of musical interpretation is discussed.

The essayettes on "The Artist," "The Artist Dimension," "Notes or Music!" "The Pianist's Education" and "The Artist's Education" have no direct bearing on the subject of pianoforte technique, but as they are the outcome of earnest thought on questions of interest to all artists, and pianists in particular, I have ventured to include them here.

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February, 1910.

PART I.

ARTIST VERSUS THEORIST.

THIS is an age of methods and musical hypochondria, and the innumerable treatises which have appeared in recent years on the science of playing notes with the fingers are among the mischievous causes.

It is an impossibility to feel musically well and play with your head full of methods, muscles, and pianoforte mechanism.

The first duty of the student is to forget these things. There is no reason why the daily finger-drill should not be performed in the same healthy spirit as that in which he takes his bath and morning walk.

His direction is ever from *cause* to *effect*; the tones he cannot *feel* will have no meaning under his fingers. Given a sympathetic imagination and a re-creative talent, effects will take care of themselves. Is not the development of individual expression the only thing worth striving for in these days of automatic "piano-players" and phonographs?

There are two ways of applying oneself to the study of the pianoforte; one may either cultivate the *artist*, or the *theorist*. The student may proceed intuitively by the way of self-expression and develop his sense of touch by training it to respond to his musical feeling, or he may adopt a method of touch which is subservient to the laws governing the mechanism of his instrument.

In the pianoforte world to-day it is largely the cult of the theorist. The excessive tendency of applying analytical methods to the study of technique—of reasoning over-much concerning causes instead of assisting the artist-intuition to lead the way of effects, of looking inwards instead of outwards—tends not only to destroy the artist-imagination

leads also to false theories concerning the act of touch. In the following pages it is my purpose to emphasise these dangers.

To achieve this end it is not my intention to attack the methods of any individual theorists. My purpose is rather to expose the methods of the theorist who is inherent, in varying degrees, in us all.

He existed long before the pianoforte was invented, and will undoubtedly be in evidence when the instrument has been superseded. The original Senior Wrangler in questions relating to Art and Religion, he has now invaded the erstwhile peaceful domain of the pianist's art, with the result that to-day the seeds of dissension are scattered broadcast.

I first made his acquaintance in the particular province of pianoforte technique, in Germany, and later I encountered him again in England. On inquiring more closely into his history I found that at one time he had crossed Kullak's path. I learned also that the old master scorned his friendship, and it is said that, although he made no effort to refute the theorist's very sane and rational arguments, he strongly advised his pupils, if they would become artists, to pay no heed to them.

Alluring indeed are the promises of the theorist's teachings; purity of tone and ease of execution are the goal of his endeavour, and to this end he has epitomized his doctrines in one specific method of touch. No efforts have been spared in obtaining evidence to support the rational basis of his creed. The pianoforte has been rudely flung open and made to disclose its innermost secrets. Every crank and shank from key to hammer has been subjected to microscopic analysis; the pianist's hand and arm have been anatomised and an exposition made of each muscle and sinew. The multitudinous conclusions arrived at have been stated in irrefutable, interminable exactitudes.

For a time I joined the ranks of the theorist and accepted his statement that pressure on the keys after the instant of tone-production cannot possibly influence either the quality or

ARTIST VERSUS THEORIST

quantity of tone. I applied his teaching in my own playing and found that while reason acquiesced musical instinct rebelled.

I have taken pains to test these methods scientifically and musically, and as a result of my investigation I have been led to make a strenuous protest.

I find that, although the theories appear to be rational in statement, they prove to be very delusive in application; moreover, granted the system be given a practical basis (on which assumption I base subsequent criticism), it would still be impotent to convey musical expression.

Before proceeding, I will draw attention to three facts which invariably escape the intelligence of the inherent theorist :

- (1) In all artistic effects there exists a dual expression: the emotional utterance, and its physical statement.
- (2) All endeavour to obtain similar artistic effects by analytical process is futile, for the reason that analysis is necessarily confined to the physical plane.
- (3) Although the pianoforte is a fixed-tone instrument, the artist at the pianoforte does not interpret music in fixed tones.

I have divided the subject under discussion into two sections. In the first I state my objections to the so-called rational methods on technical grounds. In the second I approach the subject from the artist view-point; my contention being that since the theorist is only capable of thinking on the physical plane he is compelled to ignore the greater factor in pianoforte playing, namely the artist-imagination.

My desire in attempting to throw a new light on matters pertaining to "methods" is to engage the student's mind in a truer conception of his art, to cause him to think more of its purpose and less of its means; also to remind him that beauty must first be experienced in his imagination before it can be expressed in sound.

CAUSE AND EFFECT.

THERE is, perhaps, no fact more undeniably convincing, and at the same time so disastrous in its effects on the human mind, as the statement, which the theorist is for ever reiterating, "There can be no effect without a cause." I pursued the teachings of several advocates of the rational method of pianoforte playing on the strength of this assertion, and suffered the momentary mental aberration referred to in consequence.* Intuition fortunately came to my rescue. It told me that the artist at the pianoforte was concerned with his own sense of touch, not the acts of touch of others; also, that instinct should be his guide, not reason.

I see now why failure is writ large on the pages of these treatises. Instead of prescribing indirectly for the *pianist* by appealing to the *artist*, the theorist confines himself wholly to facts relating to pianoforte tone-production, and to the thousand and one conditions affecting the various acts of touch.

It is conceivable there are as many varieties of touch as stars in the heavens. Is it possible to present two that are identical? What shall we say of an attempt to formulate them? But it would seem that the theorist is not so easily baffled. If he could only feel, he would blush with shame at his own incompetence. He has the audacity to present artists and students with thousands of tone-effects, and not a single motive for applying one. Pianoforte interiors and acts of touch in all their diversity are lifeless things, and should receive the respect due to the dead.

I ask, whose sense of justice is considered when artists are requested, figuratively speaking, to fall on bended knees in the presence of pianofortes and acts of touch?

* * * * *

* In future reference to the protagonists of the *theorist's* teaching, their self-appropriated title of "rationalist" will be applied.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Despot reason, for one short moment, swayed my mentality and the artist in me dwindled to microbic dimensions.

In fancy I found myself cringing at the tyrant's feet, athirst for knowledge.

He led me into the august presence of a modern pianoforte, and opened it to my wondering gaze. As I beheld, methought creation had reached finality. My reverence increased as my guide proceeded to unfold with due solemnity its very genesis.

What mysteries were these! Its hidden secrets were revealed to my understanding—this a “key,” and this its creamy white surface an “ivory plate” on the key; this a “hammer,” and this, its soft woolly covering, the “felt” on the hammer; and that long stretch of wire a “string.” This a “rocker,” that a “hopper,” here to my right a “roller,” there to my left a “damper”; then, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, we encountered a “check.”

I looked up piteously at my guide, but he, ever alert, had discovered an “aperture” and my dread fears were allayed. It proved to be no ordinary “aperture,” it was an “aperture” and an “escapement lever,” in very deed a “compound escapement lever.” We passed through, and mounted a “crank.” For a moment I was dazed with the vision that met my eyes from this elevation.

Gradually things began to materialize; “cranks,” and still more “cranks,” took to themselves form and stood up in countless rows on every side. “Rollers,” “rockers,” “dampers,” and “levers” lay in serried rows, and “hammers,” in their battalions, stood to attention.

I held my breath, as I was next initiated into the higher mysteries of “balance and movement,” and my senses reeled as my guide proclaimed that a single act of touch, of which he possessed the secret, would cause the air to reverberate with magic sound.

He then proceeded to analyse the sinews and muscles of the arms, hands, and fingers. I mentally underwent this vivisectional operation, and saw at last where life itself was generated, for truly, “there could be no effect without a cause.”

THE ARTIST AT THE PIANO

Awaking from my reverie, I closed the books, and, with a head bursting with knowledge of facts, I seated myself at the pianoforte. The keys responded to the impetus of my fingers. But what strange thing befell!—my sense of touch was dead.

* * * * *

A child learns to walk, not because it wants to walk, but because it insists on having things which are out of its reach.

Imagine the result were it possible to teach a child the theoretic science of the act of walking. It would first be necessary to enter fully into the laws of gravity, and to explain what must inevitably happen should a false step be taken. Then an exposition of the muscles and sinews of its legs and feet would be presented to the child, and a complete set of rules framed in obedience to the laws governing the numerous movements which are required for every step. Finally, its attention would be drawn to the degrees of impetus required, and——

But enough! the brains of a Darwin would not suffice to keep that child erect upon its legs.

AN IMPOTENT ACT OF TOUCH.

THE hypothesis on which the rationalist builds up his system of key-touch is that pressure on a key after the instant of tone-emission cannot affect the quality or quantity of that tone.

As a statement of fact, none but fanatics would deny its truth; as a hypothesis on which to formulate a method of pianoforte playing it is wholly indefensible. It is as mischievous (if the paradox be permitted) as the statement of fact is true. The rationalist, after propounding it as if it were a novelty, proceeds to synthesise rules governing touch which run counter to the practice of artists and virtuosi of all time. He glories in the idea that his theories are revolutionary, for *reason* cannot err. Let us see!

His first deduction is this: Since after-pressure cannot affect quality or quantity of tone, such pressure must be considered sheer waste of energy due to ignorance or affectation on the part of the player who applies it.

These baneful symptoms can no longer be tolerated, and the first article of the rational creed is stated:

All force employed to produce tone *must cease* at the instant of sound-emission.

The point at issue—whether or not after-pressure affects the flight of the hammer to the string—is not necessarily a problem for the pianist alone. The same variance of opinion which exists between pianists to-day may have led, with equal justification, to “methods,” not to say differences, between cricketers, billiard players and golfers.

I cannot resist the temptation to ask one of these ardent revolutionaries to approach Mr. Jessop as he is squaring his shoulders for a prospective boundary drive, and tell him that any movement he makes after the ball leaves the bat cannot possibly affect its flight.

Mr. Jessop's reply may not prove satisfactory.

He might then turn his attention to Mr. John Roberts, who is taking aim for his favourite "follow-through" stroke, and tell him that after the ball leaves the tip of his cue, no follow-on movement can possibly affect the speed or direction of the ball.

He will find still further scope for the preaching of his favourite dogma if he will go to Mr. Braid, as he is contemplating a record "drive," and inform him that the "twist" he is in the habit of making subsequent to hitting the ball is the merest affectation, of which all good golfers ought to be ashamed.

The rationalist mind would have been spared the mortification of having its cardinal doctrines refuted in open court by common consent, had it tempered its science with a little imagination.

THE RHYTHMIC TOUCH.

THE rationalist evidently sees in the human fingers so many additional cranks and shanks which automatically move at varying degrees of impetus in obedience to the will of the performer. His constant advice is "play instrumentally." In thus regarding human acts of touch in this purely instrumental sense, he commits his old offence of confounding the natural with the artificial. Throughout his elaborate exposition of method, he has overlooked the vital element in Nature, which is *rhythm*.

The natural sense-pressure on a single key is just as rhythmically expressed as the hand-shake of a friend, the act of breathing, the heart-beat, the swaying of trees in the wind, the ocean tides and waves. The rhythmic sense-touch has its flow and ebb pressure, its circle and dynamic centre, in common with all Nature's expressions.

This natural touch-pressure, commencing at zero, proceeds by harmonic (naturally acquired) increase to its maximum, then recedes to zero, and so completes the rhythmic circle.

The eye will see what is here implied if it follows the movement of the swing of the pendulum. Commencing at the point where movement begins, it gradually increases in impetus to the centre, then makes a corresponding decrease, arriving at zero at the opposite end of the swing.

The natural sense-pressure here described is the means by which all sympathetic pianists interpret their emotions.

[The note may be sounded at any degree of the circle of pressure where energy suffices for the purpose. And now, if the reader will think in circles (thousands of them), and of the degrees in each circle where tone is attainable, he will perceive that the tone possibilities of the pianoforte are indeed illimitable.]

Thinking "rhythmically" and not merely "instrumentally," we will now recall the first article of the rational creed :

All force employed to produce tone *must cease* at the instant of sound-emission.

The literal interpretation of this article implies that the flow and ebb pressure of a single sense-touch must be completed at the instant of sound-emission. To achieve this result, the pianist is compelled to attain the greatest momentum by *staccato* movement at a point rather less than half-way to the key-bed; and tone will be produced by the hammer flying off its bearings at the point it receives this impetus.

In *legato* the hammer does not come into contact with the string until the key is two-thirds of the way down in its bed. It at once becomes apparent that if the rationalist theories are literally applied in *legato* playing, the pianist's touch is reduced to impotence. If the circle of pressure is completed at the moment of contact of the hammer with the string, there will obviously be no force to cause the string to vibrate!

The rationalist intends of course that the player should arrive with the greatest momentum at the instant of tone-production. Then, one must ask, what need to call on him to shatter his natural pressure at that instant? To spare the key-bed and obtain ease of execution?

If the rhythmic circle is broken, natural *sense of touch* becomes artificial *act of touch*, and the pianist who achieves this result will find himself hopelessly out-rivalled by another automatic player—the pianola.

METHODS.

EVERY sophisticated pianist knows that the difficulty encountered in playing fast technical passages clearly is not one of putting the keys down, but essentially one of raising the fingers from the keys after they are played. Anyone may experiment by playing rapidly five contiguous white keys; first, with no attempt at raising the fingers above the surface level of the keyboard, and next, by raising quickly each finger very high as the succeeding notes are played. The difference in effect is enormous.

In the artist-methods of pianoforte playing, such as those of Czerny, Kullak, Tausig, Madame Schumann, and Leschetizky, this important factor is duly recognised. Students in these schools are taught to raise the non-playing fingers high above the surface level of the keys in slow finger-drill exercises. Also, in order continually to exercise the muscles, the playing-finger is required to support a certain even-resting weight of the arm. The transference of this even arm-weight from finger to finger (strong or weak) automatically ensures equality of touch, *crescendos* and *diminuendos* being likewise automatically controlled by increasing or decreasing the arm-resting weight.

The rationalists are very severe indeed in their criticism of this practice, their objections being that the raised-finger touch is conducive to "key-hitting," and the resting on the key-bed is unnecessarily tiring to the fingers.

But in their wholesale condemnation of these methods they have not hesitated to cross the Rubicon of forbidden territory. What right have they, even could their objections be proved legitimate, to confuse finger-drill exercises with actual pianoforte playing?

In bygone days Roman soldiers were compelled to wear sandals with leaden soles during their daily drill, so that in

war time, when leathern sandals were worn, they were better able to withstand the fatigue of long, forced marches.

The reason for the lifting of the fingers and the resting on the key-bed in the finger training drill is just as obvious.

Is it possible any students could be so obtuse as to imagine that Bach wrote Fugues, and Beethoven, Sonatas for them to develop their technical efficiency?

The insanity of playing Beethoven Sonatas in any finger-drill method may be compared with attempting to dance tied to a Sandow developer. Let us suppose that evidence of such insanity in students (and shall we add teachers) has come under the notice of the rationalists. How shall we describe their utter incapacity to diagnose successfully such distressful symptoms? Instead of treating the patient they confine their attention to the "method." These same, seeing a man run through the streets tied to a "developer," would seek to cure him of his mania by presenting him with another of more complex design.

THEORETIC LEGATO.

I WILL now proceed to analyse the rules governing *legato* playing in the rational method.

We saw in Article I. that the key-movement was brought to a premature end by the sudden release of pressure at the instant of sound-emission. Article II. is as follows :

Legato is obtained by a transference of the pressure which suffices to sustain tone.

To sustain tone after the note is obtained it is only necessary to raise the damper off the string. The very slight pressure on the keys which induces tone-continuity may therefore be transcribed damper-raising pressure. We may now summarize the requirements :

- (a) The impetus necessary to cause the hammer to hit the string.
- (b) To check the blow at the instant of sound-emission.
- (c) To follow this activity by a damper-raising pressure.

Further, in order to avoid key-hitting when playing from raised positions, Article III. requires that the fingers be brought into gentle contact with the key surface.

There is wisdom in this advice, for is it not imperative, if key-hitting is to be avoided, when arm and fingers have for their only support a mere damper-raising touch, that the fingers come down on the key surfaces with a somewhat gentle movement ?

More advanced disciples of the rational school condemn finger-raising methods wholesale, not only because of the risk of key-hitting, but also on account of the resistance offered by the air (!) in addition to that of the key. Some natures are peculiarly sensitive.

In either case a minimum of three distinct conceptions of touch is provided for the production of every tone. I will leave the reader to imagine what passes in the brain of a player who successfully negotiates a rational scale *prestissimo*.

But do all these complex rules ensure *legato* ?

It is asserted that a continuity of the very slight damper-raising pressure induces this result. Then it must be conceded that the damper-raising pedal will effect this purpose even better, since the sympathetic response of associated strings greatly assists the sustaining of tone. Moreover, when the pedal is used, would it not be pure affectation to pretend to raise the dampers with the fingers, when they are already raised by the foot ?

It is impossible to be rational and inconsistent. I suggest that when the pedal is employed there is no need to apply the damper-raising pressure. It is claimed that after-pressure does not affect tone; the up-lifting of the finger when the pedal is used will certainly not do so. Then, by raising the fingers immediately at the moment of tone-emission, you stand to lose nothing and gain freedom in the act.

I will now ask the reader to take fullest advantage of the theorist's teaching and play the following passage from the end of the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 2, No. 3:—

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 2, No. 3. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff is the treble clef, starting with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking. The second and fourth staves are the bass clef. The second and fourth staves have 'Ped.' markings under them, indicating the use of the damper pedal. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and chordal textures, with various accidentals and articulation marks.

THEORETIC LEGATO

Beethoven has tied the notes ; D'Albert has given the pedal. Afterwards, let him play Etude III. of Schumann's Etudes Symphoniques :

The musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef, G major, 4/4 time. It features a series of chords with tied notes and staccato dots. The lower staff is in bass clef, G major, 4/4 time. It features a bass line with a 'Ped.' marking under the first measure, indicating the start of the pedal effect. The piece ends with '&c.' in the upper staff.

Schumann has given both pedal and *staccato* dots.

There is no difference !

Then it is evident that Beethoven, Schumann, and D'Albert do not conform to the rationalist creed.

PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS.

WE are here confronted with an old pianistic problem, one that has always proved a stumbling block to pianists of pseudo-scientific tendencies.

Is the pianist limited in his musical expression to the moment of contact of the hammer with the string?

Most pianists probably assent to this, and yet, with strange inconsistency, all play (rationalists excepted) as if they believed the pianoforte did actually respond to after-pressure. Such inconsistency to my knowledge has never yet been explained.

Pseudo-scientists in dissociating their theories from the experience of artists evade the point at issue. On the other hand, the older schools, relying entirely on the artist-experience, do not appear to have stated their case rationally. It will presently be interesting to apply the pragmatic method of inquiry in an attempt to reconcile the apparent contradiction between experience and fact.

The pianoforte is undeniably a very mechanical instrument; it may even more truly be regarded as a sounding machine, containing many separate machines. Each key has its own action and string, and is a complete instrument in itself. Its tones are likewise unrelated, and there exists no device whereby they may be made to succeed each other in harmonic continuity of sound. Until this be possible, *legato*, in the sense in which the violinist or vocalist understands the word, is unattainable by the pianist, unless perhaps in *diminuendo* phrases when the player of exquisite touch-perception approximates to such effect. The moment that touch operates pianoforte tones are automatically controlled, and from that instant it is impossible for the pianist to give effect in sound to the slightest intention which does not accord with the instrument's response. Admitting this fact, it becomes evident that, apart from certain discrepancies which have been noted, the rationalist has adopted a thoroughly logical

PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS

attitude in his theories of muscular relaxation. Experiments prove that if the notes of a musical phrase be played in a method of touch-continuity (weight transference) or the "must-cess" touch (muscular relaxation) *legato*, or *staccato*, if pedal be used and the individual notes be sounded with the same amount of force, the ear is unable to detect any difference in the physical effect produced.

Then why, one naturally asks, did Beethoven take pains to tie all the groups of *arpeggio* notes for the fingers to hold when the pedal would have effected an even more perfect *sostenuto*, and what is the meaning of such signs as *portamento*, *tenuto*, *staccato*, and *legato*, which composers are ever employing in conjunction with the pedal? Further, is not the rationalist perfectly justified in accusing pianists, who affect the "after-pressure," of being the victims of delusion?

I shall make no attempt to vindicate such apparently non-sensical practices on the physical plane. Many have been so tempted, and in stating their beliefs in physical terms have fallen easy victims to the arguments of matter-of-fact scientists. I readily admit that if the sphere of fact be the final court of appeal the rationalist may easily win his case. But we have yet to reckon with the experience of artists if we would grasp the whole truth concerning the act of touch in its relation to musical expression.

Reason is for ever adjusting itself to true feeling: let us see if it will harmonize with that of the composers and pianists.

PART II.

SILENT FACTORS.

SO far my exposure of the rationalists' teaching has been confined to some palpable errors detected in their theories. I shall now assume, for the sake of a more real and vital argument, that such inexactitudes are rectified, and proceed at once to lift the discussion to the plane of the artist. By so doing I merely raise the question of method to its proper level. For, after all, in things pertaining to the ways and means of finding expression (however fascinating a subject it may prove for the analytical theorist) it is surely only a matter which concerns the artist.

It must be remembered that the physical senses (to which the theorist makes his appeal) may be very easily deceived. Even the eye, the queen sense, cannot readily distinguish at a short distance between a perfectly constructed artificial flower and a natural one, or between a mechanical reproduction of a picture and the original.

The ear is still less reliable. A well conducted automatic "piano-player" may, for a time, satisfy the outer sense and convince many that it is a medium for individual utterance.

Because of these limitations no test which makes its appeal solely to the outer faculties proves anything of import in the art-dimension. For this reason I shall, on principle, try to avoid the conflict which must necessarily ensue if a comparison be made between the physical effects produced by different methods of key touch. Scientific experiments are not musical experiments, and whatever the facts deduced they are irrelevant to the art of music and do not apply. If the means (the mere notes) be robbed of their true purpose (their musical significance), is not all comparison and analysis of their physical sound-effects a vain endeavour to justify an end which has ceased to exist?

The only art value of any act of touch lies in the value of the musical intention it conveys to the listener. The most perfect tones produced by a Pachmann occur daily, and pass unheeded, under the fingers of the average school-girl, or, for that matter, under the mechanical fingers of a pianola (granted, of course, an equally fine instrument).

No analysis of the means will reveal the secret whereby an artist is enabled to convey his feeling to his audience. Truth lies in the fact that the imagination, both of player and listener, is a much more potent factor in musical understanding than is the actual sound, which, at its best, is a very imperfectly materialized expression. In this respect, however, it may be doubted whether the pianist does not work to better advantage than even the painter. Look at the paint in any great work of art, and you will not see the picture. It is equally true that if you listen for and analyse the physical sound-effects of the pianist you will not hear the music.

There is such a thing as telepathy. Before sound *is*, the silent expression *was*, in the musician's mind. Even in actual performance the sounds that are silent make the greatest appeal. You cannot play with feeling a single pianoforte melody tone, but that the most intense effect in the mind is felt before the tone arrives. That moment is the climax, and, in the presence of physical effect, emotion recedes. True art conceals its outward expression; its purpose is to reveal the silent message, "*Ars est celare artem.*"

I shall have further opportunity to refer to this silent factor in interpretation in later chapters; but, in case some of my readers are loath to leave the world of fact and follow me in an intangible, but nevertheless real, argument, I would remind them whenever they think of music as having an existence on the physical plane not to confuse illusions with actualities. For instance, they must not confuse their rhythmic impressions of musical phrases with the actual sound-effects produced by the pianist. Such impressions

have no existence in sound. The automatic action which operates at the touch moment completely destroys the pianist's rhythmic utterance, and literally reduces every performance to chaos. If, however, pianoforte music is heard rhythmically it is obviously because other factors operate on the musical ear.

To give still further proof of the existence of these factors, contrast the impressions received when listening to the musical rests expressed by a great artist, and the spaces left between the notes by an untalented player. Yet with the same means—silence being the one great fact eluding all analytical dissection—the artist is enabled to hold his listeners spell-bound, while the untalented player leaves the mind staring into vacuity. It is only when the physical senses are at rest and our minds are undistracted that we come to full consciousness of the greatness of the personality that crosses our path. An artist of small dimension comes to the end of his performance and the impression he leaves is all but as evanescent as the sounds he evoked. Paderewski ceases to play and we realise for the first time the magnitude of his personality.

The rationalist theories fail because the ultimate end and purpose of art—the full utterance of the inner personality—are sacrificed to the limitations of the outer faculties. The artist at the pianoforte *finds his physical expression not in sound, but in touch and the silent rhythmic pulsating tension of his hand.* When at the same time it is realised that only for the fractional part of a performance has he direct control over the sounds produced, it becomes evident that he cannot state the sound-equivalence of his outward expression. It must therefore be admitted (since the pianoforte provides an artist with a medium for giving full utterance to his personality), that it is the silent expression which is conveyed to the listener's musical ear, and not the imperfect sound response of the instrument. This is the truth all artist-pianists and composers intuitively feel. It explains why Beethoven tied the quaver notes in the passage quoted; why Schumann

SILENT FACTORS

marked the arpeggios *staccato* with pedal; and also why pianists persist in expressing part of their musical intentions on the unresponsive surface of depressed keys.

It will now be seen that this much discussed question of methods implies more than is talked about in scientific treatises which deal with the facts relating to fingers, muscles, and pianoforte actions, and ignore the needs of the artist.

Involved in the principles on which the pianist (or any artist) cultivates his technique is his conception of Art, and the extent, which is also the limitation, of his art-dimension. To understand these principles is to know the musical creed of any pianist.

Viewed in this light, how must we regard a creed whose articles are based on principles that are consistent only with the mechanism of an unmusical instrument? Better far to be considered irrational than submit to the tyranny of such laws.

The alternative is to cultivate a method of touch which is consistent in the manner of its expression with the player's musical feeling. And who shall say that such a method is not a rational one?

A right conception of the significance of Art and a sympathetic imagination will aid the student where an encyclopædic knowledge of mechanical facts must certainly hinder.

He may learn to play all the Sonatas of Beethoven, but if he lack a sympathetic imagination he cannot interpret one note of their music. To translate Emerson into musical terms: The only music we ever interpret, is that we take with us when we play, or listen to, the notes the composers have given us.

If the student assimilate this truth he will understand that his method must first begin with himself, and not with acquired theories concerning the mechanism of his instrument.

THE RHYTHMIC LEGATO.

I EXPLAINED in a previous chapter that, in order to convey natural expression, sense-touch must be conceived rhythmically. It may be expressed in a single tone, as, for example, in the first bars of melody in Chopin's C minor Nocturne (Op. 48), and in the minim pulses of the slow movement of Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata. Or, the single pressure may be transferred through many fingers without break (each finger-touch representing an arc of a circle), as in the passage already quoted from Beethoven, where two whole bars of quavers are dynamically held together in one rhythmic embrace.

If this passage be so rendered, the musical listener will find himself attracted, not so much by the individual notes comprising the circle, as by the dynamic pulse of the rhythmic swing.

Now, since it is only too true that rhythmic intention cannot be stated in tones which are automatically controlled, it necessarily follows that if the rhythmic impression be suggested, it can only be for the reason that the pianist has expressed his musical intentions in rhythmic touch.

There are no signs on the printed page to indicate the duration and intensity of these touch pressures, and composers are entirely dependent on the individual judgment of pianists in this respect. It is the one vital factor in interpretation, and perhaps (taking teachers on the whole) the one receiving least pedagogic attention.

Rationalists, in their theories, ignore its influence; but, I ask, is it conceivable that a method which requires the pianist to relax his effort at the instant automatic action operates, can be made to convey similar dynamic effects? Since the impressions received by the musical ear are those suggested by the pianist's touch, it follows that the rationalist, being compelled to think and state his utterance

THE RHYTHMIC LEGATO

by individual notes, must succeed in attracting the attention of his listeners to the unmusical effects of a mechanical instrument: to evanescent and unrelated sounds, instead of the rhythmic outline of the musical phrase.

To revert to a further argument on the physical plane. In a former chapter I instituted a comparison between the effects of a musical phrase played in the rational *legato* and the same played *staccato*, with pedal, and inferred that if the same amount of tone were produced there could be no difference in effect. The comparison was a perfectly just one, provided that in the *staccato* interpretation the player also relaxes his muscular effort as each note is played. If, on the contrary, muscular activity be maintained, the conditions at once become unequal.

Musical phrases may be rhythmically suggested either by the *legato* or the *staccato* touch. In *staccato*, although contact with the keys is broken, the *rhythmic-tension* may still be felt in the pianist's hand. This tension is the life-pulse in the player's fingers, and ebbs and flows as naturally as breathing in response to his feeling for the musical phrases he interprets. If it be constantly broken it necessarily has the effect of causing him to *feel* his phrases in short gasps instead of long, natural pulses.

The reader may prove this for himself by playing as a musical phrase the scale of C major, ascending and descending (one octave), *legato* or *staccato*, in both of the opposed methods.

First let him play it *legato* by maintaining the rhythmic tension in his hand. Pressure will be transferred without break from key to key until high C is sounded, at which point tension and pressure attain their maximum. Descending the scale, natural release-pressure will be applied until zero is attained after low C is sounded.

Next, let him play the scale by breaking the tension and pressure as each tone is produced, relying merely on the continuity of a damper-raising pressure to effect the *legato*. The *crescendo* and *diminuendo* must now be induced by

accurately estimating the greater or lesser impetus required for each succeeding note. The difference in effect on the player's feeling will be equally marked if the scale be played *staccato*.

The remarkable result of such experiments is that the effects produced on the ear have no correspondence with the varying experiences of the player. Nevertheless, I maintain that physical differences do exist.

It will be readily conceded that in the first method the harmonic continuity of the rhythmic tension from ebb to flow and flow to ebb (the *crescendo* and *diminuendo* of the rhythmic phrase) produces at the moment of tone-emission a corresponding continuity of tone. Turn to the second method and conceive the utter impossibility of obtaining such ideal effect. No two fingers are equal in strength—consider the difference between the thumb and fourth finger. It must be doubted whether any pianist possesses a sense of touch so perfectly disciplined that he could obtain a similar dynamic effect in a method which required him to estimate the touch with such scientific nicety of judgment for every note played.

To illustrate the difference between the two systems, rational and natural, by analogy in another art, one might compare the first to the stilted method of depicting a landscape in mosaic or tapestry, and the second to the more plastic art of painting a picture with brush and pigments.

FALSE IDEALS.

THERE has been much scientific investigation in recent years on the subject of tone-quality in pianoforte playing, and, as a result, many have had their deep-rooted prejudices and beliefs rudely shaken. It is now affirmed that pianoforte tone-quality is a matter entirely in the hands of the manufacturers of the instrument, and that all the pianist can do is to play notes loud and soft, long or short. One writer goes so far as to say that "no device of touch, no curious movements of fingers, hands, wrists, or arms; no mysterious pressing of the keys after striking, no coaxing, no bullying, no willing; no schoolboy, no Rubinstein, no Liszt, can produce any varieties of tone more complex than these." *

The logical inference of which might be briefly stated "Same amount of tone, same quality," whatever method be employed.

For my own part I am inclined to think that varying modes of touch do affect tone-quality, but to such a slight extent that the unaided ear cannot detect the fine differences with any degree of certainty. The only satisfactory proof would be to test the presumably varying sounds with an instrument which assisted the ear in the same degree that the microscope aids the eye. In support of the contention that tone-quality is affected by touch, I will again refer to the practices of the cricketer. All who have handled the bat know what it means to "time" the ball. The well-timed stroke affords the agreeable sensation which accompanies "clean hitting," the badly mis-timed hit jars the nerves. Undoubtedly the secret of the perfectly timed hit is that the bat comes into contact with the ball at the dynamic centre of the rhythmic swing.

One might reasonably suppose that since timing and mis-timing a cricket ball result in such opposite sensations and effects, similar experiments in the manner of playing

* "Touch, Phrasing, and Interpretation." J. Alfred Johnstone.

notes on a pianoforte must produce differences in quality as well as quantity of sound corresponding to the sensations experienced in the varying touch-methods employed. If the reader experiments he will find it quite easy to imagine that he hears tones corresponding to the methods of touch he adopts, but it will be another matter if he turns from the pianoforte and tries to discriminate from the sounds produced by others the methods they adopt. The test is even more baffling if pedal be used.

In my former arguments I proved that the rationalist was wrong in his theories of key-touch, that what he considered to be the end was really only the centre of the rhythmic pressure, but I suspect him nevertheless of having fallen an unconscious victim to the fascination of this perfectly-timed hit in his practice at the pianoforte. It is apparent that only in *staccato* playing is it possible to obtain this effect of accurately timing the contact of hammer and string, but as I tried to show, by reason of the "must-cess" application, the rationalist did his utmost to incorporate it in all the varieties of touch, in *legato*, *portamento* and *staccato*.

Whether or not he has confused touch sensations with aural impressions, or that he actually hears the differences in the sounds produced (which I will gladly concede), it is certain that he bases his theories on the belief that in the physical act of touch lies the secret of perfect sound.

Like a modern Diogenes, he sets forth in quest of his ideal, but unfortunately good intentions are not Art.

Here let me eliminate from the minds of my readers any suspicion that these writings are intended to suggest that the holders of opposite opinions are necessarily inartistic in their art. A rationalist in theory may be an artist in practice, for in unself-conscious moments Art penetrates its barriers and is revealed despite all theoretic fetters. I oppose the doctrine he preaches, believing, at the same time, that all artists transcend in their work the limitations of whatever creeds they individually profess.

To judge of the rationalist's musical creed by the aim of his teaching, it is evident that in his conception of the art of interpretation he has failed to realise the true significance of the art of music. Perfection in tone-quality is a laudable ideal, but it is one that may safely be entrusted to Messrs. Bechstein or Broadwood. The pianist who comprehends the purport of Art will assuredly not confine his endeavour to satisfying the aural sense. If music exists merely to afford pleasure to the ear, then it is to be feared that the inspirations of many modern composers—and even the counterpoints of Bach—must be known by another name. It is on this material conception of Art that the rationalist bases his theories. Purity of tone is the goal of his endeavour, the one aim and purpose of the doctrine he preaches.

Now, to set students by the ears, and urge them to pore incessantly over their tones for the sole purpose of detecting any variation from the true outline of the aerial vibrations, is to cause them to subordinate their art-intuitions to physical conditions and limitations. Playing the pianoforte is not playing cricket, and the secret of boundary hits is not the secret of the beautiful in music. Sound may be beautiful, or otherwise; it is not music. It merely registers its existence on a plane which enables the psycho-physical consciousness to comprehend it. Tones in music, and words in poetry, must be regenerated in the minds of artists in order to convey their spiritual significance. And what transmutations are possible to the musical genius! A Pachmann or a Pugno will create music out of the tinkling tones of an old harpsichord, and who would not prefer listening to such art than to the performance of a tone-specialist as he displays the possibilities of a modern grand pianoforte? Was Mozart a lesser musician because he was not permitted to think in the tone-colour effects of a modern orchestra? Is there not more charm and beauty in the black-and-white tone-pictures of his imagination than in the sensuous tone-daubs of many a modern impressionist?

Rhythm is the vital element in music, and the teaching which insists on the precedence of sound must be relentlessly opposed by all who conform to the true principles of Art. Of itself sound is impotent to convey the slightest musical impression. A familiar air played in strange rhythm is unrecognisable, yet if its rhythmic pulses be drummed in monotone the air will be suggested. I wonder how many among those who have been privileged to witness the dancing of Isadora Duncan and her happy group of children would not bear testimony to the fact that there is infinitely more music in the charm and grace of their movements than is contained in the scores of many modern musical comedies!

FACTS AND OTHER DELUSIONS.

WHEN considering actual facts regarding the instrument and tone-production it should be borne in mind, more especially by those who are bent on dogmatising, that facts are not the stubborn things some would have us believe. Indeed, they bear a much maligned reputation. Perhaps the only stubborn ones ever encountered are the people who allow their intelligences to become entangled in a few of them. Change the view point, and what is more variable than a fact? Its characteristic is essentially one of persistent fickleness rather than that of unyielding stubbornness. Such are its chameleon-like propensities, it assumes a new aspect with every change of circumstance.

A painter draws lines of red side by side with blue ones, and at a little distance the eye sees but one colour, and that neither red nor blue, but purple. To cite an analogous example in the pianist's art, take the melody of Liszt's "Liebestraum"—with every change of harmony the reiterated melody note C assumes a new tone-colour. The pianist will find infinitely more scope for the cultivation of character in tones in the art of blending them than in attempts to produce varieties of tone-quality by diverse methods of touch on a single key.

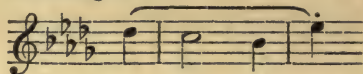
In a former chapter I spoke of the imagination as being a much more potent means of enabling the pianist to communicate his musical impressions than actual sound itself. There is yet another factor, which is frequently overlooked by those who dedicate their intelligence to so-called realities. Pianoforte tones are characteristically evanescent. From the moment they appear they begin to disappear, regardless of the player's wishes and intentions. Such indeed are the limitations of the most perfect instrument in this respect that, were it necessary for the pianist to have to consider them, it would certainly stifle his imagination. Let a violinist play or a vocalist sing and consciously produce similar evanescent tone-effects, their art would become a lifeless thing. Yet

the pianoforte, despite its shortcomings, has received more favours at the hands of great composers than either voice or violin.

We certainly cannot attribute this preference solely to the greater harmonic possibilities it affords.

Its limitations are compensated by the greater factor—illusion.

Take the phrase of melody in the first bars of the 2nd movement of Beethoven's Sonata (Op. 27) No. 2 (commonly known as the "Moonlight"):



with the string as final? Are we to play down to the actual facts which so frequently run counter to the musical imagination, or play up to our illusions which are the realities for the musical ear? In other words, are we to conceive notes at the art-destroying level of a mechanical instrument, or interpret music at the art-inspired ideal of the composer?

This brings us to the crux of a desperate situation, one that has given rise to interminable discussion. With pitiable waste of good intentions and strangely perverted sympathies unimaginative theorists pursue their arguments in favour of the object of their choice—the unsuspecting pianoforte—and so enact the farcical comedy of playing the artist against his instrument.

In the end, natural bias of individual temperament will decide the question for most pianists. Some arrive at very ready conclusions, and, in formulating their methods, take the instrument as their guide; others as willingly follow where the *artist* leads. Again, many whose intelligences are unduly influenced by the teachings of the rationalist doctrine prove by their practice that temperament rescues where arbitrary logic would destroy.

But, reiterates the sceptic, since the pianoforte cannot be made to respond to the intentions of the player after instant of tone-production, what does it matter which of the opposed methods is adopted? It is of vital consequence. In making his choice, the pianist decides whether he will be an artist or a mere automaton. No one will deny that when listening to a great performer the attention is attracted by the personality of the artist, and not by the tones of the instrument. That could not be were there any barriers to the free expression of that personality. The Rubinsteins and Liszts of the art have amply demonstrated that the pianoforte presents none.

The fact is, logic also has its limitations. However great a factor it may prove in assisting us to deal with evidence relating to physical facts, it cannot enable us to comprehend those that lie beyond. Only the pianist's art-intuitions will aid him to enter into apprehension of the realities experienced in the realms of his imagination.

THE ARTIST AT THE PIANO.

WE have seen that when discussing the known facts concerning methods of pianoforte playing there exists the great danger of over-estimating their comparatively trifling significance, and of ignoring the paramount factor, the artist's personality. The artist's sub-conscious self, and the means whereby it finds utterance through the creative faculties, are factors more wonderful and infinitely more potent than any we may hope to analyse. It is this exercise and play of the imagination and its influence over the artist's sense of touch that theoretic scientists in their treatises on pianoforte playing do not take into account. But however convincing their statements prove to the matter-of-fact intelligence, if, in practice, they conflict with the intuitions of the artist's sub-conscious self—the region whence flows his inspiration—they only serve to bar the entrance to his kingdom.

In earlier chapters I have traced the consequences of adopting a theory of pianoforte playing which was based exclusively on evidence extracted from experiments in methods of key-touch. Such is the attitude of the rationalists, and I showed that, although their statements (with important exceptions) were perfectly plausible as such, they became suddenly deformed when their native soil, theoretic reason, was exchanged for that of the artist-experience.

Music exists in the rhythmic movement of melody, and it cannot be too frequently affirmed that facts deduced from experiments in the production of single sounds prove nothing relevant to the art.

Science we know may reduce touch to terms of force and speed, and register the weight of pressure in avoirdupois, and its movement in so many inches per second. It may also afford us the assurance that a particular flower is composed of so many petals of a certain definite contour and colour. But what can theoretic scientists tell us of the rhythmic

life-pulse which is the secret of all charm and beauty in the flower, as also in the human act of touch, and the music it expresses ?

You cannot re-create a rose by piecing together its fallen petals, neither will a scientific synthesis of rules (even one that provided a key to the method of touch which produced the most perfect tones) avail in the creation of a single phrase of melody.

Fortunately for the artist at the pianoforte, he is influenced more by individual temperament than by cold reason. It may be possible for the veriest tyro of a mechanic to surprise the great player with facts relating to his instrument and key-touch, but let the artist interpret the simplest melody, and his secret of sympathetic expression, of playing with his heart in his hand, will baffle the theorist's powers of reasoning, even though he spend a lifetime attempting to solve the mystery of cause and effect.

One further appeal to the artist-experience and I shall complete my exposure of a theory of pianoforte-playing which, if applied, necessarily divorces the artist from the pianist.

The mysterious co-operation of the spiritual and physical senses provides the medium through which all artists give utterance to their emotions. Applied to the pianist, this means that his spiritual perceptions will receive natural interpretation in sympathetic physical response. Between the inner sense of feeling and the outer sense of touch must exist a bond of sympathy. In the mystic union of spiritual and physical, cause and effect are one, and Truth is stated in deed.

You have only to shake hands with your friend to realise the full force of these statements, and you will appreciate their truth still more if you adopt the so-called rational method of touch expression. Next time you meet your friend, take his hand and clasp it firmly for the merest fraction of a

second, release suddenly, and continue to hold only the dead weight of his hand. You cannot do this and retain your emotion (much less express it), any more than you can laugh and keep a straight face.

I assert, with all the impelling force of this argument, that a method of pianoforte-playing which has for its basis this "must-cease" touch-pressure, enforces corresponding "must-cease" effect on the artist's emotional feeling.

PART III.

THE ARTIST.

TO understand the artist aright, we must dismiss from our minds the conventional interpretation of this much-abused word.

Walt Whitman speaks of the child "which went forth every day, and every object* he looked upon, that object he became, and that object *became part of him for that day.*"

In the first half of this couplet Walt Whitman has portrayed the man, in the latter half he transforms man into the artist.

Man, becoming the objects he sees, is a materialist, and is satisfied with sense impressions of the facts of life.

By spiritually assimilating his experiences he becomes an artist and realises the Truth of Life.

Nature gives to man his physical consciousness, Art endows him with spiritual perception.

Man, in tune with Nature, communicates his physical desires to his fellow men by means of his physical senses.

The artist, in tune with the Infinite, communicates his emotional experiences to his fellow artists by means of his spiritual senses, which co-operate in unconscious unity with his physical faculties.

Nature is expressed in the physical life of the three kingdoms—animal, vegetable, and mineral; giving us men, beasts, birds, trees, flowers and metals. An oak tree is one of Nature's handiworks—it is not Nature.

Art is Nature's spiritual equivalence, expressed in the emotional experiences of men; in their hope, despair, love, hate, smiles and tears, and revealed in deeds; in sound, movement, colour and stone.

Nature is the silent architect of the physical sphere. Art is the Eternal Spirit, the artist's medium from Finite to Infinite.

* Meaning his everyday experience.

The terms are absolute. They have no plural, and cannot be qualified or circumscribed. It is gross sacrilege to speak of decadent Art, or indeed of the sanity of Art. Neither can Art be defined as classic, modern, romantic, impressionist, sacred or secular. The art with which these words are associated is spelt with a small "a." It is equivalent to idiom. Every artist creates an idiom; or rather, is granted one for himself.

The proportion of artists is no greater among musicians, painters, sculptors, preachers and actors than among other sections of the world's workers. The difference is mainly one of talent—the artist's capacity for expressing spiritual emotion by means of the acquired arts.

Did Nature bestow talent where Art endows spiritual insight, every village might build a Valhalla to perpetuate the memories of its great men. Providence has ordained otherwise, and "untalented" artists are happily content to find expression in the every day circumstance of life—in beautiful deeds, those unrecorded works of art.

There is no need to emphasise the fact that Art is supremely indifferent to opportunity, she bestows her priceless gifts on talented and untalented alike. Or does she sometimes respond to the law of compensation?

Many who aspire and are gifted, prove only mediocre in Art. Talents are often a source of self-deception.

We are all acquainted with the meteoric virtuoso who interprets the piano, and not the music; the eloquent preacher who talks so much, and says so little; the actor, faultless in stage-craft, who never rises higher than the emotional altitude of the gentle Hodge.

An eye for colour, or an ear for sound, may imply nothing more than a desire to satisfy these senses. Take for example certain modern composers, who think they have (when Bach is conveniently forgotten) discovered new tonal effects, and seek to satiate the ear with unending meaningless sequences of them. Contrast these sensuous progressions with the truth-inspired C major chord of Beethoven!

THE ARTIST

It is true there can be no virtue in an isolated chord, and all physical effects are sensuous in degree, but it is equally true there can be no expression, however sensuous, with which Art may not coalesce and convey her message.

* * * * *

In imagination, I see my Artist-Ideal as an old-time charioteer. He stands erect and fearless, holding the reins of his two fast-flying steeds. These, unlike as white and black and yet alike, keep step with step in perfect rhythmic tread under the guiding hand of their master. The goal towards which he strives is for ever receding on the horizon.

I revere him for his faith and courage. He pursues a vision, and realises Life, his destiny, in the pursuit.

THE ARTIST DIMENSION.

WHISTLER expressed an obvious truism when he said that it required an artist to understand the works of another artist. The same law requires that the perceptive powers of the responsive artist be at least of the same magnitude as the conceptive powers of the creative artist to respond fully and express a just appreciation of his works.

The fact that artists respond only to the degree of their dimension is nowhere more evidenced than in the case of re-creative artists—musical instrumentalists especially. Speaking of those who may be counted in the front rank, we find the inequalities in talent made more or less even, as a result of greater perseverance displayed by the lesser gifted ones. Because of this levelling-up in the facilities for expression, our modern pianoforte and violin virtuosi afford excellent opportunities to responsive artists (their appreciative listeners) for estimating them at their Art-dimension.

It is an undeniable proof of the greatness of genius, when we find only few of the re-creative artists of every generation able to interpret in the same dimension. Those of my readers who have heard D'Albert's and Kreisler's Beethoven, Ysäye's Bach, or Pugno's Mozart, and have *understood*, will not require to be told that the genius of these composers, in their interpretative dimension, is something undreamt of in the minds of the multitude of players. Schumann and Chopin have a larger number of intelligent interpreters. Descending the scale we find most of the pianists give good accounts of Liszt, and every violin virtuoso plays Paganini.

The player who realises the limit of his spiritual understanding in Paganini, and that diminutive artist whose emotional response reaches its culminating point with the sentiment uttered in a "morceau de salon," can only perceive—granted the senses are sufficiently cultured to respond—the same limited Art-dimension in the works of Bach or Beethoven.

THE ARTIST DIMENSION

I am not overlooking the fact that temperaments and tastes differ. Individual preferences are nothing more than physical sense-attractions towards certain natural objects or Art-idioms. It matters not whether truth be perceived in a fellow-being, in the perfume of flowers, or in a symphony. We are concerned here with the artist's capacity for spiritual perception, not physical preference. The only thing that really matters is his capacity for discerning truth in the facts of his choice. One exclaims, as he views a glorious landscape, "How awfully jolly!" Another, seeing a rose in a moon-lit garden, must needs crystallise his emotions in a sonnet.

NOTES OR MUSIC!

THE study of the theory of music implies nothing more than a visual and aural acquaintance of a mathematical code, and yet it may be doubted whether in any art has the acquired knowledge of code supplied so many obstacles to students as in music. Heretical and even paradoxical as it may sound, no art requires less knowledge of theoretic fact. A child responds to music before it is able to walk, and later on may acquire in a few months all the requisite knowledge for its performance.

Wagner especially saw the danger of teaching responsive artists these mechanical theories, and the creeds which go with them (for music, in common with other arts, has her schools and fierce antagonisms). He continually entreated theoretic musicians to keep their knowledge to themselves. He foresaw (and it was a nightmare in his imagination) the possibility of the people's intellects running to fact, or, to use a metaphor, he saw them knocking their heads against brick walls, and, by so doing, unconsciously emulating the mentally suicidal habits of the critics of his day.

The mischief was done when it was found necessary to invent a code whereby *music* could be *seen*. If composers could have visualized their sound-impressions, they would have stated them in colour and outline, and Michael Angelo and Raphael would have found their rivals in Bach and Beethoven. This talent was, however, denied the musician, and he perforce turned for assistance to the mathematician, with the consequent result that music as seen by the eye (our most developed sense) presents a most inartistic, not to say chaotic appearance.

Emotional thought is stated by strange meaningless hieroglyphics, rhythmic pulses and circles by accents, fractions, and bar-lines, here and there are scattered spasmodic hints concerning quantity and quality of tone and speed.

The only semblance of anything artistic are the curved lines of phrasing, and these are often so carelessly drawn as to be worse than useless to the student. It is small wonder the great majority who apply themselves to music fail to translate the mathematical impression the eye receives into even natural aural expression, not to mention Art. The compilers of many theoretic text-books, belabouring the truly awful necessity of "keeping time" (altogether ignoring rhythm), only succeed in further shackling the imagination of the would-be pianist.

We possess no natural sense of time, or its twin relation, sense of pattern. What passes as such is an artificial subterfuge adopted by the player who is either deficient in, or has not been trained to develop, his natural rhythmic sense.

The time-beating pianist is often a worse institution than his companion—the metronome. The click of the metronome is certainly a very mechanical thing, and, what is more, it is in the wrong place! The pulse surely should be the dynamic centre of the swing, but the movement is not without rhythm; which fact the pianist under question has not perceived—he connects his beats with rigid straight lines.

Students in musical form who design their compositions by geometric rule are just as hopelessly employed. It would be more utilitarian were they to concentrate their energies on erecting park fences or tiling the house-tops.

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Long years ago, there lived a man who foolishly imagined that elusive beauty had *existence* in fact. As he wonderingly gazed on its form and symbol, the circle, he became so strangely fascinated that his curiosity impelled him to try and solve its magic secret. Breaking it asunder, and straightening the curved lines, the mystery still eluded him. Unsatisfied, he broke the lines into yet smaller pieces. Then, realizing what he had done, he was filled with bitter remorse, for he had failed to find the secret of the circle, and in the chaos of fragments charm and beauty were no more.

(If the reader will pardon my audacity, I will suggest that my allegory is infinitely better told in the first chapters of Genesis.)

The rhythmic circle is the secret of beautiful forms in Nature and Art. A Mozart minuet, a Strauss symphonic poem, a tree, a flower, a sonnet, are all moulded in their diverse forms by this vital factor.

Art may not be probed by the science of arithmetic; we may piece together the broken fragments and count them, but numbers go from two to four, four to eight, and eight to sixteen, but never return,—parallel lines never meet. For the same reason, time-beating pianists and pattern-weaving composers can never become Art-mediums.

THE PIANIST'S EDUCATION.

THE pianist's education implies a practical knowledge of the musical code, a cultivated sense of hearing, and a perfection of technique which pre-supposes long years of persistent practice. Reference has already been made to the study of the theory of music, and particularly to the danger of interpreting the printed statement of notes literally.

The culture of the musician's aural sense affords a more interesting subject. It is also one concerning which the uninitiated in Art are apt to form wrong impressions. The inherited senses of pitch and tone-colour—faculties which the musician shares with all who respond to music—are not of themselves musical talents: just as one man may have a perfect sense of sight and see only the outline and colour of a painting, another may possess an absolute sense of pitch and an unerring perception of tone-colour, yet be utterly incapable of discerning the poetry of melody and the music of symphonious sounds.

An ear for music combines with the capacity for reading the prose of notes an imagination which enables an artist—be he performer or listener—to respond to the poetic utterance of the creative musician. The pianist will find ample opportunity for cultivating his poetic sense of hearing, not only while playing, but also in study away from his instrument. The intrinsic advantage of this silent practice has always been emphasized by the greatest masters. Unfortunately, in these days, when the craze for technique is the paramount interest, it is a very neglected art.*

The standard of modern virtuosity undoubtedly demands of any who would enter the lists years of ardent and

* I am indebted to my friend Mr. Robert J. Buckley for the following interesting reminiscence which adds to the significance of these theories: "On one occasion calling on Anton Rubinstein (whom I knew very well), I found him sitting in an arm-chair surrounded by a heap of music. He said: 'I am having a final rehearsal for to-night's recital,' and added: 'I like to look over the music for two hours, to fill my mind with it and then walk straight to the platform and give it out, red-hot.' Perhaps this was the secret of his wonderful magic."

unremitting study. This does not necessarily imply that the musical talents need remain idle meanwhile. On the contrary, there is no reason why a musical interest should not be associated with finger drill, and technical exercises made to serve a dual purpose.

Judging from many of the systems which to-day are claiming the interest of students, one is driven to the painful conclusion that, for many, pianoforte practice has degenerated into mere muscle exercise and finger gymnastics. It is pitiable to see how readily students devote themselves to such ideals, and become the slaves of *adopted* methods. Is it to be wondered at that musical intelligence and imagination become atrophied in this tragedy and tyranny of technics?

The time has certainly come to protest against this cult of technique *as* technique. Too much brain has already run to muscle and keyboard, and systems which serve no other purpose need not amplification but annihilation.

The best "methods" on the art of pianoforte playing have never been published. There exists—after a few scientific facts have been stated—the obvious difficulty of adapting one's own peculiar methods to the individual requirements—physical, temperamental, and interpretative—of others.

The monstrous theory (so sedulously advocated by professors of methods, who foolishly imagine that the spread of their own peculiar idiosyncrasies will not only prove a panacea to all the technical troubles of pianists, but also afford them an easy route to the heights of Parnassus) that a method of touch must be grafted on to the hands of a player, before he can rightly interpret music, is as false as its practice is fatal to individual utterance.

No great artist ever yet preached a method. It is usually left to some enthusiastic, but utterly mistaken disciples to devote themselves to this superfluous occupation. A master's pupils often prove the worst advocates of their teacher's art.

There is, happily, no need for systems which reduce the pianist's art to the level of the modern interpretation of physical culture. The grafting process must go, together

with all mechanical drill, and students must be taught to train their own senses of touch and to develop styles which harmonize with their peculiar idioms.

Pianoforte playing, not being a natural art, necessarily requires a certain amount of scientific application, and some principles must be ingrained in the minds and fingers of students before they are free to devote their attention to musical studies. Just how long this takes depends on the aptitude of the pupil. Professor James, the eminent psychologist, states that six weeks of disciplined effort suffice to form habits of any practice.

When correct pianistic habits have been formed, fingers should be relegated to the sub-conscious mind and interest centred in musical effects.

Every study must be rhythmically conceived. Even the preliminary technical ones (finger-drill exercises, for example) may be practised to the rhythmic swing of a simple cradle-song, with endless variety of tone-colour. By so doing the student will transform the nerve-shattering, hum-drum note repetitions into monotone melodies. Scales and arpeggios afford unlimited scope for the play of the imagination. Eventually, when the student has sufficiently developed his natural rhythmic sense, he may learn to hold the perfect balance of the ebb and flow movement, the irregular curvature of which is as beautifully delineated as a Pachmannesque conception of a Chopin melody.

As Leschetizky often remarks, "Every pianist acquires a brilliant technique nowadays, but how few cultivate a charm in applying it!" Wherein lies the secret of this charm? I cannot answer this question any more than I can explain the mystery of the rhythmic circle. But this I know, there can be no charm without rhythm.

We cannot all become Paderewskis and Pugnos, but we may all cultivate the charm of natural expression.

THE ARTIST'S EDUCATION.

IT is Leschetizky's theory that every pianist should devote one half of his time to study *away* from his instrument.

I well remember the surprise I experienced when I first played to the Professor. I came to him after finishing a course of studies at one of the German Conservatoires, where I had been subjected to the "thorough grounding" prescribed in a very rigid curriculum. After hearing me play, he actually named the school in which I had been taught. His comments on the hopeless futility of pedantic systems which made musicians of artists instead of artists of musicians were expressed in his most ironic vein. He dilated on the evils attendant on the "hard-work" routine to which he rightly suspected I had been exposed, and made some caustic references to pianoforte systems which inflicted on students the herculean task of hammering their way through innumerable studies—Clementi, Cramer, Czerny, Bertini, Kalkbrenner, Moscheles, Tausig, Plaidy, Kullak, Heller, Kessler, Henselt—in the hope that in years to come the fingers would be prepared to play Chopin Ballads and Beethoven Sonatas!

Finally, he advised me to reduce my practising hours by one-half, gave me introductions to a few select artist-musicians, and suggested a varied and interesting chapter of experiences calculated to widen my artistic horizon.

I relate this episode from a sheaf of student memories that it may throw a new light on Professor Leschetizky's system of teaching. It is a strange irony of fate which has caused the name of this great artist to be chiefly associated with a mere "pianoforte method." During the three years I studied with the master he referred to his "method" but once, when he confessed to having acquired it from his own teacher Czerny!

The subject of the *artist's* education as distinct from that of the *pianist's* is, to my mind, as engrossing as its consideration is urgent. I agree with the teachings of the psychologists, who tell us that the system which insists on overcrowding the memory with nothing but mechanical facts (as though mind were granted man for that sole purpose) is "building castles in the air, the toppled ruins of which are to be met at every

turn."* Such accumulations of academic facts when mentally assimilated may have their value. They more often serve to imprison intellect, and shut out Art.

True culture aims at the development of the creative idiom as well as the re-creative faculties of the artist. Unfortunately, education as understood at the present day concerns itself chiefly with the latter, and it is left to haphazard circumstance to provide the former. It supplies the tools wherewith to construct and neglects to cultivate the material with which to build. It has been compared to putting the cart before the horse. Is it not rather attempting to do without a motive power altogether—a system of means having no end? I suggest that such systems of education account largely for the ascendancy of the "brilliant technician" over the "cultured artist" among present day musicians; composers, and virtuosi.

The artist is he who has learnt to act and respond with that spontaneity which comes of close intimacy between body and mind. Not mere technique, nor intellect even, but the harmony and unity of his whole being should be the ideal of the artist, and sense-culture provides, through self-expression, the means to this end.

Needless to say the pianist's sense-training does not differ from that of other artists. It requires the healthy natural exercise of all his faculties. He must begin, at least in imagination, by breaking down those barriers to Art, all that is artificial in civilization and much that is conventional in thought. He must attune his idiom to Nature, and train his senses to discern and respond to beauty and to act no longer as mechanical reflectors of physical objects.

Unconsciously acquired impressions count more in the development of the artist than scholastic education, a sufficient reason in itself for warranting the pursuit of these artist-ideals.

To quote Debussy, "It would profit a musician more to watch a sunrise than listen to a performance of the Pastoral Symphony." Apart altogether from the value of such impressions, or, to call them by their more significant name, experiences, in providing the material for his art, the musician may learn much from Nature that will assist him to give form to his Art-perceptions.

* Dr. C. W. Saleeby.

The ancient Greeks, discerning poetry in the rhythmic movement of trees swaying in the breeze, learnt to dance with a grace unknown in these days.

Movement is the life of music. Cannot the musician learn similar lessons, and apply them to his own Art?

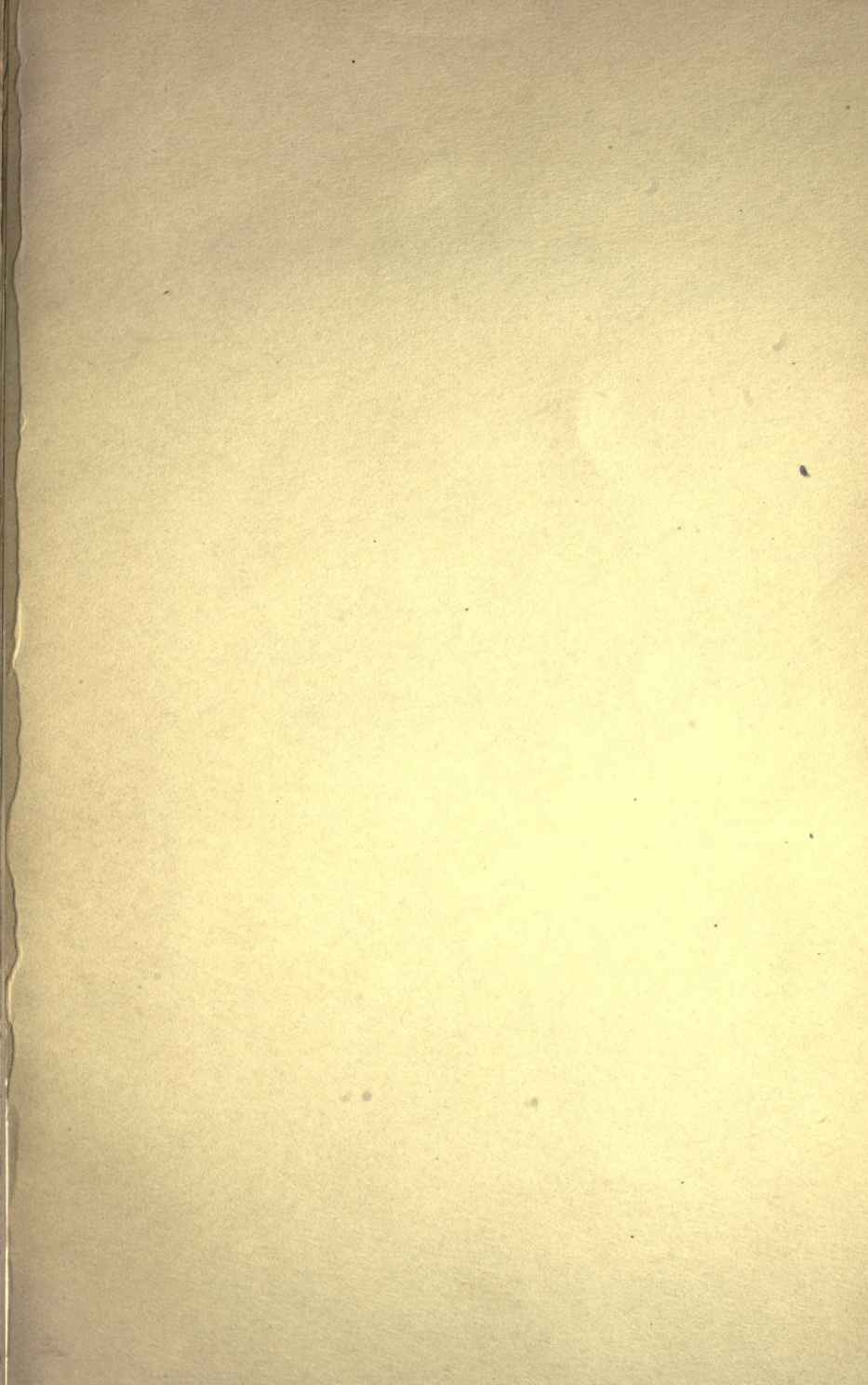
CONCLUSION.

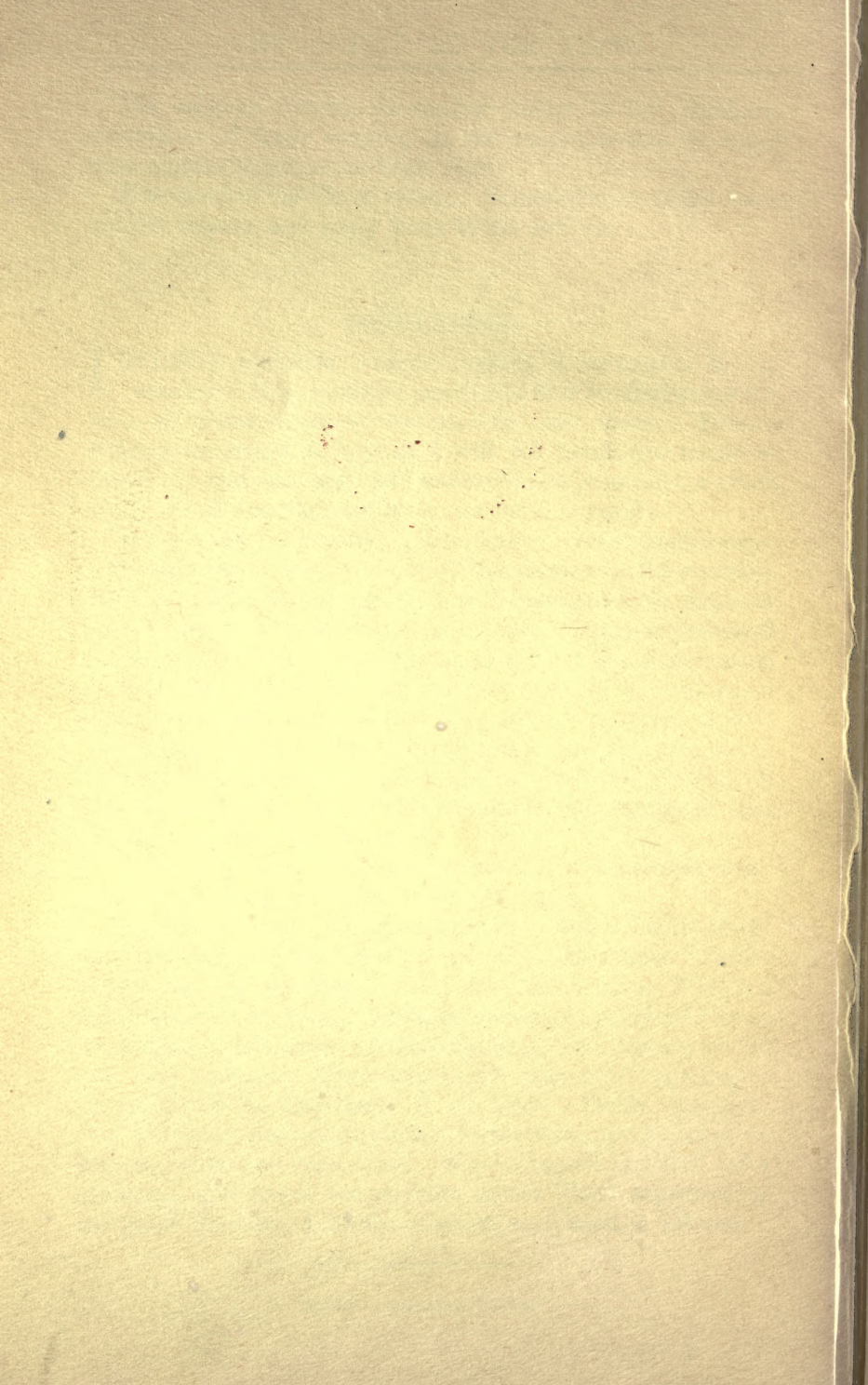
I CANNOT conclude without making a confession to my readers. It is, perhaps, inevitable that in shattering the idols of others we create new ones in their stead. Without turning iconoclast to myself, I will yet break the mould in which my idol was cast, and endeavour to preserve the spirit of my conviction, and not its limitation in a creed.

In my quest for Beauty, I, also, have confused appearances with realities and have confounded the means with the message. My senses have been captivated by the inexpressible charm of the ebb and flow of rhythmic movement. I have experienced the rapture of that expectant moment when the imagination is held for a space on the highest crest of the waves of emotional sound, where phrase of dying melody gives birth to succeeding phrase. The dusk of sunset and the twilight of sunrise, the cadence of Life's ending, and the promise of Death's awakening, are in this wondrous communion of that which is and that which is to be.

The dawn of this truth has passed to its inevitable close, and already I am conscious of a newer light.

Von Bülow's mind was but faintly illumined when he stated that the Gospel of St. John should have commenced "In the beginning was Rhythm." Our familiar version, "In the beginning was the Word" (meaning message), is indeed Divine inspiration. Let none confound Rhythm with Beauty, or Art with the Message. The microcosmic unit, man, experiences Truth before he imprisons it in form. Deeds, Religion, Music, Poetry, and all rhythmic forms were necessitated in its conception and expression. Nature herself is one of Art's mediums, and Art is the medium of the Word, expressed in the great Universe of Deeds, of which our planet is but one.





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The artist at the piano

Music

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