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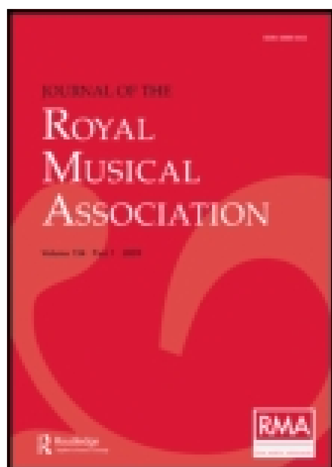

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Towry Piper
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MARCH 14, 1899.

SIR JOHN STAINER, M.A., D.C.L., MUS.D., OXON.,
PRESIDENT,

IN THE CHAIR.

VIOLINS AND VIOLIN MANUFACTURE FROM THE DEATH OF STRADIVARI TO THE PRESENT TIME.

BY TOWRY PIPER.

THERE is probably no department of human industry wherein the predominating influence of a master hand has been more forcibly and continuously displayed than in the case of Antonio Stradivari; and although my remarks are chiefly intended to be directed to the period subsequent to his death, it may nevertheless be well to preface them with one or two observations concerning this extraordinary man and his work.

Save for the lengthened neck and bass-bar, the violin as made to-day, is to all intents and purposes precisely the same in all important details of measurement and construction as when he rested from his labours in 1737; and it has long been recognised that any serious deviation from his teachings results in signal failure.

As a consequence, however, of the immense popularity of the instrument, and the great size of the public buildings in which it is daily used by soloists, attempts have been made, and still are made, to obtain increased volume of tone. To do this to the extent aimed at, without sacrificing quality, would seem to be not humanly possible, inasmuch as it involves enlarging in some way the vibrating surfaces, and consequently the contained air mass.

Now and again we meet with a Guarneri—of the larger pattern—*e.g.*, the "Le Duc," or a Maggini, which seems to fulfil the required conditions; but these are exceptions, and

I do not think it can be seriously maintained that however charming they may prove for the interpretation, in large rooms, of some classes of music, they possess that perfect adaptability for the expression (as I think Dr. Joachim has happily put it) of every shade of human feeling which is the characteristic of the perfect Strad.

I am conscious that there is nothing specially novel in the opinions herein expressed, but it is to be regretted that both artists and their audiences are so slow to accept and apply an indubitable fact; namely that the violin, as a solo instrument, was never designed, nor if it is to retain its commanding qualities is it likely that it can ever be constructed, to give forth the great volume of sound which is requisite to adequately fill many of the vast concert halls which have sprung into existence.

Let us begin then, with the assumption that in the work of Stradivari at his best we have the *summum bonum* of all that has been attained in violin construction, and proceed to consider what has been done, and is being done since he laid down the tools.

Before doing so however, I would be permitted to premise that I use the expression "at his best" advisedly, for I imagine there are few violinists professing an acquaintance with Italian work who have not discovered that there are perfectly authentic specimens of Stradivari extant, which in point of tone fail to satisfy the requirements of an accomplished public performer.

The cause of this is frequently traceable to ill-usage, accident, or the inevitable ravages of time, but this is not always the case, and instances are by no means wanting where the deficiency is clearly due to incorrect proportions. This is more frequently found in the larger instruments than in the violins, but I have in my mind's eye various examples from which I select one of the most prominent known to me, namely, a very handsome violin measuring about 14¼ inches in length, and dated, if I remember rightly, 1701. In this instrument—which is not of the pattern known as the Long Strad, but is of about the usual width—the sides are shallow and were no doubt purposely so made, with a view to counterbalance the unusual superficial area. But although the violin is in a very perfect state, its want of depth has obviously had a most unsatisfactory effect upon both volume and quality of tone. In some of the violoncellos it has been found necessary to heighten the ribs in order to get anything like decent results. Theoretically, these should be proportioned to the height of the model, but as a matter of experience it will generally be found that the most sonorous and most satisfying instruments for public use have what dealers term "extra deep ribs." The depth, I may observe

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for the benefit of those who have not studied the question, is to be found in the lower bouts. There is not generally much difference in the depth measurements of the violins of the best makers at the upper bouts.

Most of us will recollect Charles Reade's aphorism that violins are bought by the eye, and not by the ear, and though this is probably less true nowadays than when it was first put forward, its deep significance nevertheless still obtains to a much greater extent, even amongst musicians, than would be generally supposed.

For reasons which are sufficiently apparent, tone is the very last factor which enters into the calculations of the average dealer. Given a specimen in fine, or seemingly fine preservation, and the fiddle—to adopt a well-known commercial phrase—will sell itself. I must apologise for lapsing into what may be thought a rather lengthy digression, and will proceed with the consideration, principally, of the work of *post* Stradivarian makers.

A few words must be devoted in passing to the famous Joseph Guarneri. In spite of prolonged research, the exact date of his death has not yet been satisfactorily ascertained, but it is generally believed to have occurred in or about the year 1745, or about seven years after that of Stradivari.

Of his work there is little to be added to what has already appeared in print in various books and pamphlets. The legends of "prison Josephs" may be said to rest upon no solid foundation in fact. His most highly finished fiddles usually measure about 13⅞ inches in length, and are therefore slightly shorter than the ordinary full-sized Strad. It is said that he never made a violoncello; though with regard to at least one instrument of this class, whose parentage was uncertain, I have heard the statement questioned by an authority of very high eminence. In the case of the violins, the larger pattern, among which class may be mentioned as notable examples—Paganini's, the "Le Duc," and the beautiful specimen used in later years by the late J. T. Carrodus—is about 14 inches long, and the sides are of good depth. The tone of those of smaller size is brilliant and beautiful enough, and in the larger we meet with the great sonority for which this maker is famous, but the sympathetic quality is less pronounced than in the works of several other makers, and it seems to be pretty generally conceded that the works of the great Joseph are less popular to-day than was the case some years ago.

Though there is little room for doubt that Stradivari's sons Francesco and Omobono—particularly the former—had an appreciable share in the making of many of his later instruments, those few of their admitted works to be met with seem to present points of divergence in detail from

their father's, which are much more strongly marked than in examples by other Italians who claim, or are acknowledged, to have come under the great master's immediate supervision and influence.

I have never to my knowledge, during the many years I have been interested in the subject, met with an authenticated "Omobono Stradivari," and my acquaintance with specimens by Francesco is limited to three only.

In these there are many features which forcibly suggest the hand of Carlo Bergonzi, and it is far from improbable that he was to some extent concerned in their construction.

Of the great Carlo much has been written. His instruments are scarce indeed, but amongst them will be found some which—from the artistic point of view at any rate—come very far short of the high standard of excellence usually associated with his productions.

The violins are as a rule a shade under size, and contrary to what is generally supposed, a fair number—considering their rarity—are extant which exhibit a very pronounced arching.

It has been customary to assign to the other members of the Bergonzi family a very subordinate place in the ranks of fiddle makers, but I should strongly counsel anyone who has the opportunity of securing an instrument by any of them at a reasonable figure, to at all events accord it a fair trial before dismissing it as unworthy of attention.

The corners of Michael Angelo Bergonzi's violins—so sharply criticised by Charles Reade— are certainly fearful and wonderful to behold, but they are often sound serviceable instruments for all that, and I have met with examples the tone of which was quite remarkable. I have also seen a few by the despised Zosimo Bergonzi, the last maker of the family, which in point of tone were excellent.

To Montagnana I can only devote a very brief sentence. His basses are justly extolled, but the violins are uncommon, and some of them, like the works of Santo Serafino, another Venetian, have such a strong suspicion of German influence in the design and *ff*'s that it is difficult to believe he was really a pupil of Stradivari. So far as I am aware he did not survive his reputed master many years.

Violin making, like the somewhat obsolete practice of sheep-stealing, may be said to be hereditary ; or colloquially, to "run in families," and the merest tyro will readily call to mind instances, from the time of the earlier Amati onwards, where the beautiful craft has been handed down from father to son through several generations.

In this connection, the most notable family in point of numbers is that of Gagliano, whose descendants may still be found in Naples engaged, not in the manufacture of

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instruments, but of musical strings. Another prolific race of makers—of whom more anon—is that of Guadagnini.

I wonder how many of us realise that in this latter family we have representatives still at work, whose ancestors claim —and their claims are not seriously disputed—to have learned their art under the eye and guidance of the great Antonio?

Reverting to the Gagliani, it is probable that there are in the possession of orchestral and professional players, all over Europe, more useful bowed instruments by one or other of the name than can be credited to any other family of makers. True, many of these are not altogether pleasing to the eye, but I cannot help thinking that some of the abuse which has been so lavishly bestowed upon the work of the later generations is unduly severe. Even in these days of preposterous prices, a Gagliano may not unfrequently be had for quite a modest figure, and amongst them will be found large numbers of all round good fiddles.

It would be wearisome, besides being foreign to my purpose, to attempt to criticise their works in detail, but I may observe that in general they present points of marked similarity in the choice of material, and are therefore pretty readily recognisable, even by a comparatively inexperienced eye.

The name of Guadagnini is indeed one to conjure with nowadays. Many of us may recollect the days, not so very long since, when the instruments of J. B. Guadagnini were obtainable for £60 to £80; but their sterling merits have increased their value during the past decade by three and four-fold. Lorenzo, the first maker of "the tribe," as one writer contemptuously calls them, does not appear to have been a prolific workman, and his authentic productions are not often met with, but those best qualified to judge are unanimous in according him a foremost place amongst *post* Stradivarian makers.

If I were asked what individual luthier since the time of Stradivari has produced the greatest number of instruments of the first rank, I should unhesitatingly point to J. B. Guadagnini. A great deal of misconception as to this remarkable man has prevailed amongst text-writers, and even Mr. E. J. Payne—an extremely accurate and experienced observer—has asserted, in Grove's Dictionary, that there were two individuals of this particular name. From information derived from living members of the family, and more especially from the manuscript of Count Cozio di Salabue, recently published in Signor Sacchi's Biography of the Count, it seems abundantly clear that there was but one J. B. Guadagnini, who was born—most probably in Cremona—in 1711, and died at Turin in 1786.

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Like that mysterious personality, and gifted maker, Vincenzo Panormo, he seems to have been something of a bird of passage. He worked for many years in Piacenza, Milan, Parma, and Turin, from which last mentioned city some of his best, though not always most highly finished productions are dated. Amongst these will be found several of those described by Mr. Payne as "unpleasantly high coloured." The red varnish with which they are covered is brilliant in the extreme, and may perhaps be unpleasing to some eyes, but to those who are acquainted with the work put forth by J. B. Guadagnini during the last fifteen years of his life, the statement made in 1823 by Count Cozio, that the violins, tenors, and basses made between the years 1773 and 1776 could "very well for tone and power bear comparison with any instrument of the best Cremonese Masters," will not seem extravagant praise.

Instruments by the later Guadagninis are less known, though almost all may be said to possess excellent tonal qualities.

I have met with a few violins by Gaetano Guadagnini, dating somewhere about 1820, which in point of finish and workmanship were fully up to the standard of his illustrious father.

It will be observed that the bulk of my observations hitherto, has been directed solely to the Italian followers of Stradivari, and as my reason for this may perhaps be questioned by some, I may as well here state that, amongst earlier French makers, scarcely any are to be found, with perhaps the exception of De Comble, whose work is of sufficient merit to warrant special mention in a paper like the present.

Turning to English makers, it is well known that in the last century they—almost to a man—copied Amati, or Stainer, or produced a kind of hybrid instrument, partaking of both these models. Had they been better advised in their choice of design, our stock of first rate instruments would have been materially increased. The same remark applies to Germany.

With regard to Italy, again, there are numbers of followers of Stradivari, dating from about 1750 to 1800, or later, whose instruments command fair prices, but whom if I were to attempt even to enumerate, my paper would amount to little more than a dry catalogue of names. However, as I desire to devote some space to the consideration of the work of various makers of this century, and to touch upon the question of violin manufacture as carried on at the present day, the only other Italian luthier of the last century to whom I shall make passing allusion is Storioni.

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His fiddles are stated to be in great demand in Italy, and are in favour with many orchestral players in this country.

They are not all built upon the lines of Joseph Guarneri, as is generally supposed, and examples which he has produced in rather a rough and free imitation of the grand Amati model, are to be met with.

Perhaps the best thing Storioni did was to afford some elementary instruction to Pressenda, whose name, all but unknown in England fifteen or twenty years ago, is now familiar to everyone who takes an interest in the violin.

After what is usually known as the decadence of Italian violin manufacture, which may approximately be placed at about the end of the eighteenth century, it became necessary for almost anyone aspiring to a knowledge of the luthier's art, to obtain it in France. In fact, there are surprisingly few modern makers of any solid repute—no matter what their nationality—whose work does not exhibit the French influence in a more or less marked degree, and this fact has been productive of a good deal of confusion in classification, and difference of opinion amongst experts, during past years, a state of things which is happily less frequent nowadays, owing to the progress of information on the subject.

Pressenda, as we know, obtained some at least of his inspiration from the French, but he is notwithstanding, in all probability, the most original maker of this century, though in the main he never departed very much from the lines of Stradivari. His instruments built upon what is known to dealers as his best model are of massive design. The varnish varies somewhat in degree of hardness, though less in colour, and the violins are beyond all question the best since the days of Lupot.

His pupil Rocca has occasionally produced works which closely approach his in point of merit, but it is to be regretted that he is also responsible—so far at least as his name goes—for some very sorry rubbish, which is entitled to no more consideration than the common French copies, turned out from the Mirecourt factories.

It is said—and the character of the work tends to confirm the statement—that he in later years bought cheap French violins in the white, which he varnished and finished with his own hand.

Another pupil of Pressenda, whose work is at times of first rate order and scarcely distinguishable from that of his master, is Alexander d'Espine; but few of his violins sail under their proper colours, the majority having been duly labelled "Pressenda."

To France, as previously suggested, must be accredited the merit of keeping alive—so far as that difficult feat may be said to have been accomplished—the traditions of the Italian

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School, since the Decadence. Beginning with the renowned Nicholas Lupot, we have a practically unbroken succession of stringed instrument makers who have carried out, with more or less fidelity, the Stradivarian ideal.

Of Lupot it may safely be said that amongst French makers he is like "Eclipse," first, and the rest are nowhere. As a copyist, distinguishing him in that designation from a mere plausible imitator, he had but one rival in his day, and that was Vincenzo Panormo, the Sicilian, of whose work it is superfluous to say more than has been already so well expressed in the pages of Mr. Hart's book.

Passing by Aldric; the Gands; Pique; the Bernadels; Silvestre; the Chanots; and other names deservedly in high repute, we come to one which some years ago put all other moderns into the shade—I refer of course to J. B. Vuillaume.

Most of us know, from "Vidal" and other authorities, something of the—to express it mildly—dubious methods which he adopted, for the disposal, amongst a not too discerning public, of his clever imitations of the old masters. Some of us, at least, are well aware that their appearance of maturity was obtained by thinning out the wood, and the use of acids, or some such reprehensible artifice. Not a few of the older orchestral players could tell us what has been the effect of such treatment upon these specious "modern antiques"; and it is a matter of common knowledge, extraordinary though it may seem to us to-day, that the Jury which awarded Vuillaume the medal at the Exhibition of 1851, which so largely conduced to his popularity in England, contained not a single member who could even play the violin decently, or had any pretensions to special knowledge of its history and construction.

Viewing the man and his work in the most dispassionate light which is possible to a lover of the instrument, one can only express the deepest regret that so consummate an artist as Vuillaume unquestionably was, should so frequently have prostituted his magnificent talents for the mere purpose of money-getting.

He has left us many most beautiful samples of the lute maker's art, but his workshop at one time poured forth—I think I am within the mark in saying—*hundreds* of violins, not necessarily his own handiwork, which are wearisome in their resemblance to one another, and which, considered as musical instruments, are of no higher intrinsic value than such as can be obtained in the music shops for two or three pounds.

To Vuillaume we may consider ourselves largely indebted for the type of instruments known to the trade as "Frenchy," which continue to be made in shoals in modern factories on the Continent.

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They are not all made up to resemble old violins. On the contrary, I should say the majority of those now made are sent out in all the panoply of brand new pegs and fittings, and above all a complete and resplendent coat of varnish.

Vuillaume not infrequently exaggerated the salient features of the originals he copied, and his followers may be said, in this respect, to have out-Vuillaumed Vuillaume, often to a ludicrous extent. Copies of Maggini generally have an extra turn in the scroll, instead of one less than the usual number. Guarneri copies are graced with Gothic *ff*'s which are well nigh as long as the fiddle itself; and for a very modest sum we can procure a reproduction of the "Messie Strad," with the characteristic sharp edges so pronounced as to make it barely safe to handle them, for fear of cutting oneself.

How far it is legitimate to give to a new violin the exact appearance of wear and age of an old one, is a question I leave to casuists to determine.

John Lott, and the Fendts, in England, had the reputation, fifty or sixty years ago, of being most expert in this particular branch of industry; and Vuillaume is usually held to have been unapproached for verisimilitude, both before his day and since; but I think I can readily convince anyone who doubts it that without resorting to baking, or acids, or any such deleterious processes, it is possible to imitate a fine Cremona fiddle with such exactness that nothing short of careful examination, on the part of an expert, can detect the difference.

The copies I am about to show you, alongside of the originals, are the productions of a living Englishman. Their inner consciousness is untampered with; they have plenty of sound timber in them; and there is nothing in their construction, so far as can be determined, which should hinder them—in the hands of a capable executant—from rivalling their prototypes, when time and use shall have done their work.

The first I shall produce is the famous D'Egville "Joseph," one of the most beautiful specimens known of the master's more finished work.

Here is the copy which only a few weeks ago deceived a very well known dealer in a sufficiently ludicrous manner. The charming Stradivari shown is dated 1699. I produce the copy.

I also exhibit another well known Guarneri violin, which was the favourite instrument of one, who in fiddle matters, was my "guide, philosopher, and friend." I refer to the late George Hart, the most trustworthy expert, and writer on the violin, that Europe has seen.

Here is the copy which is a more exact reproduction in appearance than in the case of the D'Egville. I have

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referred more than once to the "Le Duc" Joseph, and am fortunately able to show it. As so much time has been devoted to Vuillaume, it may prove not uninteresting if I endeavour to exhibit him at his best, and about his worst. It will hardly require a very practised eye to discover the difference between the violins, the one being a work of art in every sense of the term, while to the other we can only apply a designation familiar to picture dealers, and dub it a "pot boiler." For the loan of the Strad I am indebted to Mr. Tate of Dulwich. All the other instruments have been placed at my disposal by Mr. Hart of Wardour Street.

There are probably few of us who have not, times out of number, heard the question—"Are good violins still made, or is the art altogether lost?" This is of paramount importance, because—let who will gainsay it—although the process be slow and protracted, it is certain that old violins in constant use do eventually become worn out.

Many—I might almost say the majority—of artists know this well enough, and as some hours' daily practice is with them a necessity, they use for that purpose a modern instrument, reserving their cherished "Cremona" for their own amusement, and for the public.

A writer of some little reputation—who ought to have known better—misapplied this fact a while ago, in a way which argues either a certain amount of ingenuity, or a vast deal of ignorance.

He was trying to impress upon his interviewer that the preference for old instruments was, as he expressed it, "a foolish fetish," and, by way of emphasis, he is reported to have said that many public performers carried Strads about with them, but played on new fiddles! Without carrying absurdity to such an extreme as this, I think that the question "Are good violins still made," may unhesitatingly be answered in the affirmative.

In consequence of the spread of musical education, and the vast array of students who aspire to become violinists, the demand for good violins, which the existing number of old ones is wholly inadequate to supply, has become so great that it is possible for a skilled and conscientious maker to obtain something like reasonable remuneration for his labours. Thirty or forty years ago only a very favoured few could hope to do this, but to-day we have, both in England and abroad, quite a respectable number of violin makers, whose productions are well worthy the attention of either artist or amateur, and who command prices accordingly.

I do not of course include in this category the wholesale manufacturers of Mirecourt, Mark Neukirchen, and Mittenwald, whose fiddles, so called, are fashioned and put together like common watches, by several different workmen, though

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now and then one may by chance have the good fortune to light upon a tolerable instrument, even amongst these.

Things sublunary have not yet reached that stage of perfection when we can hope to successfully rival Stradivari, *ad infinitum*, by a series of mechanical processes, such as was said to exist in Chicago, for the manufacture of sausages, where the pig walked in at one end of the machine, and shortly afterwards emerged from the other, disintegrated and ready for the cook.

If any of us is sanguine enough to hope that such a time may arrive, I would reply in the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes—

> But when you see that blessed day,
> Then order your ascension robe.

I think that with the majority of us who wish to hold a reputation for sound judgment amongst our fellows, the theory that the much debated Cremona varnish was responsible for the super-excellence of the productions of that city, has died a natural death.

Some there may be, even amongst educated observers, who still cling to it with the tenacity and persistence of the orthodox churchman, who will digest the whole XXXIX. Articles, or as Theodore Hook put it, XL. if need be. Moreover from the artistic standpoint, it must be conceded that the lustrous beauty of "the real thing," as it is called, has never been compassed by latter-day makers, and it may be that it never will be again. But, on the other hand, we are face to face with the facts that, excellent varnishes have been compounded within very recent years, and that, there are violins in use to-day, which not only do not boast this particular adornment, but never saw Cremona's workshops, nor felt the warmth of the Italian sun; and which notwithstanding can fairly claim—from the musician's point of view—to rank with some of the most perfect examples which have come down to us. In making these observations I would not be understood to go the lengths to which a vendor of a much advertised class of modern instruments not many years ago committed himself in my presence. He assured me, with due gravity, that varnish was all rubbish; and Strad procured his "at a little shop round the corner"; whereupon I thanked him, and the interview terminated, as I felt I was in the presence of a superior being, to further question whom would be presumptuous. What the progress of philosophical enquiry may produce with regard to violin making in the near, or remote future, we cannot prophesy.

So much has been accomplished of late years in almost every department of scientific research, that he would be a bold man indeed who would deny that it is possible to devise

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a system whereby uniform results may be obtained, but to the present time, in spite of the labours of acousticians, chemists, and a host of others, no better method has been hit upon than to follow with all one's might the teachings of Stradivari, as exemplified in his work.

The elementary laws of sound are known to us more or less imperfectly, but who shall say how much remains to be learned? And until our state of knowledge is in a much more advanced stage of perfection than at present, the best informed and wisest amongst us must own that we are but as children by the sea shore, picking up shells.

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I am sure we are very much indebted to Mr. Piper for the most interesting paper that he has given us. He will be glad, I know, to answer any questions. You must not be modest, because, as we all know, there are very few experts in violins in existence; and I am quite sure that if anybody will ask any question or raise any point for discussion Mr. Piper will be pleased to reply.

A vote of thanks to Mr. Piper was then passed unanimously.

Mr. COBBETT.—Mr. Piper has mentioned that among English violin makers we find good work as far as regards violas and violoncellos, but very little in the way of violins. I think that for evidence of what English makers can do we may also turn to the viola da gamba period. In the seventeenth century England was celebrated for its makers of viole da gamba. Jean Rousseau—not to be confounded with the more famous Jean Jacques Rousseau, who was born somewhat later—speaks under date 1687, in his "Traité de la Viole," of the high estimation in which old English viols were held in France. This should be a happy augury of what may be done here in the future. I should like to say a word with regard to the difficulty of rightly judging the quality of tone in a violin. The question arises, how much of the beautiful tone produced from fine instruments by fine artists is the property of the artist himself and how much is the property of the instrument? and this it is most difficult to appraise. Many an amateur has found to his cost, after purchasing a violin from which he had heard a professor coax the sweetest tones, that it altogether refused to make a similar response to his own touch. In my opinion it is only after playing on a violin oneself, and having a somewhat long experience of it, that one can do full justice to it. The relation of a violin to its player who bends it to his will is

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one of almost psychological interest. For my part, I think the greatest tribute that has been paid to the great Italian violin makers is to be found in the fact that artists elect to use their violins habitually in preference to others; and not that listeners have found the tone produced so beautiful. I am convinced that any one of them would have produced a tone of striking similarity upon any thoroughly well-made violin, and that part of the artist's own individuality is expressed in the quality of tone he produces. From this it follows that there has been some little exaggeration of the merits of violins of the Italian school. They rightly stand first in our estimation, but they do not surpass other makes so much that modern violin makers need be discouraged. Generations have lingered a little too exclusively in the sunset glow of the great Cremonese makers—I must myself plead guilty to the impeachment of "fetish worship" in this connection; but I confess I have modified my opinion very much after hearing several very excellent artists—Achille Rivarde, Theodore Werner, Elderhorst, Miss Alice Liebmann, and others make most excellent effects, both in solo and quartet playing, from instruments made not many stones' throw from where this building stands. I think we shall find there has been no appreciable change in the method of violin making since the time of the great Italian makers, except perhaps in the matter of varnish, and that modern violin makers need not be discouraged. As Mr. Piper says, it is remarkable that after a whole century of evolution so little has been done. In fact, the science of acoustics is still in its infancy. We may look forward, I think, by the end of the twentieth century to some advances in the application of acoustical discoveries to the art of violin making, and those who follow us may find that the evolution of the stringed instrument did not, after all, reach its culminating point even in Stradivarius.

Mr. Piper.—I cordially agree with a great deal that has fallen from the lips of Mr. Cobbett. I quite agree that the personal element is very strong. It is true that very much depends on the player as well as on the instrument. I have heard a man get very tolerable music out of a preserved meat tin, but it was not exactly the tone of a Stradivarius; and do as we will, we cannot do without the proper vehicle for communicating our musical feelings and emotions. With regard to the lute makers, I have little or nothing to say. We read in Mace's "Musick's Monument" and elsewhere that the English were consummate workmen; but they did not produce the best violins, and as my paper is concerned solely with violin makers after the death of Stradivarius, I do not think I am called on to reply to anything that may be said on the subject.

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Mr. SOUTHGATE.—When I saw Mr. Piper exhibiting these instruments, very much the same feeling came over me that I have felt when one goes into a Food Exhibition, where you see a number of bottles of fruits and other preserved comestibles, with wines and so on, and would much like to try them (prudence might hesitate over the wines); it is impossible to judge of them merely by reading the labels on the bottles, or even seeing their contents through the glass. I cannot but think the audience would be very much gratified if we could have some short identical passages played first on the old violins and then on the copies. If you can induce Mr. Cobbett, who is a member of our Council, and I can say a most able violinist, possessing a fine collection of violins of his own and who is a thorough master of the subject of violin manufacture—if you could persuade him to let us hear only a few bars on the one instrument and then on the other, of course playing precisely the same passages on both, it would add considerably to the interest of the paper.

The CHAIRMAN.—Of course there are a great many things to be considered. It depends whether the violins have lately been readjusted or anything of that kind, as it takes some time for them to adapt themselves to their new conditions; and also I daresay Mr. Cobbett himself would be rather shy of attacking a strange instrument, because everyone knows the merits of his own violin, and the evils of his own heart, so that it would be very difficult to do justice in a trial of this kind, in which a performer is asked to exhibit the beauties of instruments which he has never before seen.

Mr. COBBETT.—It is rather nervous work playing on strange instruments, but I am very willing to do my best.

Mr. PIPER.—I think under the circumstances, if you do not mind, as we have got these on loan, it might be safer not to put them to this test.

Mr. COBBETT.—Rumour has it that Alard, when asked to give a performance at Genoa upon the celebrated Guarnerius which lies in a museum there, fearing to play on a strange instrument, took with him to the concert a double case, and by a little juggling contrived to play on his own violin, which was supposed to represent the tone of Paganini's "Joseph."

The CHAIRMAN.—It does not seem to me that acoustics are ever destined to explain the reason for the shape of a Stradivarius. As you know, thousands of people have measured and tried to make formulæ of all descriptions to account for the tone, but they seem to have failed entirely. I have laboured through many of their theories, but have not found that they have ever proved practical.

Mr. PIPER.—I should be very pleased in other circumstances to comply with this very reasonable request, which I

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rather anticipated, and purposely did not bring a bow—first, because most of the instruments have not been played on for some considerable time and are not in proper condition to be heard to advantage; and secondly, because none of those I have shown belong to me. Their value represents several thousands of pounds, and even a scratch might seriously depreciate their commercial value, as that is to some extent dependent upon their unique state of preservation. As I simply borrowed these instruments from an old friend, and from a gentleman well known to me, I do not think it would be fair to experiment with them. It has not been my intention in any way to throw dust in the eyes of the ladies and gentlemen here; I have been interested in violins through twenty-three or twenty-four years. I have merely put forward my views as I have been able to gather them from experience and I should be glad to hear any further criticisms.

Dr. Warriner.—I do not know that I have anything new to say on this point, because my remarks have been practically anticipated by other gentlemen. It would certainly have been an admirable test if we could have had a demonstration of these models and the copies. There is just one thing I may say. So many violin collectors look on violins much as people look on pottery and china and other articles of vertu, as something to appeal to the eye and not to the ear. I am sure Mr. Piper would have been very glad to have obliged if it had been possible. He is really a musician who has a practical acquaintance with his subject, and he knows something about these things in a practical way. I may venture to say he is an able violinist, and well acquainted with the characteristics of violins of all classes, and of course it would have been very interesting to hear with what effect he could handle them; but under these circumstances it can hardly be expected that the violins should be treated in that manner. One point I was a little disappointed that Mr. Piper did not touch on, and that was the question of Maggini. As far as I know the Maggini violins that I have heard have always struck me as being particularly round, fine, and big in tone. The model is supposed to be rather ugly—rather long, and not elegant as Stradivarius'—but to a musical artist the shape of a violin is a very small detail. Mr. Piper has just told me that Maggini made his violins before Stradivarius, and was therefore outside the scope of his paper. Of course tone is the more important criterion of the value of a violin, and I was very glad to hear that point also mooted by Mr. Piper and the other gentlemen. It seems so often that tone is quite a subsidiary idea with most people taking interest in violins. I remember once some years ago riding on an omnibus with a friend, and we were

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passing a shop of some kind. He saw a violin in the window and said: "There is a rather good violin in that window; I shall get down and have a look at it!" I should be glad if Mr. Piper could show us some way in which we could spot a good violin at a mere glance. I must confess that I cannot tell one from the other in the least degree; if he could give us some idea of how to tell a good fiddle from a bad one at a glance I for one should be most grateful.

Mr. Southgate.—Before Mr. Piper replies, might I ask him if he has ever had an opportunity of playing on a violin in the white, and, if so, what is the difference in tone between this and a varnished instrument; and also can he tell us whether there is any practical difference between a violin of which the belly has been cut out and one of the modern cheap instruments in which the belly is shaped by pressure after being soaked in hot water?

Mr. Piper.—Sir John Stainer, ladies and gentlemen, to begin with the question that was asked by the last speaker, I have tried a good many violins in the white. I had one made for me by an excellent maker, who took the medal at the Inventions Exhibition and copied from a long Strad. The tone was very much better before it was varnished than after, and it took a long time to settle down. With regard to the stamped fiddles, there is only a limited number of them produced in this fashion; even the cheaper ones are mostly cut. The result of the stamping process, as might be expected, is a very hollow and harsh tone. Dr. Warriner referred to Maggini. Maggini was dead in 1632, a little more than a hundred years before Stradivarius. He was a pupil of Gaspar di Salo. His violins, as I said at the beginning of my paper, are excellent for certain classes of music, but at close quarters they have a good deal of the nasal tone of a viola. They are generally, but not always, rather large, about 14½ inches long, and have curious sound-holes with the lower turns larger than the upper ones. For grand and serious purposes in a large concert hall, few fiddles can beat a first-rate Maggini.

The Chairman.—If the tone depended so very much on the varnish—if you had a Strad, the tone would disappear as the varnish wore off; but you never heard of a violin being ruined by that.

Mr. Piper.—Some of the finest violins I know have but little varnish left; of course the substratum is still there.

The Chairman.—You think, then, that the instruments have been preserved by the varnishing rather than the varnish?

Mr. Piper.—Yes.

The Chairman.—Is there such a thing in existence as an ancient white fiddle?

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Mr. PIPER.—There is a legend of one by Stradivarius which was afterwards varnished; but I think it is nothing more than a myth. The instrument in question is a bass, not a violin.

The CHAIRMAN.—I knew Dr. Charles Reade, who was a Fellow of my College (Magdalen College, Oxford). I remember his love of music was such that when he came up to Oxford he always made me go and play to him and a few of his friends in the dark in Magdalen Chapel. We used to lock the door and light one candle, and there he and his friends would sit and listen to a selection of various beautiful movements composed or arranged for the organ. It was said of Dr. Reade that he could recognise fine violins by sight.

Mr. PIPER.—Not only so, but he could actually recognise from the blocks of the cuts in Mr. George Hart's book the violins themselves which he had not seen for a very long time.

The CHAIRMAN.—There was a story current about him in Oxford that a friend of his, who had become possessed of a Stradivarius violin, invited him to lunch and placed the instrument upright in an easy chair. When Charles Reade went into the room he said: "Halloa, old man, got a Strad there? That's a good one—date about 1725, I think?" The man looked it out and found that that was the exact date. No doubt the story has a slight dash of legend in it. But he certainly bought two very fine violoncellos for the President of Magdalen, Dr. Bulley, which were in use in my own time; one was an Amati, and the other a fine Ferdinand Gagliano, a very large instrument. The subject of violins must always fascinate when you consider what a poor, helpless little being a fiddle is, and yet what it is capable of doing. Someone once asked which was the most extraordinary product of man's perseverance and ingenuity, an "express" steam-engine or a fiddle. The question is not so foolish as might be supposed. One is the result of his desire to move from place to place with rapidity, and to bring under control giant force for his own gain and prosperity; the other is the result of his craving for a musical instrument which can weep with those who weep and dance with those who dance. The one can be almost controlled by a child, the other occupies a large slice of a man's life before its capabilities are mastered; but then it can express thoughts and feelings in a manner which words fail to do. I do hope that modern makers will not be discouraged from making new fiddles. I suppose it is impossible to say at the present moment whether a Stradivarius was as good in its own day as it is now.

Mr. PIPER.—The only evidence we can bring forward is that he received commissions from various foreign courts.

There is not much evidence as regards the tone of his instruments when new. The commendations that were made in his day refer more to the appearance of his work. It is well known that he made inlaid and ornamental cases, and guitars, and all sorts of things besides violins. There are specimens of some of these in the museum of the Conservatoire in Paris.

Mr. Cobbett.—Has Mr. Piper seen the violin he made when ninety years of age, which was sold about ten years ago?

Mr. Piper.—I have seen one such. There are three of these in existence.

Mr. Knox.—Can Mr. Piper tell us how the varnish was put on?

Mr. Piper.—It was put on with a brush and then rubbed down with pumice-stone and Tripoli powder, or some such preparation.

The Chairman.—Mr. Piper would imply, I suppose, that no varnish at all would be better than bad varnish. You can spoil a violin, I presume, by the varnish.

Mr. Piper.—Undoubtedly.

The Chairman.—Mr Piper has been very kind in picking his brains to satisfy our curiosity, and we all feel greatly indebted to him.

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