

PIANO PLAYING

est natural sequel of fingers to be used without a break. By earnest thinking every player can contrive the fingering that will prove most convenient to him. But, admitting that the great diversity of hands prohibits a universal fingering, all the varieties of fingering ought to be based upon the principle of a natural sequel. If a player be puzzled by certain configurations of notes and keys as to the best fingering for them, he ought to consult a teacher, who, if a good one, will gladly help him out.

Precision, the other component part of finger technic, is intimately related with the player's general sense of orderliness. As a matter of fact, precision *is* orderliness in the technical execution of a musical prescription. If the student will but look quite closely at the piece he is learning; if he has the patience to repeat a difficult place in it a hundred times if necessary—and correctly, of course—he will soon acquire the trait of precision and he will experience the resultant increase in his technical ability.

Mental technic presupposes the ability to form a clear inward conception of a run with-

CORRECT TOUCH

out resorting to the fingers at all. Since every action of a finger has first to be determined upon by the mind, a run should be completely prepared mentally before it is tried on the piano. In other words, the student should strive to acquire the ability to form the tonal picture in his mind, rather than the note picture.

The tonal picture dwells in our imagination. This acts upon the responsive portions of the brain, influences them according to its own intensity, and this influence is then transferred to the motoric nerve-centres which are concerned in music-making. As far as known this is the course by which the musician converts his musical concept into a tonal reality. Hence, when studying a new work, it is imperative that a tonal picture of perfect clarity should be prepared in the mind before the mechanical (or technical) practicing begins. In the earlier stages of cultivating this trait it will be best to ask the teacher to play the piece for us, and thus to help us in forming a correct tonal picture in our mind.

The blurring of the tonal picture produces a temporary (don't get frightened!) paral-

PIANO PLAYING

ysis of the motoric centres which control the fingers. Every pianist knows—unfortunately—the sensation of having his fingers begin to “stick” as if the keys were covered with fly-paper, and he knows, also, that this sensation is but a warning that the fingers are going on a general and even “sympathetic” strike—sympathetic, because even the momentarily unconcerned fingers participate in it. Now the cause of this sensation lies not in a defective action of the fingers themselves, but solely in the mind. It is there that some undesired change has taken place, a change which impairs the action of the fingers. The process is like this: by quick repetitions of complicated figures, slight errors, slips, flaws escape our notice; the more quick repetitions we make the larger will be the number of these tiny blots, and this must needs lead finally to a completely distorted tonal picture. This distortion, however, is not the worst feature. Inasmuch as we are very likely not to make the same little blunders at every repetition the tonal picture becomes confused, blurred. The nerve contacts which cause the fingers to act become unde-

CORRECT TOUCH

cided first, then they begin to fail more and more, until they cease altogether and the fingers—stick! At such a juncture the student should at once resort to slow practice. He should play the defective place clearly, orderly, and, above all, slowly, and persist in this course until the number of correct repetitions proves sufficient to crowd the confused tonal picture out of the mind. This is not to be regarded as mechanical practice, for it is intended for the rehabilitation of a disarranged or disturbed mental concept. I trust this will speak for the practice of what I called “mental technic.” Make the mental tonal picture sharp; the fingers must and will obey it.

We are sometimes affected by “thought-laziness”—I translate this word literally from other languages, because it is a good compound for which I can find no better equivalent in English. Whenever we find the fingers going astray in the piece we play we might as well admit to ourselves that the trouble is in the main office. The mysterious controlling officer has been talking with a friend instead of attending to business. The mind was not keep-

PIANO PLAYING

ing step with the fingers. We have relied on our automatism; we allowed the fingers to run on and the mind lagged behind, instead of being, as it should be, ahead of the fingers, preparing their work.

Quick musical thinking, the importance of which is thus apparent, cannot be developed by any direct course. It is one of the by-products of the general widening of one's musical horizon. It is ever proportionate to the growth of one's other musical faculties. It is the result of elasticity of the mind acquired or developed by constant, never-failing, unremitting employment whenever we are at the piano. A procedure tending directly toward developing quick musical thinking is, therefore, not necessary.

The musical will has its roots in the natural craving for musical utterance. It is the director-in-chief of all that is musical in us. Hence I recognise in the purely technical processes of piano-playing no less a manifestation of the musical will. But a technic without a musical will is a faculty without a purpose, and when it becomes a purpose in itself it can never serve art.