XXIII

COLONY ECHOES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A woman in a nearby village was something of a local character, noted for driving her husband out of the house, after which she would stand in the doorway and rail at him. His method of reprisal was his own get-up. He was an able drummer, and although she had bashed in his drum years before, he did manage to keep a pair of drumsticks hidden from her, and he had an oak keg that was too stout for her to smash up. He would sit on the chopping block in the dooryard and drum on that keg until she retreated from the doorway, which sometimes took an hour. When the neighbors heard that tireless tattoo in plain and fancy
rhythms, they knew that couple had reached a stalemate in their unholy deadlock. The woman had asked me to stop and look at her old piano at my convenience, which came about on a warm summer afternoon. She answered my knock at the door with a sharp, "Who is it?" from somewhere inside. I announced my name and errand, and she said in an entirely different tone of voice, "Wait a minute." It was several minutes, and when she finally opened the door, she stood there in slippers and a thin wrapper, but all decked out in war paint and eye shadow. Obviously, she had spent the time while I was waiting at the door warming up the odds and ends of her leftover charms into a sort of cosmetic hash. All smiles, she explained, "Sorry to keep you waiting, but when you came to the door I had just retired for a nap, and I was in my birthday clothes..." at which point she wriggled coyly under the wrapper. It took a very short time for me to look at that piano and depart. My reaction was similar to that of the Boston judge who was delegated by the Watch and Ward Society to read James Joyce's Ulysses when it was a new and shocking book, with the intent of ascertaining its possible effect on morality. After his perusal of the book, he was said to have reported, "The effect of the book on public morals would be difficult to determine; its effect on me was that of an emetic rather than an aphrodisiac."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'How are things going?' he asked.

'Not so well.' Then I told him about the family who were not inclined to buy.
'Come with me,' he said, 'I'll sell it for you.'

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

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

"They bought the piano."
XXVII

IN HOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A mother commenting on her grown-up children told me of a daughter who had been away for a long time in the WAC, and had married. "We haven't seen
her husband yet. She ought to be able to pick a good one -- she has had boy friends enough -- but some people can walk all the way through the woods and still come out with a crooked stick."
XXVIII

THE ENTERING WEDGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have been learning both the wisdom and the humor of that remark ever since, and have come to understand the patient acidity that came easily to Quint. He was once called to fix a note that didn't sound, fixed it, and, as the woman was paying him, she stated that the piano hadn't been tuned for 17 years, and asked if it needed tuning. Ned replied, "I guess it'll go a while longer," and walked out. At another time he had to tune an old upright with the birdcage dampers found in some European uprights--a mean mechanism that is always in the tuner's way in placing his mutes. He tuned it, and as he was leaving, growled, "If this ever needs tunin' again, consider that I've died."
The beloved piano teacher, Mildred S. Porter of Hillsboro, asked me to come back to work for her after she had been having another tuner for a while. Her piano was old and tough; some of the bass strings had been tied with splices, and throughout, it had the most brittle wire I ever want to see. I tried to dodge, and suggested that she find someone else. She wrote me a very fine letter in which she said she felt just that way about teaching certain children, but that a parent would say, "If you don't take my child, she won't get any music." So Mrs. Porter would give in and take the pupil, and she said she hoped I would relent in a similar way about working on her poor old piano. I did so, and kept tinkering on it periodically as long as she needed it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Possibly my sassy remark about conditioning the athlete was an affront to a professional educator, whose function in life is to know, but I was never too good at biting my tongue. This and other forms of impudence return to haunt one in after years. Called to a boys' summer camp to tune, early in my career, I noticed a familiar figure going about the place as I worked, whom I recognized as a certain mustached teacher known as "pooch face," who was housefather in the dormitory of New Hampton School which I had attended some fifteen years earlier.
So I thought back to sundry pranks that had plagued the good professor. One persistent source of annoyance was a cowbell that was hung in the supposedly locked attic, with a string running down to this or that boy's garment closet. The bell would break out in joyous clatter in response to non-bovine stimuli at the most unseemly hours, arousing a varied set of emotions in the professorial breast. After this good man and I had eyed each other real hard a few times in passing, he again entered the lodge, and I addressed him properly by name. He came forward and shook hands, friendly enough, saying, "I can't remember your name, but you were a TARTAR!"
A FARM CUSTOMER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before they had a gym of their own, the high school boys in Peterborough used to practice basketball in the town hall. At one practice session two boys started tossing the ball back and forth across the stage behind the curtain. An upright piano stood in their way, so one boy gave it a shove; it fell flat on its back, and when righted, with the removable lumber dislodged, the keys were slewed up into the cutest little hill I ever saw, sort of stepwise, like the approach to a Mayan temple. At this point the town fathers called me for a con-
sultation. I decided it could be fixed cheaper than replaced, and took the job. Three of the four slender action castings were broken, and it took some undoing to remove these, take them to a garage and have them welded, and get the action to acting again. The boy who applied the big push came around during my operations, very penitent, and said his mother was making him earn the cost of the repair. I daresay he never shoved another piano.

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

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

"It worked, didn't it?" said I, "his folks sold the piano."
By the routine process of trade work, I came to know this remarkable pianist and teacher. He had no publicity man to blazon his name, but it is a source of satisfaction to find a man who is bigger than his publicity. At his farm in Wilton I have found him busily at work in his garden, pausing occasionally to shoo errant grandchildren out of his flower beds, and he talked just as enthusiastically about peas, peonies, and petunias as he might talk about the "three B's" of music.

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

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

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

The just and moderate attitude of this man toward other musicians has impressed me in the many talks I have had with him; it may be summed up as a wholesome perspective. I have never heard him condemn or harshly criticize people, but he has indicated his disapproval of things tawdry and cheap. Nor have I heard him give unqualified praise. I asked him to name the greatest pianist he had ever heard; this he would not do. He admired Busoni for his scholarly approach and classical authority, De Pachmann for his poetic interpretations, "Lhevinne played the best octaves I ever heard," and so on. Often his recollections have been warmed with mellow humor, as when he told of meeting
De Pachmann: "He wanted me to go to Europe to study with him, but I was quite satisfied with Josefý in New York. De Pachmann told me (striking a pose), 'I am the world's greatest pianist. Moritz Rosenthal is second. Paderewski is third.'"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Dun and Bradstreet?"
"Yes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Another teacher, a person of discrimination and good taste, commenting on Tallarico as a performer said, "People marvel at the vigor and dexterity of his playing, but he will never grow old at the keyboard, because, when he is there, he has a grasp on something eternal."
A tuner is often said to have particularly acute hearing, but the fact that he hears things that other people do not is a matter of training related to his work, and of attention to the things he overhears. Some reportable episodes are here given which came through and registered despite my routine thumping.

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

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

GIRL: Mother, make him stop.

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

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

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

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

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

sotto voce:

MAN: Has he worked for anyone we know?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Suddenly low gray clouds scud over, obscuring the sun. The air cools rapidly; a few snowflakes sift down through the bare branches. We hurriedly draw our jackets close around us and make for the car. Before we have covered those few rods, a sugar-snow is falling, clinging damply to everything and taking the season back some weeks. Then we can see what the old neighbor meant by the pay-off. And we're glad that we didn't shy a stick at the red squirrel just to see him scamper; his enjoyment was soon enough cut short.
At a summer residence in Jaffrey Center, I observed over the piano a number of framed photos, one of which was signed "Adelina Patti Cedarstrom," and showed the celebrated singer with her husband, attired in walking dress of the period. Other photos showed my customer, in her youth, as Elsa in "Lohengrin" and in other operatic costumes. This aroused my curiosity, so when this dignified mature lady came through the room and said, "We are just now having some coffee, wouldn't you like some?" I accepted, and remarked, "It is unusual to see Patti in any pose except as a singer."

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

"You, of course, sang."

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

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

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

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

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

She paused and smiled, obviously savoring a recollection.

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

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

"Was Patti Italian?"

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

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

This discourse far outlasted the coffee, and I was most grateful. She signed her check "Florence Stevens Low."
Here are a few oddities that have appeared in the line of duty:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fancy names -- anything to further the impression that an upright could be equal to a grand: Upright Grand; Parlor Grand; Cabinet Grand; Petite Vertical Grand. Suggesting waftings of perfume and pink rayon intimacy was this fetching appellation: Boudoir Grand. Sohmer & Son matched this with a baby grand: "Cupid Model."
The specimens which have been sold to the unsuspecting public by wily piano makers are too numerous to mention, but in general the worst production came at periods when the industry was converting to new designs, as in the case of the first uprights that followed the early square pianos. Many of these were built, even by reputable makers, without a full metal plate to support the tension. Probably they behaved fairly well in houses with only stoves and fireplaces, but the intense dryness of some forms of central heat has rendered many such instruments hopeless. Experience brought the better makers to use a full metal plate to insure adequate support.

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

* * * * *

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

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

* * * * *

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

MODEL PIANO
Simpson & Company
New York

* * * * *

Besides oddities of manufacture, some of which are refreshing and commendable, a tuner has to contend with specimens of malfeasance resulting from the efforts of would-be tuners, all of which are irksome and condemnable. When a string has gone flat, someone has the urge to fix it, so he goes and gets a pipe wrench, batters the corners of the tuning pin, and leaves the string flatter than before. Only a tool that grips all four corners of the pin evenly can be used to turn those soft iron pins successfully. More than once I have been called to clean up after a man who should have retired long before he did so, and have found two adjoining notes almost exactly the same pitch. Now I maintain that a proper tuning job which has gone somewhat out of tune is preferable to a mis-
tuned piano, for in the first instance, some of it will still be correct, while
in the latter instance, none of it is right.

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

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

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

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

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

In many pianos that have obviously never been cleaned inside, the old dust contains woolen lint that moths feed on as readily as on cloth and felt, and this accumulation of dirt also develops, through the years, an unpleasant mustiness that is particularly bad in humid weather. But not all tuners feel as I do on this subject. The common dodge to avoid a cleaning job is to tell the
customer, "Never disturb the dust; it makes the tone softer." Occasionally someone asks me if it amounts to anything to get the dirt out of a piano. Being of the opinion that a stupid question deserves a stupid answer, I reply, "If you have to move the piano, it won't weigh so much."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A fine singer of my acquaintance, whose professional standing commanded a considerable fee, told me that he had been engaged to give a recital for a social organization in a Boston church. The date had been set, and in talking over arrangements with the program chairman, the singer mentioned that the piano should be tuned just before the performance. "Well!" the chairman exclaimed,
"if we've got to have the piano tuned, we won't hold the concert." And they cancelled it forthwith.

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

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

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

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

MY PUBLIC

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

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

While I was tuning for an elderly lady, her daughter was sniping around the edges, complaining that a piano should not need tuning so often. "Why," she said, "my piano hasn't been tuned for seven years, and my friend who plays says it isn't too bad." But could you imagine anyone's social acquaintance saying, "My dear, your piano sounds perfectly horrid?" We all have some taboos and reticences with our friends, even the closest, for which reason we seldom get down to anything basic or earnest with them, but remain largely on a basis of pleasant casualness. But entering so many homes in the way I do, it occasionally comes about that the absence of habitual mental barriers permits some really worthwhile talks.
A fine woman, Mrs. Grace Perry, whom I knew only slightly at the time, came in while I was working, and almost immediately we were engaged in a discussion about the experience of death, and how we might recognize those who had passed on before us. Suddenly stopping short, she said in surprise, "Here I am talking with you on this subject that I wouldn't discuss with my best friend!"

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

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

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I often tell people that my trade is like greasing automobiles in one respect: it is something that will have to be done again sometime. You might think that the comparison ends there, but some pianos put on mileage, too. A minister's wife told me their piano had been moved 27 times in 28 years. They stayed longer than their average time in Greenfield, and I got to know them fairly well. I could see why they might have changed parishes quite often: Mrs. Parson was the aggressive sort. She never just plain said anything; she always at least asserted or declared, and frequently asseverated, reserving the latter vehemence especially for denouncing the pillars of the church-of-the-moment and their shortcomings and longgoings. By the attraction of opposites, perhaps, her husband was mild, scholarly, affable, and played the violin. We had some pleasant evenings with the easy duets I could manage. (This was before the merger with Daisy,) Mrs. Parson played the piano as forcefully as she talked. She had a sense of humor, though -- she told me that their daughter, distinctly urban by preference, used to say, "I don't like cows. They look so immodest." Once she was funnier than she realized: when talking about playing the organ, she mentioned the "Bourbon bass stop." I wondered privately if this was the low-voice equivalent of a "whiskey tenor."
A tradesman working independently needs to develop qualities that are not needed in as great a degree by persons in more routine employment. Besides planning, as in the matter of travel, it is of course essential to meet dates agreed upon and to be responsible about the property of customers, since the trade work is done where there may be surroundings and furnishings of considerable value, and lacking these, each place has nevertheless a basic significance for the owner. The home that looks sparsely furnished and hard-bitten may also have been hard-won; the lodge room that seems stuffy and dated may have furnished a number of worthy people with opportunities to hold office and have a social life which they would not have enjoyed in any other way. So it is important to put the camp key back under the same flat rock, or to make sure the windows are closed where a shower might drive in. In over-furnished rooms where people move in little trails, it is necessary to watch both ends in handling removable boards and lids. Klonking heirlooms is decidedly unpopular, as I learned the hard way.

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

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

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

The quotation also makes possible the decking out of one's homespun thoughts in the neatly tailored garb of another's phraseology, and the packing with special meaning of even the most familiar phrase, to suit an occasion.
The little tots are never as much of a bother as their mothers imagine them to be. I never discourage them from looking on, assuring anxious parents that I have had a great many elbow audiences. If youngsters get too eager and start sounding the bass notes just to watch the hammers strike the strings, I have found a method that works. As the child stands at my side, fascinated to watch the hammers move, I place a hand gently on his head and say, "Honey, how do you suppose the man can hear when you are doing that?" Usually they smile back at me, twist away a little self-consciously, and desist. One boy did inform me that his name wasn't "honey." I could only say "It seems like 'honey.'"

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

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

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Early in my career I became prejudiced against square pianos: why did people keep the old things, anyway? The strings are often rusty and brittle, the actions delicate and finicky. But I outgrew that, and can now see a lot of merit in some of them. The superb handwork in many of them is to be admired; it belongs to a period in human endeavor that will not return. I met a man in his nineties who, in his youth, had carved square piano legs on a piecework basis, which had brought him very good wages for those times. My friend Lothrop Herrick, who thoroughly knew antiques, used to say that although a slatback chair is not rare, beautiful, or even comfortable, somehow hardly anything else looks so quaint and old-fashioned. In a similar way, a square piano has its own
connotations of quaintness and atmosphere, and when nicely kept in a proper period front room, yielding a faint fragrance of rosewood in summer weather, it conveys a sense of having been intimately associated with some of the choicest occasions in human experience. When correcting its thin tones, I have had fanciful glimpses into the past, its people, their costumes, and pastimes.

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

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

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

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A tuner has to work in a country church once in a while, generally in warm weather. This involves going to a house in the neighborhood for the key, passing the time of day with the householders, and giving them a chance to size up the mechanic. Country churches are most agreeable to work in. They have a recog-
nizable smell -- a bit woody, a trifle closed-up, and highly respectable -- the very odor of sanctity. I speculate on the human drame of the community in which the church played a leading part. I enjoy studying the furnishings and woodwork -- pews of native chestnut or virgin pine, perhaps, which could never be replaced. One chapel, in East Washington, still has oil lamps with reflectors. A "lamplight service" is held there occasionally.

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

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

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

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

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Some instructions go against my grain. As I was about to start on some school tuning, I was told that the music teacher said all of the pianos were too
high for the children to sing to, and please to lower the pitch. I replied, "That would be like lowering the standards of morality for the aid and comfort of sinners. She had better transpose the songs into lower keys, or divide the children into parts according to their voices." Those pianos were nearly all below standard pitch, varying a half tone or more from one another, and all too old to risk drawing up very much.

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

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

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

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

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

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- 100 -
How to head off reed organ jobs is one problem a tuner has to meet. To be sure, I have learned a little about them by the empirical method, but they are so loaded with debris, such as acorn shucks left by squirrels, coupled with evidence of elementary physiological functions performed by these and other rodents, that I prefer to let the old wheezy boxes alone. A complete cleaning is what most of them need, and the taking apart necessary to accomplish this is a major operation. So if someone insists, and I am not too busy with pianos, I prepare the customer for the worst by stressing that I always start such jobs in the morning. Reed organs and melodeons work on a suction principle: the tiniest speck of dirt stuck in a reed will keep it from sounding. These instruments cannot be showered with balsam needles from Christmas greens or with phlox and delphinium petals from bouquets, and still keep sounding, as a piano does.

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

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

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

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

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

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- 101 -
One summer evening about quarter of seven Daisy and I were just finishing supper and watching the newscast, when a telephone call came from one of the mansion people in Dublin. She had just learned of my existence. She had had her piano tuned the week before by a very fine tuner, but had been unable to get him to come back and fix the note that didn't work, and some of the tuning had slipped a little in the week of humid weather we had had. She was going to have a piano recital at her house that same evening at quarter of nine, and could I possibly come up and see what I could do? I knew the place through having worked for the former owner, and assured her that I would come right up (although not exactly complimented by being called in as a stop-gap). I got there promptly, fixed the bass note that wouldn't repeat, and retuned the bass section to the satisfaction of the charming young lady who was to play the recital. As I was putting the fallboard back into place, the lady of the house came over and inquired how much I would charge to come up there and tune a piano. I told her, adding, "Of course this was not a complete tuning job, but on the other hand, it was an accommodation, and I was taken from the bosom of my family at a most unseemly hour." This last, with all the severity I could muster, managing to keep a straight face. She retreated to the other end of that huge room and wrote out a check, then sent the butler back with it. She had added to my fee a generous bonus to assuage my separation.