

The Rockwood Review.

OLD VERSUS NEW VIOLINS.

I have been somewhat interested in the controversy going on in the columns of *THE GLOBE*, between Mr. Thomas C. Dawson and Mr. E. R. Parkhurst, on the subject of violins. Mr. Parkhurst whose well trained ear and artistic sense enable him to speak with authority, is quite right in his contention that good old violins are infinitely superior in tone to good modern instruments. The writer has had ample opportunity to verify this well established fact, and frankly admits that at one time he was as sceptical in regard to it, as Mr. Dawson is at present. In my collection are to be found typical examples of good makers, old and new. The best specimen of the modern violin is a faithful copy of the Dolphin Strad, made by a maker whose name stands among the highest, and whose skill is recognized by all. The workmanship is perfect—the varnish everything that could be desired, the tone about the best I have ever heard in a new violin, (1894) and yet it cannot stand the test of daily comparison with Cremonese instruments. What is more significant still, is the fact that the maker does not profess to be able to equal or surpass the qualities of the best Italian instruments, but feels confident that time will add the mellowness that no skill can impart. A test such as that proposed by Mr. Dickson is not required, in fact would not prove anything that has not already been well established. The great violinists almost invariably play on the masterpieces of the Cremonese luthiers, and they do so because their artistic instincts guide them in deciding what is best for themselves and most pleasing to their audience. An unerring instinct directs a public player to select an instrument possessed of sympathetic tone, and this indescribable sympathetic quality is the characteristic of the best Cremonese vio-

lins. I doubt if it exists in any of the modern instruments. Even the Lupot violins have not in every instance acquired it, although the best specimens will, it is said, eventually rank in the first flight. I was particularly struck by this fact a few years ago, when I thought seriously of purchasing a Lupot, said by Hill & Son of London to be one of the finest specimens of this maker to be found. It was a magnificent copy of a Joseph Guarnerius, as perfect almost as when it left the hands of its maker. In tone it was grand; brilliant, refined and full, and yet lacked the exquisite quality violinists insist on recognizing as the essential of a really great instrument. After all, violinists as well as audiences must be the judges of what is best, and it cannot be said that they are blind to the business side of their profession. If modern violins, which are comparatively cheap, would answer the artistic requirements of public performers, modern violins would be used, and empty sentiment would count for little. The dollars and cents value of the good Cremonese instruments is founded on something more substantial than sentiment—although a number of collectors, with whom collecting is merely a fad will occasionally store up a lot of trash—for after all there were thousands of bad fiddles turned out in the old days, as well as good ones. As far as workmanship is concerned, the conscientious luthiers of the present, are just as capable as those of the past—and while the great masters, left little room for further advances in the evolution of the violin, there is a possibility that some minor improvements may be effected. It is a certainty that time alone can impart that "something" to the tone which Cremonese instruments of the best class, alone possess.

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