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Taking Care of the Fingerboard

JUST as all the parts of a watch must be in perfect adjustment, and free from wear to keep correct time, so all the parts of a violin, especially its vital organs—so to speak— must be in perfect condition, and each in its proper place. Taking the world over, I doubt if there is more than one violin in a hundred which gives forth its best tones, simply because some of its parts are not of the proper quality or are out of adjustment. Take the fingerboard for instance; this seemingly unimportant part of the violin is responsible for much bad tone if it is not of first-rate quality, and properly adjusted. A fingerboard should be of the best ebony, of as hard quality as possible, so that it will resist as long as possible the action of the fingers which press the strings so tightly on the fingerboard that little gutters are soon worn in the fingerboard. As soon as these little gutters appear, which they will do in time in the best ebony, the fingerboard must be shaved down, if it has enough wood to admit of the operation, or a new fingerboard must be adjusted to the violin. When the strings are pushed down into these little gutters in playing, an intolerable false twang results, making a good tone impossible.

Wrongly Adjusted Fingerboards

The fingerboard, especially in cheap violins, is frequently adjusted at the wrong angle, so that the end is too high or low at the bridge. When this is the case, it is impossible to fit a bridge of the proper height to the violin, since the height of the bridge must be governed by the distances of the strings above the fingerboard. If the neck and fingerboard are adjusted at too great an angle, a very high bridge must be used, and if too low, a very low bridge.
It must be evident that once the proper height of a bridge for a violin is ascertained, the neck and fingerboard of the violin must be adjusted at such an angle that when this bridge is used the strings will lie at the proper distance above the fingerboard. Some repairers change the angle of the fingerboard by shaving some of the wood from the inner side, when it is too high, or by inserting a wedge between the neck and fingerboard when too low. The best plan is to have the repairer unglue the violin where the neck is inserted, and change the angle of the neck so that the fingerboard will like at the proper angle to admit of a bridge of the correct height being used.

Many violinists complain of certain tones on their violins being bad, which they ascribe to fundamental defects in the instrument. While this may be the case in many instances, a faulty fingerboard is often the underlying cause. Looking at a fingerboard casually, it often seems to be free from defects, but when a level is applied to it, it is seen to be warped and full of little humps and hollows. It is impossible to one, good tones on such a fingerboard: some will be good and others bad. When the finger presses the string into a hollow, the string touches the fingerboard for some little distance, preventing free vibration, and causing a distressing twang. It would seem that a good carpenter or cabinetmaker could be relied on to dress an old fingerboard or adjust a new one, but such is not the case. One must understand perfectly the principles of construction of the violin, and the adjustment of its various parts, in order to get good results, so that it is better and really cheaper in the end to have all repairs done by a really first-class violin repairer. Violins can be sent by parcel post, cheaply and safely, to good repairers in the large cities, and the player will be amazed at the improvement which will result if his violin is put in first-class condition.