

FASTER SPEED IN OLD MUSIC TODAY

A REVISION of the speed at which music of the older school is to be performed is suggested by Ernest Newman, the distinguished English critic, who is now a guest reviewer for the New York Evening Post. Mr. Newman would have the light-footed music of Mozart and Rossini played at a swift tempo appropriate to our altered modern conceptions of speed. His point is that speed is merely relative, not an absolute conception, and that the twentieth century idea of it is very different from that of the eighteenth century. The railway train, the motor car and the aeroplane have made what a hundred years ago would have been regarded as a dizzy speed, to us, quite a sober one. We skip out of the way of the automobile at twice the speed, at least, that we used to work up to avoid the horse-cab; But it seems no faster, because everything else is correspondingly faster. "Apply these considerations to music," says Mr. Newman, "and you see at once that all our notions of the tempo of the older works have to be revised. What may have seemed a break-neck pace to a musician of the eighteenth century is probably only a canter to us. I am not urging that all old music should be taken prestissimo, but only that it should be translated, as it were, into the modern speed language."

Mr. Newman disagrees with one English critic who thinks that, in order not to miss the exquisite detail of Mozart's music, it is necessary to play Mozart even more slowly than it was customary to play him in his own day. Mr. Newman objects to this as he did to the conversation of two women that he heard on a London bus. It was going down Regent street, and one of the ladies remarked how interesting the shop windows were. "Yes," said the other, "but they don't give you time to see them properly. They ought to run the buses slowly down Regent street,"—regardless, says Mr. Newman, of the mere men who have no great interest in the shop windows, but are possessed only with a base utilitarian desire to get from one spot to another as quickly as possible.

One is inclined to wonder if Mr. Newman takes into consideration the fact that an increase in the tempo of these older compositions means a more exacting demand on the technic of the players. In a way the suggestion is complimentary to the artists, and especially to the players in our symphony orchestras. It is possible that they have not reached the limit of their technical skill. But if Mr. Newman's suggestion should be taken up by conductors, and still more by teachers all over the country, the students of the present day will have their work cut out for them. Perhaps at least one year will have to be added to the average conservatory course to the end that young players may add twenty or twenty-five per cent more speed. When they take up the studies of Mazas, Fiorillo, Kreutzer, and others, they will find it necessary to devote most of the attention to the studies made for velocity.

It may be urged that it will be a good thing if some of our students find it necessary to develop greater velocity, especially in separate, detached bowing. Teachers will feel authorized to listen to a recitation and at the end of it say to a pupil: "The notes are correct. But you must 'hit up the speed.' " We are told that the best players of the present have a technic surpassing that of some of the famous players of the past. The demands on the young artist force him to higher technical flights than was the case fifty or one hundred years ago. So the demand for greater speed may result in an increase of technical skill, not on the part of a few, but of the many.