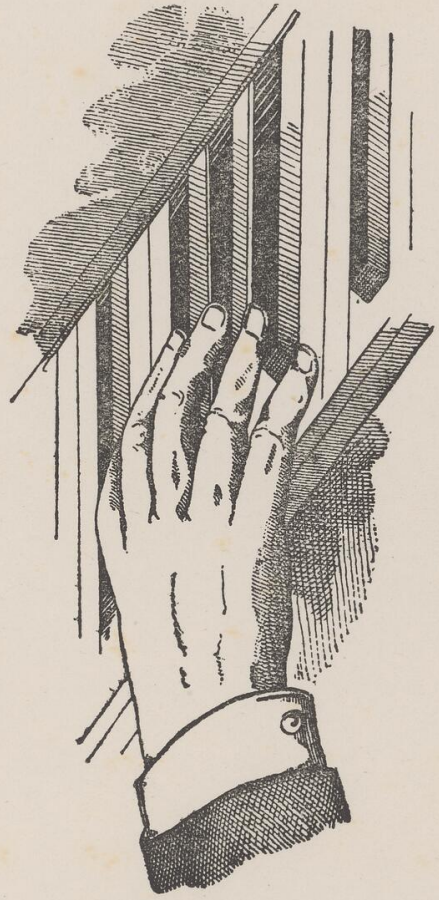
HOW TO PLAY CHOPIN

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(Figure A). *(See page 28.)*

How to Play Chopin.

THE WORKS

OF

FREDERIC CHOPIN

THEIR

PROPER INTERPRETATION

BY

JEAN KLECZYNSKI

TRANSLATED BY

ALFRED WHITTINGHAM

WITH SEVERAL ILLUSTRATIONS

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

Of all music written for the Pianoforte that of Chopin will least bear rough handling. Unless its interpreter thoroughly grasps its meaning, and possesses the amount of technical skill necessary for its perfect execution, this music, so full of grace and elegance, becomes unsatisfactory, meaningless, painful to the hearer The following Lectures have been placed before the English world because they contain many valuable hints as to the meaning of several of Chopin's Works, besides other information which cannot fail to benefit the student.

In the performance of Chopin's music, the correct employment of the open Pedal is a point of the highest importance, many of his most charming works depending upon this for their effect. For further information upon the subject the reader is

referred to "*Das Pedal des Clavieres*," by Hans Schmitt.

It must also be noted that Chopin's Works cannot be well played upon a bad instrument. The common Sticker-action Cottage Pianoforte, with its coarse tone and coarser touch, is altogether unsuitable. It may be added that there can be little excuse for the employment of such instruments for any purpose at the present time, when Pianofortes with check action, of pure tone, and elastic sympathetic touch, may be obtained at very moderate prices.

Concerning Chopin and his Works, much more can be learned from "*Frederic Chopin: his Life, Letters and Works*," *by Moritz Karasowski*, translated by E. Hill; also from Liszt's "*Life of Chopin*," translated by John Broadhouse. For the attaining of refinement and high finish in the performance of all kinds of music the "*Traité de l'Expression Musicale*" of M. Lussy is strongly recommended.

Some of the best technical Studies, for use before attempting the more difficult works of Chopin, are to be found in Part 4 of *Lebert and Stark's Grand Theoretical and Practical Piano School.*

FREDERIC CHOPIN'S WORKS,

AND THEIR

PROPER INTERPRETATION.

LECTURE I.

NEARLY thirty years have now elapsed since the master, beloved of all, was laid in his grave. In proportion to the increase in the number of his admirers, the circle of those whom he knew and loved, of those who shared his thoughts, diminishes every day. That which tradition brings down to us, concerning his incomparable style of execution, becomes more and more vague; no lively remembrance of him remains, except with his best pupils; especially with those women who have best known how to reproduce the magical poetry of his inspirations. The time has come in which to collect these precious remembrances, to snatch them from oblivion, to transmit them to posterity as the echo of the manner and touch of the master.

The fountain-head being to me inaccessible, I have,

for my information, had recourse only to those most nearly connected with Chopin by the ties of friendship and talent;* this having been obtained, added to the results of my own mental exertions, it appeared to me to be my duty to let the whole world share it with me. May be my work will induce those who are in possession of materials more full and complete, to utilize those materials as an act of reverence to the memory of the great artist.

Much has been written concerning Chopin, especially during the last ten years. His character, his works, his life, have furnished themes for exhaustive descriptions. Although, to speak generally, foreigners have under-estimated him, as we shall show further on, it must be admitted that his genius has been fully recognized by Liszt, by Schumann, and by Schucht. ("Thoughts on Chopin," in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1875.) Liszt's book, above all, gives us an idea of the genius of Chopin at once poetic and deep. Our national authors have nevertheless, it appears to me, best set forth the character of his music. It would appear after this, that all difficulties in the correct reading of the works of Chopin should disappear; yet how rare it is, either in the drawing-room or on the concert-platform, to have them well executed, with even a small approach towards that which we have from tradition concerning them! How many of the rest of us, who feel profoundly what Chopin meant, cannot succeed in our endeavour to transmit that feeling to those who listen to our performance of his works!

* I may mention the Princess Marcellina Gartoryska, Madame Dubois, Madame B. Zaleska, and M. J. Fontana.

It is because the compositions of the master are not only rich in ideas and attractions (others have equalled and sometimes even surpassed him in these)—but it is that, nevertheless, their formation so varied and elegant, never oversteps the limit allowed to the pianoforte. The idea is clothed with a tissue so ethereal and delicate, with reflections of that idea so changing and diversified, that we sometimes stop powerless in despair as to the possibility of reproducing such great delicacy.

Although his style is always distinguishable, we find the master at one time grave or despairing, at another gay or playful, occasionally bursting forth like a clap of thunder which dies away in plaintive lamentations, but all through maintaining a certain suitableness and propriety in form, never overstepping certain limits from the passage of which his æsthetic instinct prohibited him.

We now purpose to devote several pages to the spirit and meaning of the works produced by this genius of the pianoforte—we shall then indicate the technical necessities for their performance—we shall finally consider the differences between Chopin and other composers, the observation of which differences constitutes the great difficulty.

Born of a French father and a Polish mother, Frederic Chopin had within him these two nationalities. Nature had given him a sensitive mind, inclined to meditation and sadness, together with an amount of vivacity and gaiety. These two opposite qualities united in a wonderful harmony, in a whole in which each tendency corrected the other, each exhibiting itself in its turn, both in his life and in his compositions. It has been well said that he had a

sad heart and a joyful mind. Among his intimate friends he carried gaiety sometimes to childishness; among strangers he was quite another being; contact with a strange hand rendered him like the sensitive plant which, upon being touched, withdraws its corolla. This suffices to explain the glowings of his youth and his later sufferings. So long as he was among his friends his good humour and liveliness passed into his compositions. Later, as his exile became prolonged, with no one to whom to open his heart, too proud to lay bare his sorrows to those who could not take the place of family and country, he suffered the more from the fact that his sufferings were hidden within himself; solitude gave colossal proportions to this misery, rendering it almost tragical. His generous soul, his lively nature, would nevertheless at times react, and never allowed him to fall into utter depression. If we add to this his native delicacy, which could endure nothing except that which was refined, we shall have some lights for our guidance in the reading and execution of his works. German critics have, it appears to me, completely misconceived the character of Chopin; they represent him as a man of despair, a hero of the minor keys; they forget his early youth, his happy years at Varsovia, his good humour and sprightliness, which he never lost even in Paris. Beyond this, in considering his mazurkas and his polonaises, they have not grasped that intensity, that fire, which exhibits his spirit, fighting against suffering, and fighting victoriously until physical suffering at last gained the ascendancy. Several of these critics, notably Schucht, unable to deny this energy and these indications of life, account for them as a sort of sepulchral gaiety,

as that kind of forgetfulness which one finds among the heroes of Byron.

The first works of Chopin, whether written under the direction of Elsner or quite independently, are free from every trace of trouble; they overflow with life and cheerfulness! Listen to Schumann concerning the *Variatious sur Don Juan* (Op. 2). "In reading this work, I seemed to be under the gaze of fantastic eyes, eyes of basilisks, of peacocks, of young girls .... Leporello seemed to beckon me, and Don Juan to pass in a white cloak. The whole is dramatic and sufficiently in the manner of Chopin .... Each bar is the work of a genius. Don Juan, Zerlina, Leporello, Masetto, are characterized in admirable style. The first variation is just a trifle too pompous; it is a Spanish grandee cooing amorously with a country maiden. In the second, more familiar and animated, two lovers seem to pursue one another and to laugh at their sport. What a difference in the third! The moon illumines the scene with its poetic glimmer; Masetto stands aside, and swears in an unmistakable manner; but Don Juan does not stop for so small a matter. And the fourth! is it not captivating and full of boldness? The *Adagio*, in B flat minor is like a warning to Don Juan to renounce his designs. Leporello, concealed behind a thicket, sets his master at defiance; the clarionet and oboe attract and provoke him; the key of D flat major, suddenly introduced, indicates the first kiss .... All this vanishes if we compare it with the *finale* (hast thou still any wine? adds Schumann); the corks pop out, the bottles are smashed on the floor. Then come the voice of Leporello, the spirits who appear upon the scene, Don Juan who takes his flight. A few final bars

which calm and satisfy the mind, conclude the work."

Upon consideration of the impression produced upon foreigners by these early works of Chopin, a judgment may be formed of that which we (Poles) feel, finding in his notes not only that which is beautiful, but a picture, as it were, of our national mood. Listen to these brilliant passages, these cascades of pearly notes, these bold leaps which we find in the *Rondos* (Op. 5 and 15), in the *Cracovienne*, in the *Fantasie sur motifs polonais*, and in the two *Concertos*. Is this the sadness and the despair of which we hear spoken? Is it not rather, youth, exuberant with intensity and life; is it not happiness, gaiety, love for the world and for men? The melancholy notes are only there to bring out, to enforce the principal ideas. For instance, in the *Fantasia*, Op. 13, the theme of Kurpinski moves and saddens us; but the composer does not give time for this impression to become durable; he suspends it by means of a long trill, and then suddenly by a few chords and with a brilliant prelude, he leads us to a popular dance which makes us wish to mingle with the peasant couples of Mazovia. Does the *finale* in F minor indicate by its minor key the gaiety of a man devoid of hope?—as the Germans tell us.

It may perhaps be true that the minor key in which the greater number of our national dances are written may be accounted for by our proverb, "A fig for misery." But this circumstance gives to these airs a character of elevated beauty, not of sepulchral gaiety. Sadness and despair have a right to a place in the domain of art, if only they are accompanied and counterbalanced by a feeling of hope, by an utterance

of fortitude which elevates, and calm which refreshes us.

The group of the Laocoon is beautiful, because in it we see suffering vanquished by fortitude of soul; the statue of Niobe is beautiful, the maternal sentiment, carried to the height of our conception of it, imparts to it a supernatural calm which transfixes us and compels our admiration. The art displayed consists not in concealment of the suffering, but in keeping it within certain limits, assigning it a place beneath some idea more grand and elevating. In studying Chopin we shall perceive that this idea is always to be found in company with his laments, removing from them that which might seem personal sorrow. In his first works his spirit had not sustained those struggles which caused its later suffering. Some few studies (Op. 10), showing that quietude of mind had forsaken him, were composed, if we may trust to tradition, some time after he had said farewell to Varsovia.

Chopin loved his relatives and friends; his delicate nature, both moral and physical, required amiable surroundings. He suffered much in quitting Varsovia, leaving there a girl loved with all the strength of youthful love. When later circumstances would not permit of his again seeing Varsovia, his despair knew no bounds. During his stay of six months at Vienna, as he could not give a concert, he there wrote probably nothing.

Afterwards, when his mind was somewhat more calm, the tempest of his soul found vent in ideas, and he composed his *Scherzo in B minor* (Op. 20) and the *Study in C minor* (Op. 10), likewise without doubt that other *Study in C minor*, filled with sounds like

the discharges of great guns, which forms part of Op. 25.

This *Scherzo in B minor* is a proof of that regard for forms, which even the most intense passion never prevented Chopin from observing. His ideal nature could never descend to coarseness; there is never too much of the pathetic nor an excess of the brilliant; it is rather the movement keen and telling, the unexpected alternations of *forte* and *piano*, revealing the state of his mind. The first two chords, nevertheless, are of astonishing boldness: a commencement with two such characteristic dissonances was extremely daring for that time. (Ex. 1). The principal motive, full of thunderings and tempest, stops suddenly and gives place to a sweet and poetic song in C major, telling of the meadows loved in childhood; then the two chords of the commencement interrupt this melody, and the tempest is again unloosed to cease on an equally daring chord, and to die away in its own tumult.

As we are not recounting the life of Chopin, and not being forced to follow any chronological order, we may here speak of the *Scherzo in B flat minor*, more highly finished than the one before mentioned, and equally impassioned. What could be more beautiful than the song of the first part? The melody ascends gradually to the upper part of the pianoforte like the ascent of the soul which takes its flight to loose itself in heaven. The middle movement is an idyll full of grace and charm; then, repeated for the last time the theme attains the highest degree of intensity and power, leading us to a series of dissonances, introduced so naturally and so logically that they in no way offend the ear.

With such works as these before us, we are compelled to acknowledge that Chopin never loses the feeling of equilibrium; always refined, he feels that passion should never descend to the prose of realism. He suffers, he has his fits of madness, but none of those unbecoming convulsions which composers of the present time, sometimes without reason or sense, introduce into their realistic productions; he does not take advantage of guessed or risked chords; he does not allow his idea to wander at random; he never forgets to preserve his dignity; he knows that it is not for him to exhibit to strangers the extreme depths of his heart. He was the same in his life. Few indeed were those whom he admitted to his intimacy, and to whom he imparted his thoughts; the letters from members of his family, and the little presents which he received from them were his most cherished treasures which he shared with no one. It gave him pain for any strange hand to touch these beloved objects.

At this period his mind, still strong and energetic, knew also how to reject sad ideas and to bring to the front whatever he possessed that was gay and pleasing. Then he became "dear little Chopin," as his friends styled him; he would imitate the Polish Jew bargaining for corn, or the sentimental English lady; seated at his pianoforte he would caricature the playing and movements of the fiery Liszt or the formal Thalberg. There is no composition more elegant, and containing more of brilliancy and freedom than the *Grande Polonaise in E flat major*, preceeded by an *Andante Spianato* (Op. 22), which was written at this time, and played at the Conservatoire during the first years of his stay in Paris.

Then it was that a little *Nocturne* in E flat (Op. 9, No. 2), the Nocturne most popular of all at the present time, made such a sensation in Paris. This charming bagatelle did more for the popularity of Chopin than all his other works. It is impossible to deny certain resemblances to Field's first Nocturne, if only the key, the rhythm, and the last peculiarity. (Ex. 3.) But in it there is a certain tinge of earnest sadness unknown to Field, which even at that time began to manifest itself. The Nocturnes—in which compositions Chopin has put the greatest brightness of his genius—have remained to the present time models of elegance and of romantic sadness without affectation; these are the most eloquent pages of his life; true poems of the night, sometimes calm as the silver moonlight (for instance, the *Nocturne in E flat*, and the first part of that in F), at other times overshadowed by the clouds which darkened the horizon and the heart of the poet; occasionally intercepted by some sanguinary drama, the echo of some terrible narrative.

The first in order of date, the *Nocturne in B flat minor*, exhibits to us a musical form unknown until that time; a thrilling sadness together with a novel elegance of construction. In the middle part, *which should not be played too fast*, the melody drags along in heavy octaves, as though the soul were sinking beneath the weight of thought and the heat of a summer's night.

The *Nocturne in F sharp* is the type of feelings of youthful expansion, of the love of human-kind; the young man, knowing nothing of the wicked, seems to say to the world, "All that I have is yours!" This Nocturne resembles Schiller's poems; at this time,

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when the influence of the German ballads was so great, when Mickiewicz himself began his career by the imitation of German poetry, a young man so sensitive as Chopin could not but feel the power of these verses consecrated to the love of mankind; but he knew how to impart to ideas, common to many minds at that period, a form so typical and so individual that he made them his own, and he cannot be accused of any plagiarism. He comes neither from Beethoven, Weber, nor Schubert,—he is always himself—he is connected with them only by a community of tendencies.

Two *Nocturnes* (Op. 27), written at a much later period, mark the culminating point of his creative genius. An entire world separates us there from Field,—the thought of a poetry profoundly felt, clothes itself in magic form. The *Nocturne in D flat* has been compared, by authors who have written about Chopin, to the highest creations of contemporary poets. His concluding bars are inimitable; they are sighs with truth stamped upon them, which rise in the air to lose themselves in the entrances of the heavens. The Nocturne in C sharp minor appears to me to be the description of a calm night at Venice, where, after a scene of murder, the sea closes over a corpse, and continues to serve as a mirror to the moonlight.

In the *Nocturne in G minor* (Op. 37), which might be entitled "Home-sickness," the poet weeps at the remembrance of his native soil; a remembrance which we perceive in the middle part of the piece in the form of a prayer played upon the organ of a country church. This prayer soothes the mind of the artist who concludes with a last modulation into G major.

The celebrated *Nocturne in C minor* is the tale of a still greater grief told in an agitated *recitando;* celestial harps come to bring one ray of hope which is powerless in its endeavour to calm the wounded soul, which proceeds with its tale of despair, and sends forth to heaven a cry of deepest anguish. (Ex. 4).

The two last *Nocturnes* (Op. 12), by their somewhat too affected form, furnish an indication of the ravages made upon the heart of the poet by deception and physical suffering.

The *Study in C sharp minor* (one of the most dignified among the compositions of the master) and the *Berceuse* (so calm and elegant) should be numbered among the Nocturnes.

We will leave until later some remarks which might find place here, and we now return to the first years of his stay in Paris.

As we have already said, two elements combined formed the personality of Chopin—Slavonic thoughtfulness and French vivacity. During the period of youth this latter element predominated. The facility itself with which he composed ought to have filled his whole being with that contentment and happiness which are the ordinary privileges of composers whose ideas are rich and numerous.

His commencement was nevertheless difficult; first there was the separation from those whom he loved, and the idea of his being a burden to them; these were troubles of a substantial kind. Then, although received with deference in the artistic world, he had not yet gained that sympathy, which afterwards was so general and so devoted: witness the opinions concerning him of Kalkbrenner, Field and Moscheles.

We know that he was at that time thinking of

going to America, but a trifling circumstance which happened through a mere chance, a meeting in the street, caused him to remain in Paris. The Prince Valentin Radziwill begged Chopin to come with him to a soirée at Rothschild's. He could not refuse; he played for a long time, and extemporized like one inspired. Surrounded immediately by the ladies, he had so many requests for lessons in the houses of the most opulent, that he had no need to disquiet himself longer about the future. Then it was that his previous works became popular, and that there appeared several new ones: the *Ballade in G minor* (Op. 23), the *Mazurkas*, the *Studies*, the *Nocturnes* (Op. 27), and others.

If the Nocturnes are the most charming among the smaller jewels of his poetical casket, the *Ballades* are certainly his most complete and finished works, the works which have the greatest musical value. Their form is new and bold; they scorn all conventionality; the master listens only to his own inspiration, pursuing his idea with the greatest order in the midst of variations and other passages always appropriate to the title. Their meaning and character are derived from the ballads of Mickiewicz. They are veritable dramatic recitatives, always changing, and full of surprises. In the first three, especially, we see the author in possession of his full energy and vitality. Their design is broad, their gloomy pictures are painted objectively, as in the theatre; sadness, despair, fill the heart of the hero of the story; but we perceive that these feelings do not represent the only sentiments of the author.

It was at this time that his friend Orlowski wrote (1834):—" Chopin is full of health and vigour; all the

French women dote on him, and all the French men are jealous of him. He is all the fashion; the world will shortly see *gloves à la Chopin*."

I have the more extensively enlarged upon this masculine side of Chopin's creations, seeing that up to the present time it has received but little attention (except from Karasowski*). His graceful and charming figure, the delicacy and softness of his best known works, lastly his malady, and that which we know concerning his last years, all tend to represent Chopin to most people as a weak and enervated being; and, worse than this, such an idea is frequently the cause of a dull and monotonous performance of his works; a performance absolutely contrary to their spirit. His poetry and sweet melancholy which touch our hearts (*our* hearts), injure him in the estimation of foreigners. These have styled him, as Field styled him, a man with the talent of the sick-chamber; they have exaggerated the weak side of his mind, and have instanced certain compositions written under peculiar circumstances. Even amongst ourselves this opinion has its adherents; we cannot too strongly combat it, for it is the cause of a performance diametrically opposed to the sense and meaning of the music. Numbers of school-girls playing Chopin's music with that which is called *feeling*, are not aware that there is in it strong and noble matter which they debase and degrade *ad lib.* This misnamed *feeling* has the following characteristics: (1) Exaggeration of the *rubato;* (2) The turning of the thought upside down,

* Author of several books concerning Chopin written in Polish, also of an excellent biography of the master, published in German. Of this work there is an English translation, 2 vols, cr. 8vo., 12s. 6d, London, W. Reeves,

if one may so describe it, by giving the accents to the notes, which should be weak, and *vice versâ;* (3) Striking the chords with the left hand just before the corresponding notes of the melody. Chopin has, without doubt, his negative points which serve as the basis, so to speak, of the positive side of his genius. He somewhat lost sight of himself in the Parisian drawing-rooms; perhaps he did not come up to the expectations which he raised, so far as considerable works are concerned. Considering the richness of his talent, he has disappointed us somewhat, as he disappointed Schumann; but, on the other hand, throwing his whole heart into small works, he has finished and perfected them in an admirable manner. The executant should not exaggerate his weak points; on the contrary, as we shall say when we come to speak of style, he should treat them as the reflection of the more powerful passages.

Those who set themselves above the music of Chopin are generally people of an unmusical nature; people who are no better critics of the music of other masters, nor of the utility of music itself. These same Zoiluses, occasionally hearing the last prelude or the *Polonaise* (Op. 53), feel themselves taken by surprise, and ask: Is this really Chopin's?

In the letter which we have already quoted, Orlowski thus explains himself: "He is only afflicted with home-sickness." He had also other afflictions; and amongst these a "weariness of life," common at that time to many exalted minds. To us he is most touching in the works in which these sorrows are made perceptible in gentle complainings. The *Nocturnes in F minor*, and in *G minor*, the *Study in C sharp*, the *Waltz in A minor*, the *Preludes*, &c.,

brought him the sympathy of every feeling heart—feminine sympathy especially. "Chopin," says someone, "is a sigh which has something pleasing in it."

People have gone too far, nevertheless, in seeking in his *Preludes* for traces of that misanthropy, of that "weariness of life," to which he was a prey during his stay in the island of Majorca. That which happened to him was the lot also of other masters. Haydn was not happy in his household affairs; Beethoven fled from the world and from men; still gaiety rings in the works of the first, and the second enchants us by the tranquil majesty of his melodies; in the compositions of either it would be in vain to seek for traces of household discomforts. How is this? It is that man is one being in his daily life, but a totally different being when the divine inspiration takes hold of him. The happiness which he feels in creating renders him indifferent to the whole world, carries him far from earth and its cares. This is true of Chopin above all; of Chopin who, in his private life, could not allow indifferent persons to share the secrets of his heart, who would have deemed it beneath his dignity to exhibit the true state *of his* soul; at least, he did so very rarely.

Very few of the Preludes present this character of *ennui*, and that which is the most marked in this respect, the *Prelude No.* 2, must have been written, according to Tarnowski, a long time before he went to Majorca. We know, from the Memoirs of Madame Sand, the history of a Prelude which Chopin had composed, but that the rain was beating against the windows of the house in which he was alone, waiting for his friends, who had gone out for a walk, and whom he imagined he should never see again. If

this Prelude, according to the universally received tradition, is that in B minor, I ought to add that the idea which it contains is only developed fully in the *Prelude No.* 15 *in D flat*, compared with which the first-named is a mere sketch.

The foundation of the picture is the drops of rain falling at regular iuntervals, which by their continual dropping bring the mind to a state of sadness and absence: a melody full of tears is heard through the pattering of the rain; then passing into the key of C sharp minor, the melody rises from the depths of the bass to a prodigious *crescendo*, indicative of the terror which nature in its deathly aspect excites in the heart of man. Here again the form does not allow the ideas to become too sombre; notwithstanding the melancholy which seizes you, a feeling of tranquil grandeur revives you. What is there to say concerning the other Preludes, full of good humour and gaiety (*No.* 18 *in E flat*, *No.* 21 *in B flat*, *No.* 23 *in F*), or of the last in *D minor*. Is not that strong and energetic which concludes as with three cannon shots?

The work most full of despair, the work most replete with sadness, is the celebrated *Funeral March*. The tolling of the bells fills us with dread, and serves as accompaniment to a mournful and heartrending melody; but who would presume to say that this is sickly, unhealthy? He who has, if only once in his life, found himself in the state of mind here so dramatically depicted, *he* comprehends the grandeur of these lamentations, the majesty of this grief. The note of hope in the middle part in D flat major is no defect.

Let us now pass on to the more characteristic

works of Chopin, the *Mazurkas*. Here again we must combat the idea that they are too sad, too much in minor.

The propensity to melancholy, to musing, is not in itself a weakness; a delicate nature is not necessarily a feeble nature. Chopin, a Pole, as his mother was a Pole, could not avoid that which is characteristic of our nation. Our peasants like dances in minor keys; they return often and sometimes persistently to that somewhat monotonous tone which, nevertheless, with them indicates so well the loving and generous depth of their being. Ah well! that is *our* defect. It is a weakness, if you must so regard it; we like plenty of that Christian love which extends to the entire creation. Blessed, nevertheless, be the masters and poets who have known how, in their works, to sound that note so dear to our hearts.

There are those who might perhaps object to Chopin that he delighted in popular themes of a melancholy cast. Let us not forget that he has put forth with equal felicity the chivalrous and martial parts of these songs, and this is the most difficult to reproduce. A foreigner who sees our dances is forced to admit that these are the pastimes of a virtuous and martial people.

In spite of his continual sufferings, Chopin did not allow his efforts to relax. One of his last works is the *Allegro de Concert* (Op. 46), full of life and gaiety. It bears some resemblance to the introduction to his *Fantasie sur des Airs Nationaux* (Op. 13).

We may safely say that his illness and natural weakness produced no other effect than that of rendering his productions more infrequent, of putting somewhat wide spaces between his moments of

poetical inspiration: during these moments he forgot everything else, becoming quite another being. It is to these moments that we are indebted for the *Fantasie in G minor*, and his *Polonaise* (*Op.* 53), the type of a war song. There is a tradition attached to this Polonaise. When he seated himself at the pianoforte for the purpose of playing it for the first time,* the room seemed to him to be filled with the warriors whom he had conjured up in his music, and he fled in terror of the products of his own imagination. This tradition furnishes a key to his character; it gives us, so to speak, Chopin in his entirety; the body too weak, too enervated, could not support the productions of the mind which remained healthy and strong.

At this period however, as we have just said, production became more difficult; thought could not so easily burst into the light of day in the midst of so many hindrances. The efforts of the master, however, for some time concealed these impediments to production; this is perceptible in the *Berceuse*, the *Sonata in B minor*, and the *Barcarolle*. It was only after his rupture with George Sand, and during the short space of time which elapsed until his death, that we see a broken spirit, a thought which found difficulty in giving itself clear expression. Thus it was with his last *Nocturnes*, the *Sonata* for *Violoncello*, and that last *Mazurka* composed on his death-bed, which his failing hand could not write.

This painful period, nevertheless, produced one grand and trimphant conception, a protest against sickness, against feebleness of body; a shout from the spirit which felt itself still strong; this is the

* This occurred in an isolated tower of the *Château de Nohant*.

Polonaise Fantasie (Op 61). The idea, the parent of this Polonaise, concealed under a form unfortunately too vague, was to depict the sufferings, the fall, and the approaching triumph of his people. Does not this prove that, his weakness of body notwithstanding, his spirit was always supported by a lively faith and an unshaken hope?

Finally, is it possible to include Chopin among men of despair, literary and poetical? No; for he never forgot, in the midst of his greatest sufferings, the ideal to which his soul aspired. That ideal has not always served as guide to masters of the new school. Does not Schumann himself sometimes present in his Fantasias too much fever, too many undefined and clouded ideas?* And the Realistic school itself, where has it placed its ideal? Has it not supplanted ideality, and for it substituted doubt and the worship of matter? If these symptoms and tendencies are to be found in Chopin, no one can deny that his work had a neutralizing influence. But *we* find the contrary, and a few exceptional works will not weaken our opinion. Resting upon that which we believe ourselves to have proved, we shall proceed to study the technical and intellectual requirements for the performance of the master's works.

* These tendencies consist in an abuse of chromatic passages, dissonanees, and in the instruction, contrary to established custom, to play the dissonance *piano*. This strangely irritates the nerves.

Lecture II.

Whoever has seen the portrait of Chopin painted by Ary Scheffer, whoever has for any length of time considered his frail, delicate form and the native grace and dignity of his manner, will understand one of the most distinctive characteristics of his productions; he will perceive that Chopin dwells in ethereal and ideal regions; that refinement and elegance are the necessities of his nature; that many things appear to him coarse which do not offend the generality of people. Not to speak of his habits and manners, for which he was by Liszt styled "The Prince," we find in his compositions and in the tradition which has descended to us concerning his manner of performance, characteristics which distinguish him from all other artists. His touch was generally softer than that which is ordinarily employed, and he rarely used power; he carefully avoided that which is merely brilliant and written for mere effect; he sought out higher qualities, and often such as were incomprehensible to the ordinary crowd.

Liszt's manner of playing did not always satisfy Chopin; his favourite authors were those whose works were most delicate and purest in form. Heine has styled him "The Raphael of Music;" Mozart, who merits the same description, he preferred to all other composers. On his death-bed he begged the

Princess Marcelline Czartoryska and the violoncellist Franchomme to play Mozart's Sonatas. The grand works of Beethoven offended him, in that they contained some passages which he considered rough; and even in the immortal "*Don Juan*" of Mozart, his favourite work, he found passages disagreeable to his ear.

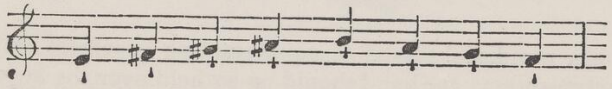
From this we perceive that Chopin placed the ideal of pianoforte playing very high. Without yet entering into an analysis of his beautiful style, we may affirm that in the opinion of all his contemporaries his execution was perfect, except perhaps in weight; his touch was so exquisite that sometimes a single chord was sufficient to charm his hearers. It is not surprising that he should require the same perfection in his pupils. Thus the first few lessons were to them a perfect martyrdom; the touch of the pupil always appeared too hard and rough. The smallest detail which did not come up to the ideal of the master was always repeated and severely criticized.

The basis therefore of this method of teaching consisted in refinement of touch; and this alone would suffice to distinguish it from all others. Every one, it is true, recognized the utility of a good touch, but often spoilt it by an abuse of exercises badly comprehended. Chopin was entirely filled with the sentiment of the beautiful and the exquisite; and the same may be said of his admirable works.

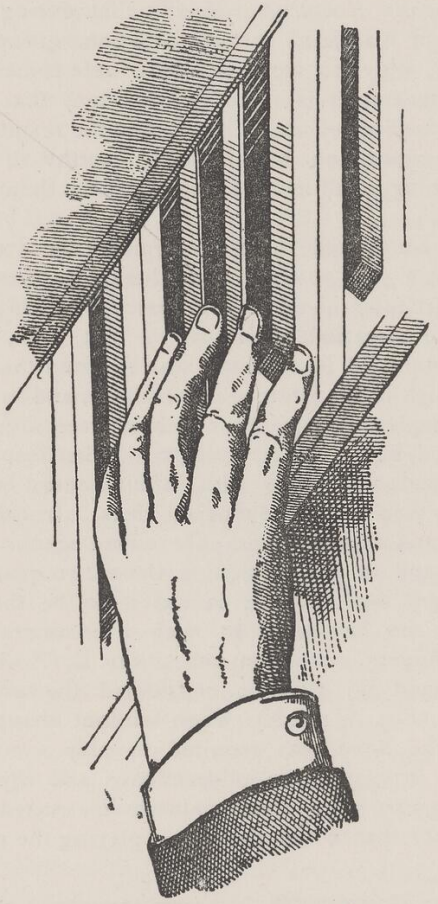
The works of Beethoven, and even of Liszt, played with ability, but with a less refined touch, may yet please us and retain their characteristics; whereas Chopin's music, played with a clumsy or too heavy hand, is not far from caricature, especially in the

Berceuse or the *Nocturnes*. Seeing that during the latter part of his life he became, as a consequence of his illness, only too conscious of a note somewhat roughly touched, it is impossible to deny that this constant care for delicacy of touch was the result of a profound conception of an ideal, worthy of the greatest eulogy, and more rare at that time than it is at present.

Chopin considered the first requisite for a good touch to be a good position of the hand; he was extremely particular about this matter. Though there were some remarkable virtuosi at that time, the method employed in teaching was far from the perfection which it has attained in our days; and in this respect Chopin outstripped the then existing German school, and surpassed it perhaps in other respects. He prepared the hand with infinite care, before permitting it to reproduce musical ideas. In order to give the hand a position at once advantageous and graceful (and in his estimation these two qualities always went together), he caused it to be thrown lightly on the key-board in such a manner that the five fingers rested on the notes E, F sharp, A sharp and B; this he considered the normal position. (Fig. A, p. 28.) Then without change of position the hand was required to play exercises calculated to ensure the independence and equality of the fingers. He almost always instructed the pupil to commence these exercises playing the notes staccato.



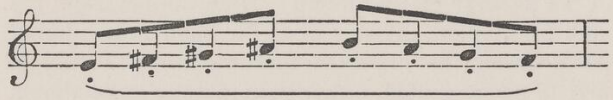
The staccato effected by a free movement of the wrist



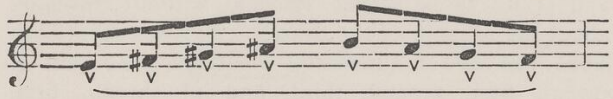
(Figure A).

is a wonderful means of counteracting heaviness and clumsiness; the hand should be so held over the keys that the teacher placing his own hands under the wrists of the pupil feels scarcely any pressure. This

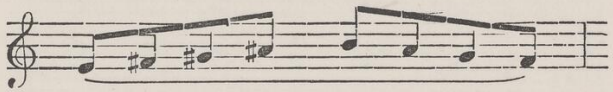
is, besides, the kind of exercise which most certainly conduces to an equality of power in the fingers; it is, likewise, that which most quickly counteracts the natural inferiority of the third and fourth fingers. A second set of exercises consisted of a legato staccato, or heavy staccato, in which the finger rests somewhat longer on the key.



Then we come to the true slurred manner by modifying the legato staccato, making it an accented legato.



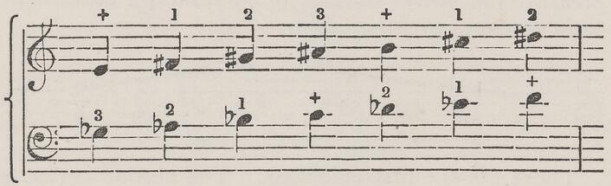
Next we use a legato executed with the fingers raised considerably above the key-board; and, finally, we have the legato performed *ad lib.*, with a movement of the fingers more or less marked, modifying at pleasure the power from *ff* to *pp*, and the movement from Andante to Prestissimo.



These are the first exercises. The second series is for the purpose of preserving the even and tranquil position of the hand during the passage of the thumb in scales and arpeggios. We here touch upon a question important and much controverted, and we are probably about to find ourselves in disagreement with the generally received opinion. It is known that with

nearly all great virtuosi the elbow rests near the body as much as possible, and the passage of the thumb in scales and arpeggios takes place insensibly. But I believe that none of the exercises written with this object are so good and so logical as those of Chopin. At first it is ordinarily impossible to avoid moving the elbow, or turning the hand somewhat, at the moment of the passage of the thumb. Now Chopin, from the very first lesson, insisted upon the hand's retention of its position; he preferred that the notes should at first be disconnected, rather than that the hand should alter its normal position.
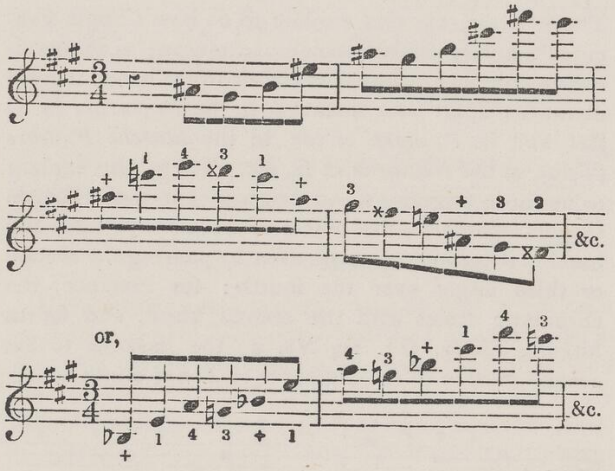
He also at the commencement caused all exercises and scales to be played staccato, without troubling about the passage of the thumb. Taking it that each scale has two fundamental positions, viz., that of thumb, first, second, third, and of thumb, first, second, fingers; his pupils commenced with the scale of B major for the right, and of D flat major for the left hand,* forming the hand in the manner already described at each fundamental position—



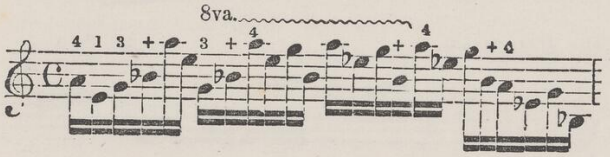
By this staccato exercise the hand was rendered familiar with the successive positions; then by the various steps of legato staccato, accentuated staccato,
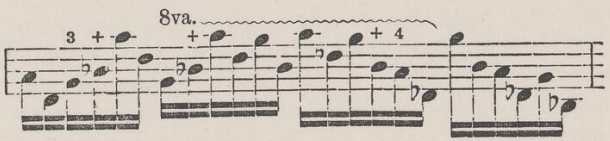
* These being the most easy scales for the respective hands.

&c., the pupil got to the point when, raising the fingers high, the thumb was passed by the action of the muscles alone, the hand still retaining its horizontal position; the hand was thus prepared for the more difficult scales, and for arpeggio passages, in which the wide intervals were eventually reached without effort and without greatly raising the fingers. I know from experience that by this method an equal and steady style of performance is attainable even when it is necessary to pass the thumb after the third or fourth finger, as in the *Scherzo in B flat*—
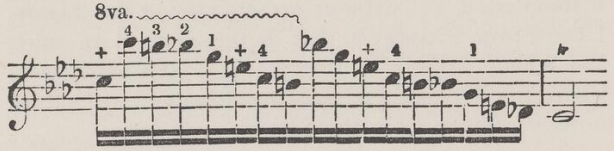


in the *Study in A minor*—
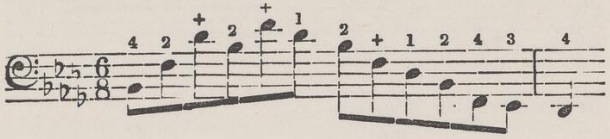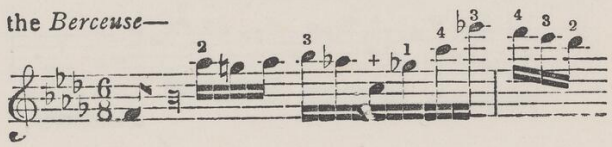




in the *Impromptu in A flat*, &c.—
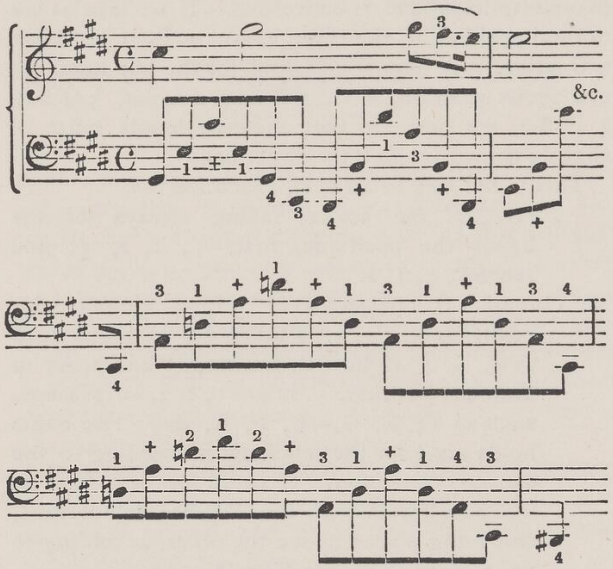


These exercises also explain to us how Chopin executed his very difficult accompaniments; accompaniments unknown before, and consisting of notes at great distances apart; for instance, in the *Nocturnes in D flat* and in *C sharp minor* in the *Marche Funebre* (Trio), in the *Nocturne in G*, &c. These also explain to us those fingerings—so original that they shocked the old pianists—the object of which is to keep the hand in its proper position, even by passing the second or third finger over the fourth: for instance, the chromatic scales with the second, third, and fourth fingers, *Study*, O♭. 10, *No. 2;* the passage to the second motivo of the *Nocturne in B flat minor*—



the *Berceuse*—



the *Nocturne in C sharp minor*, &c.—



Kalkbrenner, an excellent pianist, but a partisan of the old school, was quite horrified at this unceremonious innovation; and admitting that Chopin had "*a kind of talent*," advised him to follow his (Kalkbrenner's) instructions for three years at least, in order to correct his defective fingering. Fortunately the young master, in accordance with the counsels of Elsner, would not listen to the advice, and remained that which he was.

I must yet add a few words concerning this fingering. It arises from an idea perfectly true and rational, from a natural position of the hand, to which position it ought to conform in most passages; and

this is one of Chopin's greatest merits so far as pianoforte technique is concerned. If we take as the normal position of the right hand, + E, 1 F sharp, 2 G sharp, 3 A sharp, 4 B, and for the left hand the analogous position, + C, 1 B flat, 2 A flat, 3 G flat, 4 F flat, we perceive that the two hands must be slightly turned in contrary directions.

This is the Key to an even execution :—

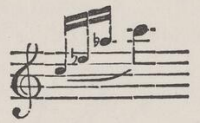
First.—Of the scales, taking always for the hands the positions, first, +, 1, 2, 3; and second, +, 1, 2.

Second.—Of passages of broken chords; the position, +, 1 2, 3, is taken for passages such as C, E, G, B flat—C, D sharp, F sharp, A; or even the position, +, 1, 2—+, 1, 3, for passage, such as C, E, G,—C, F, A, &c. The same holds good for the left hand proceeding in the contrary direction. It could be best done on the pianofortes with two key-boards reversed, one being placed above the other, according to the system of the Brothers Mangeot.

Third.—Of all rapid passages in general, recollecting that the hands must be slightly turned, the right hand to the right, the left hand to the left, and that the elbows should remain close to the body, except in the highest and lowest octaves. Exceptions to these rules will certainly be found; but they will be very rare.

The pupils of Chopin, however advanced, were required, besides the scales, to play with care the second book of *Clementi's Preludes and Exercises*, and above all to study the first *Etude in A flat.* Every hard, rough, or uneven note had to be played again

and carefully corrected. To complete his misery the pupil encountered at the commencement an arpeggio :—

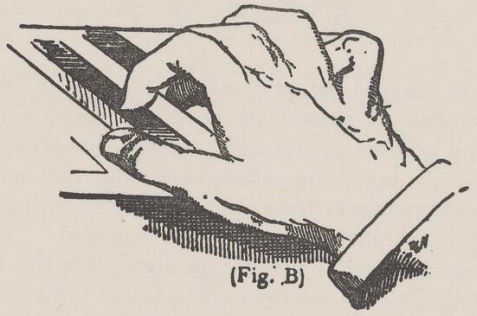


which has caused many tears to flow. It was necessary that it should be executed rapidly, crescendo, but without abruptness. It was this arpeggio which brought upon one unfortunate pupil this somewhat too sharp rebuke from the master, who springing up on his chair, exclaimed : "What was that? Was that a dog barking?" I had this story from the late Madame B. Zaleska, who herself has said some sharp things to me whilst showing me some peculiarities in Chopin's manner of performance.

This unfortunate study had to be worked in every possible way; it was played quickly and slowly; forte and piano, staccato and legato, until the touch became equal, delicate, and light without feebleness.

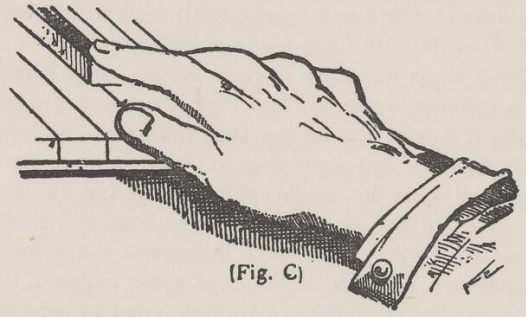
I have some difficulty in reconciling these lessons with a statement which I had from some of his pupils. Chopin, it seems, sometimes kept his hand absolutely flat, in such a manner that it was impossible to understand how he could play so well with it in this inconvenient position. I have been shown this manner of playing, and have heard one of his pupils thus play the *Study in A flat*, and some pages of the *Sonata in B flat minor.* This has failed to convince me, and I do not believe that such a manner of playing can ever become general. It is true that by this means an extremely delicate and connected tone may be obtained, but these qualities are otherwise obtain-

able, and such a position of the hand is incompatible with power and rapidity. It is possible that Chopin employed it in order to avoid striking the keys with his nails (Figure B), and to facilitate striking



(Fig. B)

them with the fleshy part of the finger. (Figure C.) At the present time it appears to me that some professors of the pianoforte recommend that the



(Fig. C)

fingers should be bent like a claw, so as to give them more power and certainty; others would keep them more flat. But these latter do not go so far as to recommend the perfectly flat hand em-

ployed sometimes by Chopin; from which I presume that it was a method rarely adopted by him, and without doubt slightly exaggerated by his pupils. The two methods above-mentioned can always, I believe, be employed according to the nature of the passages to be executed. By holding the hand more or less bent it appears to me that the touch would be somewhat different in different cases. That would depend—

First.—Upon the scale in which we may be playing. By comparing the following positions, E, F sharp, G sharp, A sharp, B—and C, D, E, F, G, it will be seen that more extended fingers are most convenient for the first; whereas fingers bent are most advantageous for the second.

Second.—Upon the necessity for a strong and elastic, or singing tone.

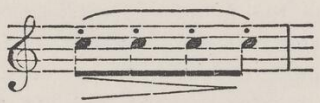
For striking a strong chord it is necessary absolutely to concentrate the hand, so to speak (Fig. D);—in the opposite case, we may stroke the keys with out-



Fig. D

stretched fingers, as Chopin sometimes did in order to obtain a touch like velvet.

The above is the greater part of the information that I have been able to collect. Let us add that listening to the greatest virtuosi, besides playing technical exercises, is necessary for the acquirement of the touch required for the execution of Chopin's works. We should, it seems to me, learn from Madame Essipoff and Antoine Rubinstein.* The latter enchants us by a special detail; almost without moving his finger, he repeats the same sound like an echo, softening it each time in a manner infinitely charming.



Chopin often employed this effect, and has indicated it to us at the end of his *Study in F minor* (Op. 25, No. 2) in the *Nocturne in F minor* (Op. 55, No. 1), in the *Polonaise in C minor*, (Trio), in the *Polonaise in C sharp minor*, &c.

These rules for touch are quite compatible with power, which Chopin employed sometimes to a considerable extent; but the tone though powerful should never be rough and hard; it should be always full and rich.

In order to acquire these different qualities of tone, Chopin, from the first lesson, unceasingly directed the attention of the pupil to the freedom and independence of the fingers. He differs in this, I believe, from other professors who do not come to the independence of the fingers until after a long course of study. Chopin recommended, with this object, that the fingers should

* Or from Richard Rickard.—*Translator.*

fall freely and lightly, and that the hand should be held as though suspended in the air (without weight): he objected to rapid movements at too early a stage of the pupil's progress, and wished that they should learn to execute all passages *fortissimo* and *pianissimo*. From this method the various qualities of tone came of themselves, and the hand was never fatigued. This frequent employment of *piano*, for the purpose of avoiding heaviness and clumsiness of hand, is a characteristic feature in the method of Chopin.

With the object of acquiring independence of the fingers, in addition to the five-finger exercises of which we have spoken, he had the scales played with an accent on each third or fourth note.

Resuming our observations, we perceive that this continual tendency to develope beauty of tone was the principal cause of the charm of his execution—the full sounds were thereby the more easily connected. And as this result was obtained by the free movements of the hand owing to the staccato work, it may be said that the *staccato* is the best exercise for learning to play legato. Moscheles has left us an enthusiastic description of that execution, so beautifully smooth and so sweet to the ear, which he admired in the study in A flat. (Op. 25, No. 1.)

It is evident that in this study an important factor was the use of the pedal, of which Chopin has penetrated the secret better than any other master. He gave to his pupils several rules which only later found a place in the usual methods. Not being able here thoroughly to examine this question of the pedal, so important and so full of variety, I refer the reader to a little book published at Vienna in the year 1875: *Das pedal des Clavieres*, by Hans Schmitt. Except in

certain particulars this is an excellent book, and throws great light on the execution of Chopin's works.

Before all things, those who would study the use of the pedal in the works of the master, should pay attention to these observations: (1) The directions for the employment of the pedal are sometimes defective in the editions of Chopin's compositions; (2) The employment of the pedal is an individual matter, and one which cannot be fettered by precise and definite rules. Different artists take different views of it, and thus produce new effects. Its use also depends upon the instrument and the place in which we play.

Each employment of the pedal (I speak here of the open or loud pedal) must have an end which justifies its employment. The pedal may be employed in the following cases:—

First.—It is useful in all broken chords, and in some passages which keep in one key. Many passages in Chopin are indebted to the frequent and intelligent employment of the pedal for their beautiful harmony: for instance, the *Study* in A flat (Op. 25, No. 1), *Prelude in F* (No. 23), &c.

Second.—We know that in playing with the same hand both the melody and its accompaniment, the pedal is indispensable to the prominence of the melody. Another use of the pedal occurs infrequently in the works of Chopin, though examples are to be found—for instance, in the trio of the *Study* in E minor (Op. 25, No. 5), but it is an effect often employed by Thalberg and Liszt. In the compositions of these authors and others of the same school, we find the pedal

utilized in a manner altogether peculiar, and that is the holding it for a length of time without interruption. Thus the sonority of the instrument attains prodigious proportions; but this is only allowable in grand crescendos. Tausig used this means in the trio with octaves of the *Grande Polonaise in A flat* (Op. 53).

Third.—According to Schmitt, the pedal augments the richness and beauty of the tone by the introduction of the harmonics of the principal sound, which vibrate with it. This is especially true of the middle octaves of the key-board. The employment of the pedal may therefore become, in a melody consisting of notes of long duration, the principal cause of beauty of tone.

Nevertheless, there are two things which must be avoided:—

(*a.*) Mixing two notes of a melody,—not only two adjoining notes, which would produce dissonance, but even two notes belonging to the same consonant chord, the hearing of which together would be illogical and unnatural. The pianoforte with double key-boards would be of great service in cases like this, as there is a pedal for the melody and another for the accompaniment.

As an example I will here cite the *Nocturne in F sharp* (Op. 15), and the *Prelude in D flat*, in which the pedal cannot be held during the whole measure, though, according to the indications, it should be so held. In the Nocturne the first measure would be dissonant; in the Prelude the melody would have the
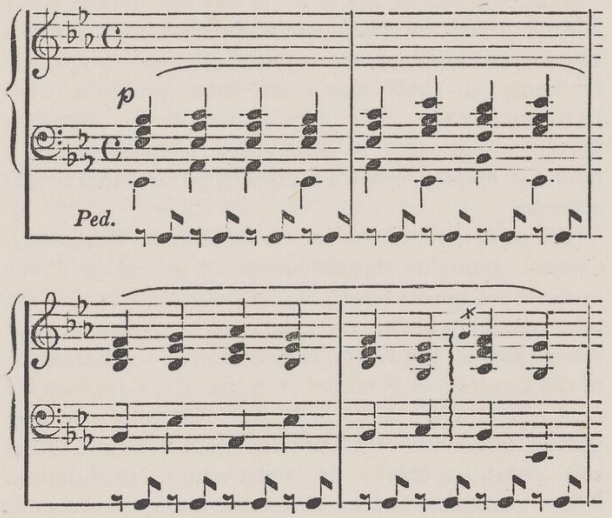
effect of a duet, two notes sounding together, one of which ought simply to follow the other.

(*b.*) The too frequent use of the pedal. This fatigues the ears of the audience. It appears to me an impossibility to employ the pedal every time its use is indicated in the first eight measures of the *Nocturne in A flat* (Op. 32), or in the trio of the *Fantasie Impromptu* (Op. 66). This confirms the opinion of Schmitt, who considers that great artists prefer not to trouble themselves at all about the pedal, leaving its employment to the will of the executant (like Schumann, who frequently simply marked *Ped.*, at the beginning of a piece), or, not taking into consideration their own use of the pedal, their indications are not in accordance with the manner in which they themselves would intuitively employ it. (This may be said of Moscheles in his editions of the Sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven.)

Fourth.—The higher octaves of the pianoforte admit a more frequent and lengthened use of the pedal than the middle octaves.

Fifth.—Sometimes, in order to sustain certain notes, it is well to take the pedal *after* having struck the note or chord. By this means we obtain a great smoothness and connection between chords which succeed one another. We have indicated the pedal in the manner of Schmitt, by notes placed on a special line. All this part of the Nocturne thus played, has an admirable effect, as though played upon an organ. The sounds of the bell in the

Marche Funebre should be connected in the same manner:—
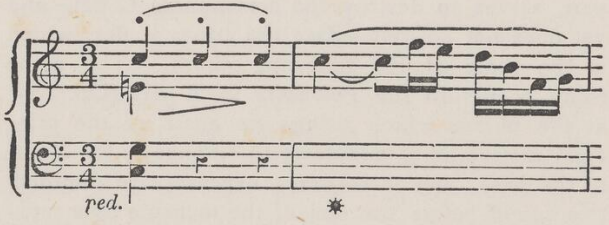


Sixth.—Sometimes we omit the pedal for a moment, to make a phrase clear and to avoid a dissonance. Thus, in Example 3 (Plate 1), the pedal, quitted an instant before the B flat of the upper part, serves to destroy the dissonance, C flat, and yet does not entirely efface the bass, B flat, which is the tonic of the following chord. The same thing occurs in the *Polonaise in E flat* (Op. 22); at the phrase which brings us again to the principal motivo, it is necessary to emphasize the B flat of the bass: but it becomes necessary to diminish this sound before the end of the measure by a rapid movement of the foot, for the purpose of allowing

the following chord to come into prominence in all its purity.

We refer you to Schmitt for further details, only adding that the pedal is a delicate and difficult means to employ, but which if used frequently for only a short space of time produces very beautiful results. In a few rare cases, when it becomes necessary to strengthen a consonance, it may be employed for a longer time and in a bolder manner.

We now come to the combination of the two pedals. Chopin brought this resource to perfection. We know those graces which are so beautiful when played with the help of the soft pedal—(the *Nocturne in F sharp*, part 2; the *Nocturne in G minor*; the Larghetto of the *Concerto in F minor;* the trio of the *Impromptu in A flat;* the *Nocturne in D*, &c. Chopin frequently passed, and without transition, from the open to the soft pedal, especially in enharmonic modulation. These passages had an altogether particular charm, especially when played on Pleyel's pianofortes. For instance, the first measure of the solo in the Larghetto of the *Concerto in F minor* on the note E flat; the *Polonaise in C minor* (Op. 40) upon the return of the motivo of the trio:—



The *Mazurka in A minor* (Op. 17), eighth measure;

the *Polonaise in C sharp minor* (Op. 26), second part, ninth measure, &c.

In the next Lecture more detailed directions upon this subject will be given. Here we will only add, that notwithstanding the charming effects of the soft pedal, it should be employed with due caution; many passages are best when played simply and without the use of either pedal. This may be said of the *Nocturne in F* (Op. 15), and the middle part, in ¾ time of the *Andante spianato* (Op. 22).

Likewise an excessive use of the *pianissimo* should be avoided, the result of which would be to invest a work with an air of affectation.

LECTURE III.

Up to the present time we have spoken only of the necessary technical conditions for the execution of the works of Chopin. It now becomes requisite to enter into the spirit which should influence that execution. The remarks which we are about to submit were obtained from those who were acquainted with, and who followed the instructions of, Chopin.

Before all, let us recall that ideality which animated the great artist, and which endowed him with the appellation, "the Raphael of Music." This ideality was associated with perfection of form, delicacy, and an infinite variety of shadings. But this ideality was not without defined outlines, it was not without distinct character. This Raphael suffered and experienced much; we have seen that his works contain a considerable amount both of grief and of gaiety, but he avoided all useless noise and vulgarity. He had a certain reticence in all things, which prevented his falling into affectation and sickly sentimentality: still he would be open to such an accusation, judged by his compositions as executed by some, and only too many, exponents.

The root of his musical tendency was truly the aspiration to a broad and noble style. This beautiful style in the course of time became absolutely his own; still several masters, both his predecessors and contemporaries served as his models. We know with what care he studied Bach; he found in the Adagios of Beethoven that clearness of thought and that serenity, which he so well knew how to adopt and to utilize. In other works of less value, but suited to the pianoforte, we also find that harmony and that elegance, which Chopin has brought to such a height of perfection. For example, Field's Nocturnes, his First Concerto; Cramer's Study in D (in Book 4 of his Studies) which is similar in style to the Concertos of Field; then the Concertos of Hummel and the Andante to his Fantasia (Op. 18), &c.

This style is based upon simplicity; it admits of no affectation, and therefore does not allow too great changes of movement. This is an absolute condition for the execution of all Chopin's works, especially of his earlier works, and more especially of his concertos; the richness and variety of the embellishments would tend to sickliness and affectation if the execution were not as simple as the conception.

This remark, being in every respect in accordance with that which we know of Chopin's execution, allows us at the same time to estimate at their proper worth all the details of his compositions, so complicated, and yet possessing so much unity. Thus, for example, these digressions, these frequent arabesques, are not meaningless ornaments and paltry elegance, as were the ornamental passages of Herz, amongst others; but they are, if we may be allowed the expression, the transparent lace-work through which

the principal thought smiles upon us, thereby gaining yet another charm. This is a matter which must not be disregarded in executing them. These ornamental passages, these grupetti of a certain number of notes, most frequently appearing when the same *motivo* returns several times; first the *motivo* is heard in its simplicity; afterwards, surrounded with ornaments, richer and richer at each return. It is, therefore, necessary to render this *motivo* with very nearly the same shadings, whatever may be the form in which it reappears. For example, compare, in the *Nocturne in F sharp* (Op. 15), the third and the eleventh measures, then the eleventh and the third upon the return of the principal *motivo;* or compare, in the *Concerto in E minor*, the thirteenth and fifty-fourth measures; or, in the second *motivo* of the *Impromptu in A flat*, consider the different forms in which the phrase in F minor appears, &c. Again, these ornamental passages should not be slackened, but rather accelerated towards the end; a *rallentando* would invest them with too much importance, would make them appear to be special and independent ideas, whereas they are only fragments of the phrase, and, as such, should form part of the thought, and disappear in it like a little brook which loses itself in a great river; or they may be regarded as parentheses which, quickly pronounced, produce a greater effect than they would if they were retarded. Here are examples of these ornamental passages which should be played more slowly at the commencement and accelerated towards the end:—

a. *Nocturne in E flat* (Op. 9), measures 16 and 24.

b. The *Larghetto* of the *Concerto in F minor*, measures 26, 28, 30, 40, 75, and 77.

The following parentheses should be delivered rapidly and *pianissimo*:—

a. *Nocturne in A flat* (Op. 32), measures 14 and 22.

b. *Nocturne in F* (Op. 15), measure 28; also upon the return of the *motivo*.

c. *Nocturne in G minor* (Op. 37), measure 36, &c.
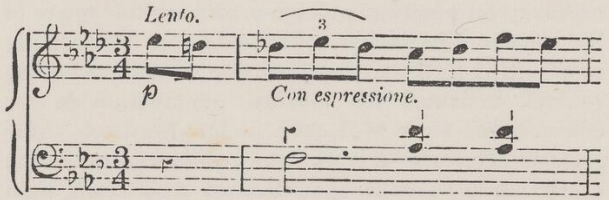
Chopin differed, in his manner of using arabesques and parenthetical ornamentations, from the usual manner of his time, which was to dwell upon such passages and to endue them with importance, as in the cadenzas attached to the airs of the Italian School. Chopin was perfectly right. In spoken language we do not use the same tone of voice for the principal thought and the incidental phrases; we leave the latter in the shade, and properly so. All the theory of the style which Chopin taught to his pupils rested on this analogy between music and language, on the necessity for separating the different phrases, on the necessity for pointing and for modifying the power of the voice and its rapidity of articulation. We are not now putting forth any new doctrine, since Bülow has so well indicated the musical punctuation in his editions, and since M. Lussy, in his *Traité de l'Expression Musicale*—a work crowned (*couronné*) at the exhibition of Vienna—has thrown a brilliant light upon this subject.

The rules laid down by these two authors have rarely been utilized by other writers; M. Sikorski is

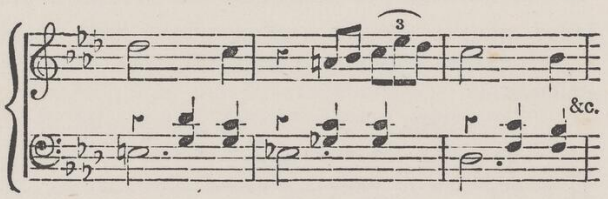
an exception, for, in his *Mouvement Musical,** he recommends them to his readers. Here follow some principal rules for musical punctuation and elocution.

In a musical phrase composed of something like eight measures, the end of the eighth will generally mark the termination of the thought, that which, in language written or spoken, we should indicate by a full-point; here we should make a slight pause and lower the voice. The secondary divisions of this phrase of eight measures, occurring after each two or each four measures, require shorter pauses—that is to say, they require commas or semi-colons. These pauses are of great importance: without them music becomes a succession of sounds without connection, an incomprehensible chaos, as spoken language would be if no regard were paid to punctuation and the inflexion of the voice. A short example will make the matter clear. Let us take the well known *Waltz in A flat* (Op. 69); the musical thought is divided into periods of two measures, and thus the concluding note of each second measure should be shorter and weaker than the preceding notes.
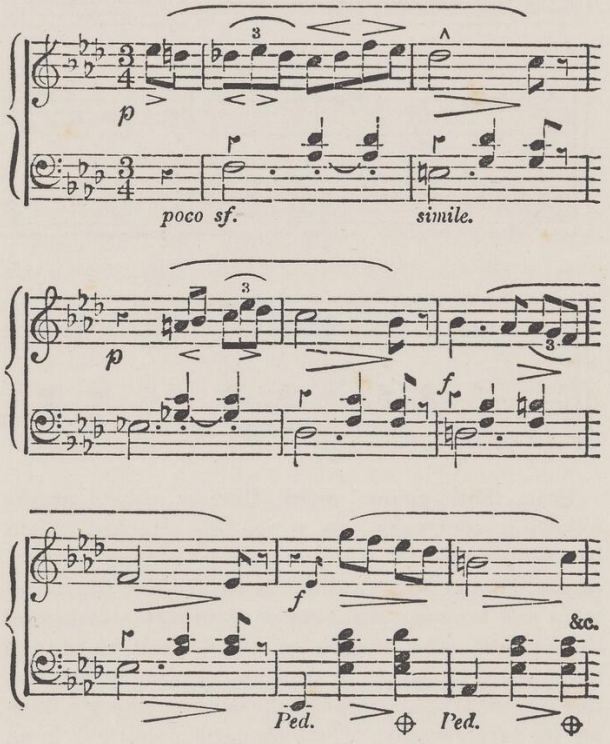
Written thus:—
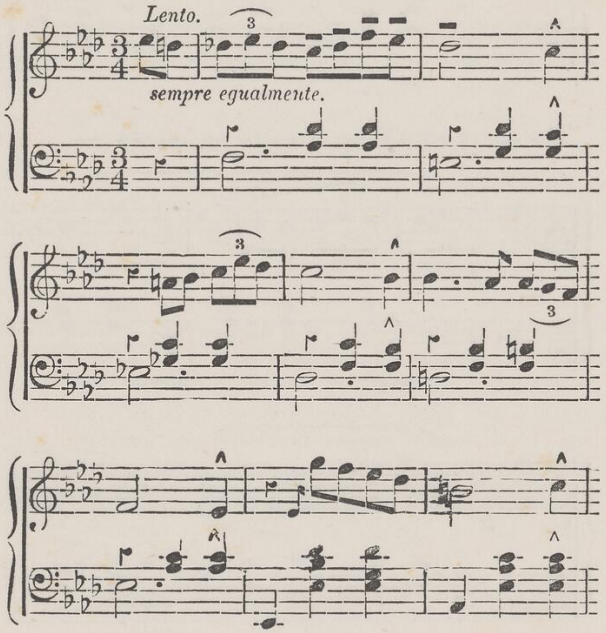


* A Musical Journal, which was issued in Varsovia, from 1857 to 1862.



The above should be executed as follows:—
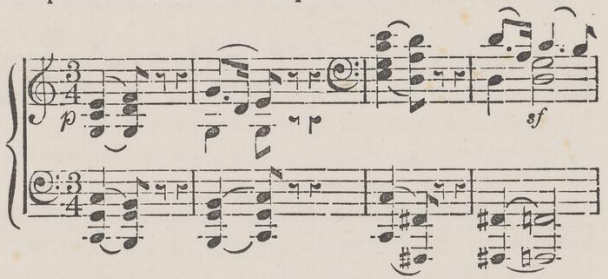


Judge what a ridiculous effect would result from a performance like that indicated in the following example:—

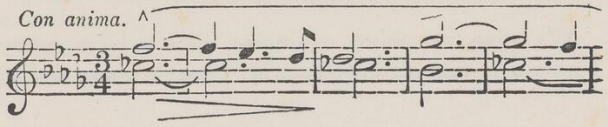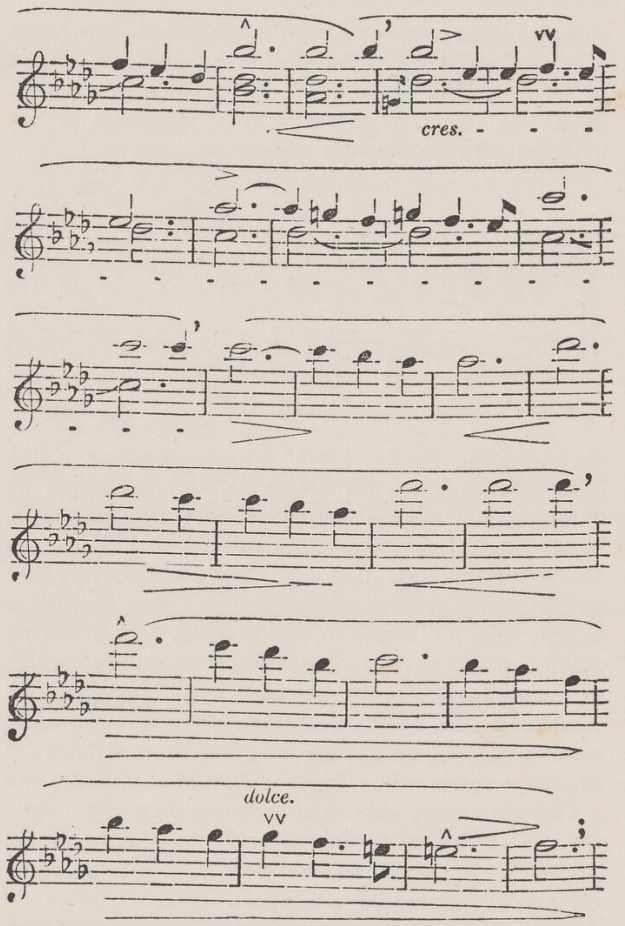


From these general rules, Chopin arrived at the following conclusion, to which he attached much importance: *do not play by too short phrases;* that is to say, Do not keep continually suspending the movement and lowering the tone on too short members of the thought; that is again to say, Do not spread the thought out too much, by slackenings of the movement, this fatigues the attention of the listener who is following its development. If the thought is short, as in an

Adagio, the movement may be slackened, but never when it consists of more than four measures. Thus in the Adagio of the Fourth Sonata by Beethoven, in E flat, each of the first four measures is the independent member of a phrase:—



we may for a similar reason play more slowly in the Adagio of the *Sonate pathetique*, for instance, where the phrase is not comprehensible until after four measures. How many times have I heard the melody of the *Fantasie-impromptu* (Op. 66) played in this dragging and fatiguing manner. The listener is then tormented to extremity; it seems to him that the phrase crawls along and will never end. Further, Chopin remarked, and most justly, that every shortened note is also a weakened note, the note of smaller duration requiring smaller power, just like the long and short syllables of ordinary verse. The highest note of a melody, and a dissonant note, should also be made strong. Here we give as an example, part of the melody of the *Scherzo in B flat minor;* we have indicated the punctuation, also the strong and weak notes.





We give no more examples, but advise every amateur to take as his guide M. Lussy's book, and in

accordance with the rules there given to find out the punctuation of every musical idea, the note of greatest importance in each member of the phrase, and the places in which the tone requires to be lowered. This labour will be all the more agreeable from the fact that it is easy, and at the same time very useful for understanding the works of the great masters.

Chopin's advice was, that this theory should be grounded upon the rules which guide vocalists, and that it should be perfected by hearing good singers.

At the present time the method usually adopted for the indication of members of musical phrases is, to place over them the segment of a circle, which unfortunately also signifies "*legato*." This system might be altered; it is quite possible to distinguish the different members of a phrase by commas, semicolons, and full points. Chopin attached great importance to these segments, which by the way are not always correctly drawn in the greater part of his works; whenever this mark terminated he detached the hand after having diminished the tone; this we do at the present time. (*See Lussy and Bulow.*)

Continuing our observations on the works of the great master, we arrive at this conclusion amongst others, that to play Chopin's music without time and without rhythm is absolutely opposed to tradition, as also to the principles of music in general. Time and rhythm are the necessary conditions for the comprehension of a musical thought. "Time is the soul of music." Chopin always observed it; the *rubato* passages with which we meet in his works cannot weaken this truth.

The different outlines of the thought must always be clear and defined; it is only in developing this

thought with greater freedom, that the liberty is allowed of infringing the absolute laws which govern the value of notes written of equal length. The time strictly observed is sometimes the only means of reproducing the simple ideas of Chopin.

We have spoken of the *rubato;* it will be well for us to rest awhile upon this word. First, what is its meaning? *Rubare*, to rob, from which comes *rubato*, that is to say, stealing from the hearer certain parts of the measure. I know not who first made use of this term, but certainly it was not Chopin, for the *rubato* existed long before his time. The *rubato* had its origin in the Gregorian chant; the singers held certain notes *ad libitum*, taking the other notes rapidly, for the sake, no doubt, of traditions concerning the declamation of the Greek rhapsodists. The *recitative* introduced into Italy in the sixteenth century, and which was also the revival of old Greek traditions, is nothing but the *rubato* style. This style passed shortly afterwards into instrumental music; we have signs of it in the *Chromatic Fantasia* of Bach. Beethoven sometimes indicates *rubato* passages: the *Trio in B flat* (Op. 97, Adagio), the measures 17, 11 before the finale, the *Sonata for Piano* (Op. 106, Adagio). Besides, tradition tells us that for his later Sonatas Beethoven allowed a certain latitude as to the time. This it is in which, according to the letters of Mendelssohn, consisted the charm of the *Sonata* (Op. 101) dedicated to Mdme. D. Ertmann, and executed by that artist herself.

In proportion as music is employed for the purpose of painting tumultuous sentiments, or those more vague and indefinite, the *rubato* becomes more frequent. No one probably ever employed it with

greater grace than Chopin, who took the idea, if not from Bach and Beethoven, from the recitatives of the Italian school. From this we may explain the recitative introduced into the Larghetto of the Concerto in F minor. The greater the amount of personality and original boldness shown by Chopin, the more frequent became his employment of the *rubato*, until in his later works he ceased to indicate it; leaving its use in proper places to the intelligence of performers.

Once again, what is the *rubato* of Chopin? Liszt answers our question. "Suppose a tree bent by the wind; between the leaves pass the rays of the sun, a trembling light is the result, and this is the *rubato*."

Some of Chopin's pupils have assured me that in the *rubato* the left hand ought to keep perfect time, whilst the right indulges its fancy; and that in such a case Chopin would say, "The left hand is the conductor of the orchestra." Many passages of the *Berceuse* can be executed in this manner. Paganini also, playing with the orchestra, recommended that the instrumentalists should observe the time, whilst he himself departed from it, and then again returned to it. It is, nevertheless, my belief that this means can only be employed in certain particular cases; and I, therefore, can only regard it as a *demi-rubato*. There are passages in the works of Chopin, in which not only do the leaves tremble (to continue the comparison of Liszt), but the trunk totters. For instance: the *Polonaise* in C sharp, (Op. 26) 3rd part, measures 9-14; *Nocturne* in A flat (Op. 32), the middle part. We may quote also the *Impromptu* in A flat; here everything totters from foundation to summit, and everything is nevertheless so beautiful and so clear.

Moscheles, speaking of the *rubato*, says, "Chopin's manner of playing *ad libitum*, a phrase which to so many signifies deficiency in time and rhythm, was with him only a charming originality of execution.'

We see, therefore, that even the *rubato* is never a defect in the time; the idea of rhythm, and consequently of the relative value of the notes, must never be lost, apparent changes and momentary incongruities notwithstanding.

I shall now give the result of my own reflections on the *rubato* of Chopin:—

1. Precise rules for it cannot be given; because a good execution of the *rubato* requires a certain musical intuition, that is to say, a certain particular talent.

2. Every *rubato* has for its foundation the following idea. Each musical thought contains moments in which the voice should be raised or lowered: moments in which the tendency is to retardation or acceleration. The *rubato* is only the exaggeration or bringing into prominence these different parts of the thought; the shadings of the voice make themselves more marked, the differences in the value of notes more apparent. Hence there arises in the mind an image of the musical thought more full of vitality and of poetry, but always in accordance with law and order.

Let us, as an example, take the middle part, in F minor, of that *Nocturne in A flat*, so frequently before cited. In the first measure we may rest longer on the high note F; in the second, on the D flat; and we glide over the other notes. We may also rest, in the fourth and fifth measure, on the notes A flat and D flat. The same thing may occur again even with a greater exaggeration in the fifth measure of the *motivo* which returns in F sharp minor. We in all cases

borrow the time from notes of smaller importance for the purpose of giving it to the principal notes. In this manner may be explained the remaining details of this middle part of the Nocturne, which ought, so to speak, to *totter* all the way through. Whoever has heard one of Chopin's pupils thus execute a piece, will admit that, in this momentary uncertainty of the rhythm, there is an infinite charm. The exaggeration, nevertheless, does not extend far; and to nothing is more aptly applied the proverb, "From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but a step." The *rubato* likewise is only applicable to somewhat short movements; applied to longer compositions it might become monotonous. This possibly, or it may be the novelty of the style, was the cause of the non-success of the Concerto in E minor, which was performed, with the orchestra, by Chopin, at the Théatre Italien, just after his arrival in Paris.

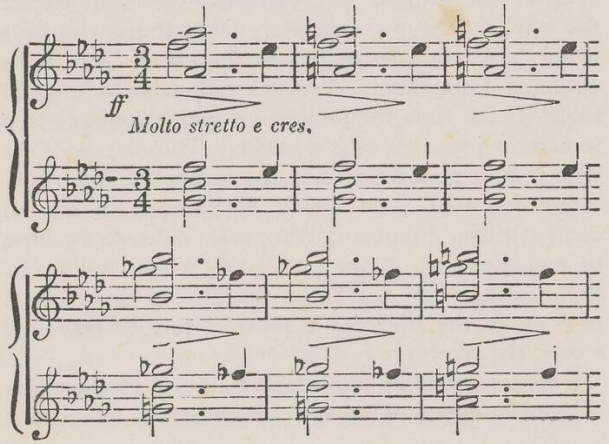
Beyond these peculiarities of touch, of rhythm, and of style, the veritable speciality of Chopin consisted in the employment of the pedals. Only those who have heard him are able to tell of the effects which he obtained from them. We are only able to judge of these effects from the indications which he has given in certain passages of his works. The soft pedal is with him, it appears to me, the symbol of, and condition for, that ideal which he pursued in all his compositions. Frequently the pedal *una corda* attaches to melodies truly divine; melodies which remove us from earth. For example: the trio of the *Prelude in F sharp*, the *Waltz in C sharp minor*, *Scherzo in B minor*, the *Nocturne in C minor*, &c.

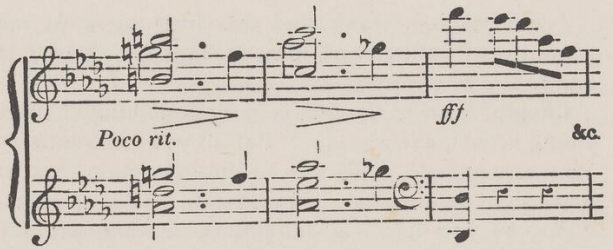
I consider it to be impossible to play these passages without thoughts of the soul's immortality, of an ideal

something beyond the grave, which hovers above the miseries of the world here below.

This sentiment of the ideal is also apparent in the enharmonic passages, which are another speciality of Chopin. In this characteristic he has often been imitated, and with great felicity of imitation, by Schumann. As an example take the *Arabesque*, measures 89—104.

The language of passion itself, we have already said, is never, with our master, deprived of the sentiment of the ideal and beautiful; it is not necessary that too harsh sounds should be employed. Even in the *Scherzo in B flat minor* it is necessary to preserve a certain time, in order to avoid falling, towards the end, into a too convulsive agitation. In the midst of the most impetuous *crescendo* and *accelerando*, when the musical thought approaches its climax and is about to burst, it is well that the performer should rest a moment (*ritenuto*), as though to collect his powers. We advise this in the following phrase:—





We might here multiply our observations if we allowed ourselves to proceed with the study of Chopin's works in all their details; but this course would be better suited to a *Conservatoire;* it exceeds the limits of a work like the present. Our object has been to give general indications by which the comprehension of Chopin's compositions may be facilitated, and which may furnish assistance towards their correct execution.

The following is Liszt's remark:—

"All the compositions of Chopin should be played, observing the rules of accentuation and of prosody, but with a certain agitation, the secret of which, those who have never heard the master find it difficult to fathom."

It is sad to reflect that the great musician, whilst leaving us his immortal thoughts, carried with him to the tomb a great part of his genius, the best part of his artistic personality. How many of us feel this regret when listening to descriptions of Chopin's marvellous style and manner of performance, a performance which we ourselves never had the chance of hearing and admiring! Concerning it, we are able only to collect certain indications, but not to reconstruct the ideal in all its purity, not to bring to life an individuality which has, alas! been snatched from us for ever.

I nevertheless think that this little work is not destitute of utility, and may perhaps be allowed to add to it a few words.

Chopin, hearing the dull colourless playing of some young artists, exclaimed: "Put all your soul into it! Play as you feel!" This is a solid injunction, but at first sight somewhat paradoxical. The precept, "Play as you feel" is dangerous, in that, wrongly applied, it injures the most beautiful works, and especially those of Chopin. On the other hand, it is evident that many people play badly because they do not give themselves the trouble to consult their own intelligence, and to put forth their power. It was, without doubt, to this class of pupils, the mentally idle, that Chopin gave this advice, in order to prevent them from putting a restraint upon their individual conceptions, and to give them confidence in themselves. Far from laying down precise and immutable rules for every detail of his works, his desire was that above all things the idea should be grasped. Though most exacting in his requirements concerning each important detail, he knew how to respect the intelligence of a pupil whom he saw taking a characteristic and individual course; he would then say: "*I* do not play it in this manner, but your rendering is good." Further, he himself played his own compositions in different styles according to the inspiration of the moment, and always charmed his audience.

Is it to be concluded from this that there is no criterion of truth in music, and that all the traditions which we have collected are worthless? By no means; truth in the *principal* features is one matter, but there are numerous *secondary* features which must be left to the individual mind of the performer; a

perfect execution is impossible except when tradition is in accordance with the individuality of the executant, except when the individuality of the master who has composed a work, has become that of its interpreter.

I will give some general examples: whoever has heard a song composed of several couplets, sung with intelligence, knows what a prominent part is furnished by the manner of the singer in the variety to be introduced in these various couplets. In the first he will be calm and tranquil; in the second he will put forth a greater amount of feeling; the third may contain some sudden outburst of passion; the last may bring us to the tranquillity of the commencement, and all without any change in the melody. Thus it was that Madame Viardot, with true genius, brought out the three celebrated couplets of Gluck: "*J'ai perdu mon Euridice.*" The first couplet possesses a character of resigned sadness; in the second we have, as it were, wailings which lacerate the soul; the third causes us to share in the despair of the lover: the melody rises to the height of passion, the time also is accelerated.

This may be perceived in more than one of Chopin's *Nocturnes*. The same idea returns again and again, always with a new sentiment, which the author could scarcely indicate, except in a very general manner.

I will give an example in the well-known *Nocturne in F minor* (Op. 55).
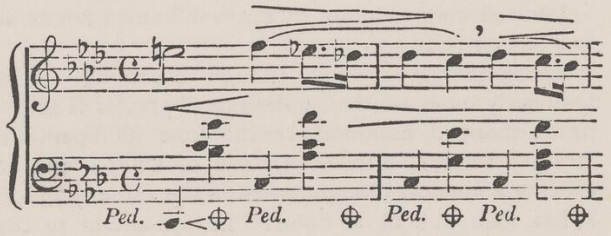
The principal melody, though charming, is so frequently repeated that, unless its character is sometimes changed, monotony results from its repetition. It was, besides, a characteristic of Chopin not to execute a musical thought twice in the same manner. What, then, should be done? In opposition to the

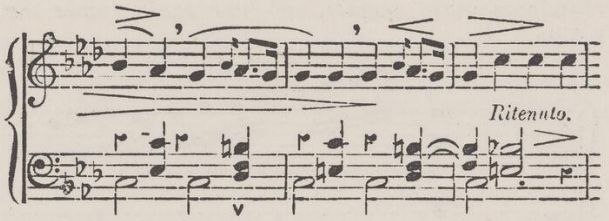
theories of Hanslick—who pronounces music to be powerless for the production of sentiments—it is necessary to grasp the work in its entirety, to apply it to the words of an imaginary poem created by our own mind; the details will then come spontaneously and without difficulty.

To myself, this *Nocturne* represents a sadness which rises by different degrees to a cry of despair, and is then tranquillized by a feeling of hope. With this idea for a guide we might execute the work in the manner following:

The first two measures will be *piano* and calm; the two following will be weaker, like an echo of the first lament; in the fifth and sixth measures, the melody, by a strongly pronounced *crescendo* will rise to *forte* and fall again to *piano* in the seventh measure. The repetition of the first eight measures might be executed thus: the first two *pianissimo*, then gradually rising to *forte* (even somewhat accelerating the time), and lastly, the tone diminishing, but to a greater extent than before.

The second part (measures 16, 17) will be commenced with calmness and simplicity; a *crescendo* will extend as far as the upper F, and a *decrescendo* follow to the end of the phrase: we beg the attention of the reader to the necessity for separating the members of the phrases following:—

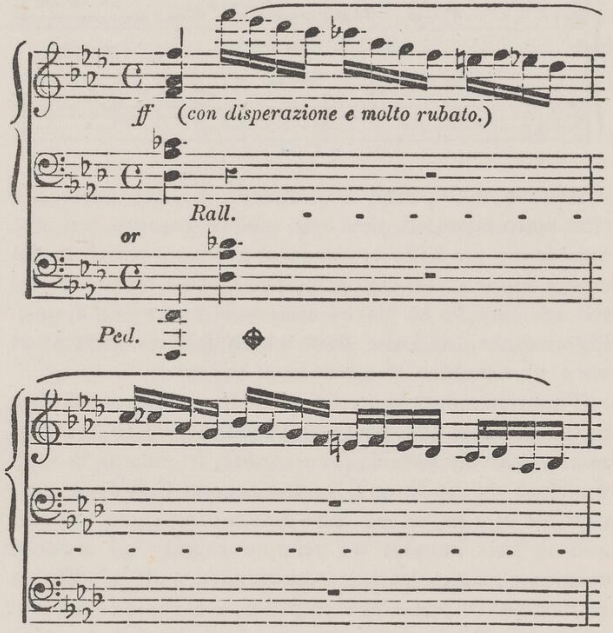




After a melancholy *diminuendo* on the three C's which are repeated, the first *motivo* returns, but not too *piano;* the little ornamental passage, which is the embellishment of the principal *motivo*, requires, on the contrary, to be played extremely *piano*—in a singing manner—and the *forte* which follows ends all at once by a sudden diminution of the tone.

This represents the grief pent up and accumulating in the mind of the poet; the second *motivo* returns, and is scarcely audible (*una corda*); it ends as though wearied, on the three C's; the second C is even susceptible of a pause 𝄐. The first *motivo* again returns, and in this couplet we resume rapidly all anterior contrasts: after having commenced with a soft, yet somewhat impassioned murmur, we come to a burst of force in the last measure, but still do not decrease the tone, and continue *forte* the *più mosso*. There, with the first symptoms of grief, comes the *rubato*—the sign of a still greater mental agitation; the crotchets held down should be well accentuated. After eight measures the tempest abates, at least apparently;—the author wrote *piano* to avoid clamour and vulgarity. But we are no longer masters of ourselves; we play *piano*, but we accelerate the time; we give more and more tone to arrive at a *fortissimo* (Chopin's indication is simply *forte*) which is an

abandonment to despair, and here again comes the *rubato.*



Other masters would have continued this impassioned movement,—Liszt certainly would have filled several pages with surprises and bursts of emotion,—Chopin controls himself, returns to the principal theme by modulations full of charm; resigned and wearied he pauses.

This is the termination of his despair; the theme has returned to us, clearer and more peaceful. I recommend here the greatest simplicity. After the ornamental passages which mark the recent agitation,

the soul of the poet rests in perfect peace. After the percussion of the bass F, he raises a song full of resignation and devotion to the Creator, and in a series of admirable graces *pianissimo*, he elevates his thoughts to heaven.

The *nocturne* is now, so to speak, concluded. But this was not sufficient for Chopin. He would once again resume his thoughts. A minor chord sounds like an echo of past laments; then a sweeter chord leads to the major; the sounds rise by a *crescendo* to the broken chords, strong, long, majestic, as though proceeding from an organ.

This is the meaning of this poem, and all Chopin's works are poems. Only seek and you will find, and you will be a thousandfold rewarded for your researches.

The form in couplets, that very usual form, is not the only form which permits us to introduce our own individuality into works of genius. Everywhere the individuality of the artist may make itself conspicuous, and this it is truly which transports us in listening to the Liszts and Rubinsteins; it is that gift of creation without which no one can become a virtuoso of the highest order.

One circumstance favourable to us (Poles) is that we are the fellow-countrymen of Chopin. Whilst the foreigner pursues a difficult path through an unknown country, we find, at a glance, the right road (especially in the *Polonaises and Mazurkas*); the qualities of his muse are qualities which appertain to us, and he himself frequently regretted, amongst his foreign pupils, the absence of these Polish characteristics. It becomes by so much the more necessary that all which we have received from tradition should be collected; it becomes necessary to listen to those artists

who have best understood Chopin, but not with the object of slavish imitation; then we should endeavour to infuse our soul into each of his immortal works.

To make plain that which Chopin was with regard to ourselves, I may be allowed to quote some observations of M. Wilcznski concerning the composer Moniuszko; the author here most happily characterises our Slavonic art:—

"Notice the characters of our poetic sentiment; they are entirely peculiar to ourselves, and we differ from all other nations. They bear no resemblance to the German romanticism which took its rise in sombre forests, seas, and mountains. The country of the Germans is built upon a barbarous model; it inspires a superstitious fear which penetrates you from every point of view: likewise the fancy of man has there produced terrible legends and sanguinary dramas. Its ideal is abstract, barbarous, solitary; it resembles those barons of the middle ages who from the high peaks of their rocks waited for the passing of the peaceful traveller. The Germanic ballads filled with horror the Roman legions who invaded these barbarous countries.

"Our land, on the contrary, breathes calmness and tranquillity. Our mind is imprisoned by no barrier, and bounds in freedom across the infinite plains; nothing affects it invincibly, neither melancholy rocks, nor a too ardent sun; nature produces no too strong emotions, we are not entirely occupied with nature. Thus the mind turns to other things and interrogates the mysteries of life. Hence that sincerity in our poetry, hence, that continual tendency towards the beautiful, and that impassioned pursuit of the ideal. The force of our poetry is in its simplicity, its true

emotion, and its ever exalted purpose. Another of its characteristics is an indescribable vivacity of imagination."

And further on—page 40.

"Our style aspires to two ruling qualities: simplicity and purity. How does art with us represent beauty? Let us take two *chefs-d'œuvre*. One strikes us by the force of its subject, and compels admiration: the powerful conception of the master has exalted the idea to its greatest height. He has kept within the bounds of truth; but he has, if one may so speak, by the power of his genius caused it to shine with unwonted brilliancy, and shows us truth as science has made it. He has taken a view of his subject differing from the average view, it has presented itself to his mind with an unusual aspect. It is from this that we obtain that exaggerated form of truth, that aspect of the supernaturally true, to which the realists object."

"Look upon the pictures of Kaulbach, listen to the music of Wagner; what force there is in the form, in the colouring, in the shadings and contrasts! It is the same with the dramas of Victor Hugo, and the romances of Dumas. We believe ourselves to be in a world of giants, we seem to see mankind through a magic-lantern. Here we have a style extremely grand but far removed from simplicity. Now let us consider this other *chef-d'œuvre*, it does not attract you, it waits until you feel disposed for its contemplation. Here the master, though fully penetrated with the idea which he represents, has placed that idea in the foreground, has utilized all its qualities. This *chef-d'œuvre* does not delight you all at once, but the more frequently you regard it, the more

clearly apparent becomes the grandeur of the conception. A contemplation of several hours will not fatigue you, for the various aspects of the idea will unveil themselves to you from moment to moment.

"This is the simple style—rare as the purest pearls—it is this which gives eternal life to works and preserves their value. If in the first there is greater apparent force, a greater power of representation, in the second the idea has of itself more of greatness, whether given forth by the pen, the pencil or by sounds; in the first we are the slaves of the master, in the other we are free, we are his brothers in thought. We feel ourselves better able to enjoy the conception which the master has set forth, we become like him, poets and artists. This style demands true and profound feelings, not fictitious nor feverish enthusiasm; it requires a simple and pure mind, a poetical imagination and delicate sentiments. Purity of style raises art to a level with religion."
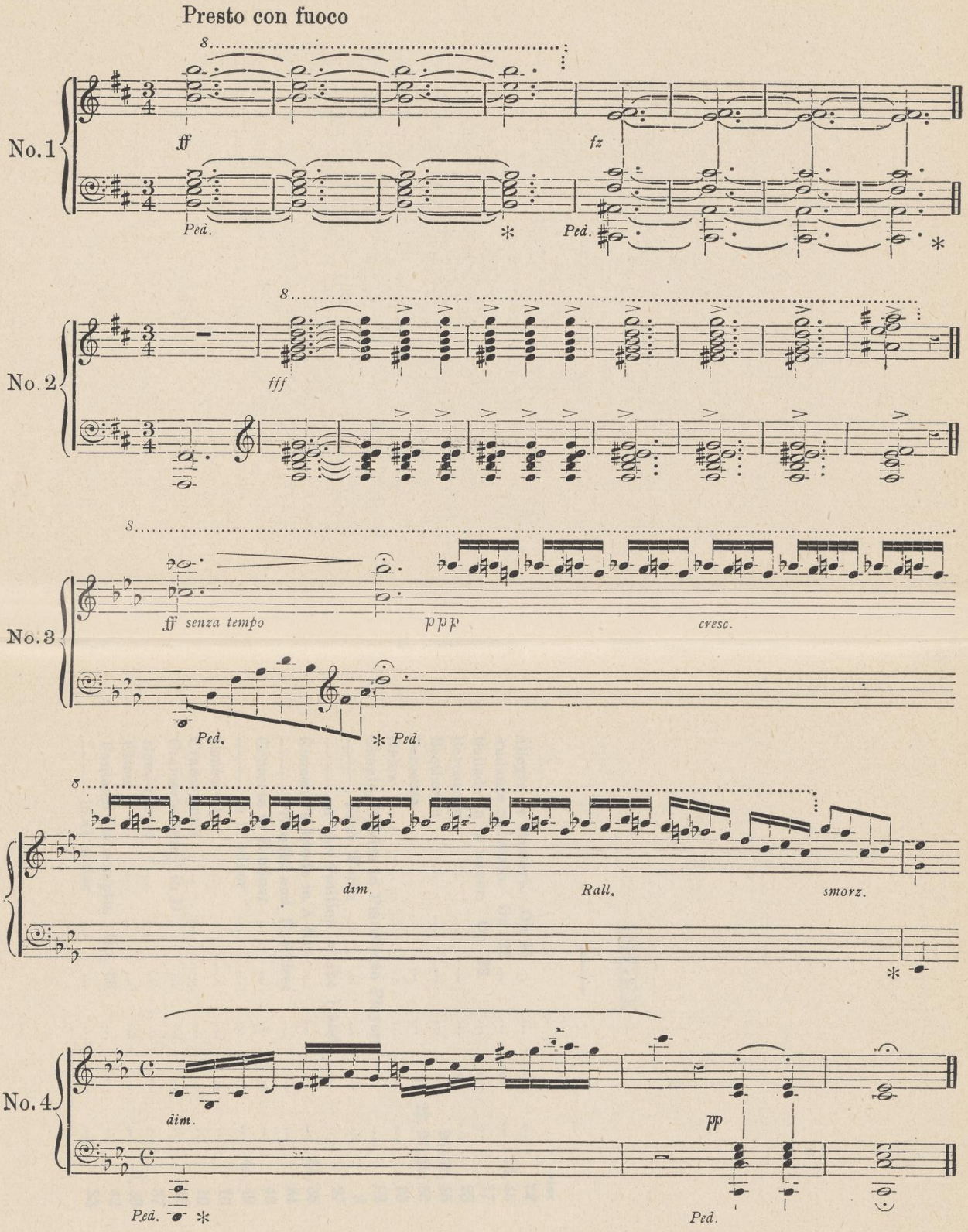
These observations are admirably applicable to Chopin; with him that which strikes us is purity of style and perfect simplicity, a certain reserve, a profound dignity which is never wanting; even in the expression of his strongest feelings he does not entirely give himself up to us, he has in his modesty withheld one part of his soul. We cannot penetrate into these recesses which he has concealed from us; we can only endeavour to divine and comprehend them. At times gay and cheerful, he is never vulgar; when sorrowful, his complaints never descend to meanness; amiable, he never stoops to affectation. Those who seek in his Mazurkas for dramas in the manner of Hugo will lose their labour; to those who

know our people Chopin has simply set forth his love for the dance, his melancholy intruding upon his gaiety and goodnature, at times somewhat rough but yet sympathetic.

We have said that women seem to play the works of Chopin better than men. Must we conclude from this that it is right to describe his nature as effeminate? By no means. He was a poet: this it is which made his nature resemble that of woman, a poetical tendency. Women also render better than we the numerous shadings in his works; these we at times treat in too rough a manner. Nevertheless, for passages of force the hand of a woman is not generally strong enough. Chopin was, however, of that race which people may style effeminate if they will, because its nature is to love and not to hate;—because it is suited for peaceful life, for the domestic hearth, not for battle-fields and the hazards of war.

As a son of this race, he was also a true Christian; we see this in his life and in his works, and this sincere religion entitles him to sympathy and respect. *Woman* he was for his gentleness and his sense of the beautiful; *Man* for his energy and the force of his mind. He consequently presents one of the most complete types of a human being and of an artist.

THE END.



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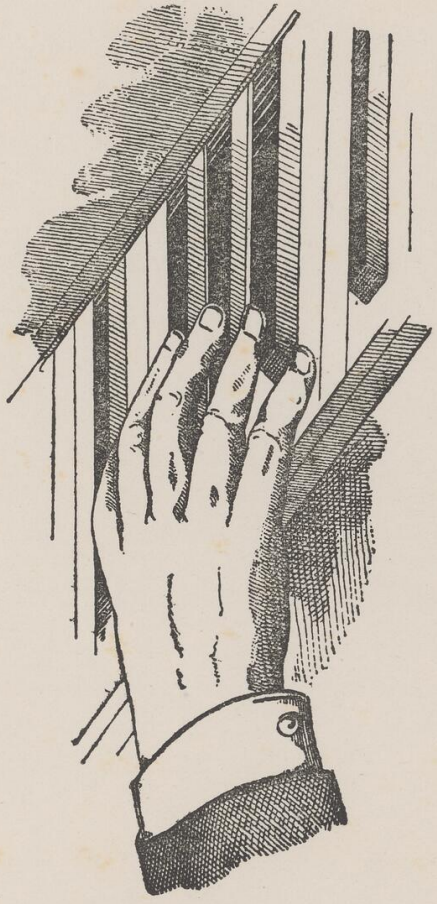
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