



TECHNICAL STUDIES

Part I

INTRODUCTION

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IMPORTANCE OF TECHNICAL EXERCISES IN PIANOFORTE-PLAYING.

Many Pianoforte-players, professionals as well as amateurs, endeavor to escape a thorough study of their instrument, with the excuse that it is not their object to become *virtuosi*. To this it may be replied, that some fundamental study will by no means expose them to the danger of suddenly finding themselves *virtuosi*; and that, before they reach that point, they must first become simply *good players*. This should be the aim of every pianist, so far as circumstances will allow:—of the *professional*, otherwise he will be subject to the reproach of having lowered his art to the level of a mere ordinary occupation;—of the *amateur*, for the fact that he studies only for his own pleasure, gives him no right to regard his art merely as a pastime, or to perform a composition for his own amusement in a manner more or less mutilated.

The objection that the study of the Pianoforte, as here required, demands too much time, is not valid. The most thorough method is, after all, the shortest; and to devote *four* or *five* hours daily to the Piano must surely be possible for every musician, without encroaching thereby upon his studies in counterpoint and composition.

Many amateurs even will be able to spare a few hours every day for it, and find themselves amply rewarded by their great progress.

He who makes the Pianoforte his chief study **must**, of course, give it the most time—four hours, at least, cannot appear exorbitant.

The main point is, however, to employ this time *well*, and to devote it to serious, systematic study, instead of *trifling*, as it were, with music, and wandering about without plan or method.

Even the greatest talent ought not to be exempted from this thorough course of study, without which it cannot be developed beyond a certain point. Though all that a player may desire be, to perform a composition with feeling and taste, even that is entirely out of the question so long as he has to contend with mechanical difficulties. He is greatly in error if he thinks these are to be overcome by the mere study of an interesting work. On the one hand, each one of these works would require an immense amount of time; and, on the other, he would meet with innumerable difficulties, which he will never learn to conquer by any such *imperfect* method, but only by a long and uninterrupted course of study. Such is the object of Finger-exercises and Études, and by their aid alone will he ever attain the mechanical perfection necessary to the proper performance of ancient and modern classical works.

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GENERAL RULES FOR PRACTICING ON THE PIANO.

CHAPTER FIRST.

POSITION OF THE PERSON.

1. The performer should be seated before the *middle* of the keyboard, and at such a distance from it, that the arms can conveniently reach the farthest keys of the instrument, as well as cross each other, and move with freedom in both directions.

2. The seat should be so high that the elbows may be a little above the level of the keyboard.

3. They should also be kept close to the body, though without touching it.

4. Crossing the limbs, and kindred attitudes, should be avoided, as well as violent motions of the head, shoulders, and upper part of the person.

5. Let the position generally be easy and unconstrained; should the scholar have awkward habits to get rid of, so that an easy position costs him some trouble, there should be the least appearance of constraint possible.

6. But let not the fear of affectation so far enslave, as to make him avoid such motions as spring naturally from an expressive performance.*

CHAPTER SECOND.

POSITION OF THE HAND.

To give the hand a strictly correct position, let the scholar place the fingers on five successive white keys in

* Children whose feet do not touch the floor when sitting, should always make use of a footstool, in order to have an easy and firm seat.

the middle of the board (as in the "Finger-Exercises with the hand firmly fixed"), and observe at the same time the following rules:—

1. The wrist must neither be perceptibly raised nor lowered, but lie without constraint upon a level with the hand and arm.

2. The knuckles must neither be raised, so as to form a hollow within the hand, nor bent inwards (as many teachers consider requisite to a good touch), but must be kept in a natural position, on a level with the back of the hand.

3. The fore part of the fingers must be gently rounded, not, however, so that the nails (which, by the way, should not be kept long) can touch the keys.

4. The 4th and 5th fingers, however, should not be quite so much rounded as the others, but a little more extended.

5. Let the *thumb* be stretched horizontally, so that the end-joint shall be upon a level with the key, and the key itself struck by its outer edge. It must be held continually above the surface of the keys, and by no means be permitted to hang down, much less to rest upon the keyboard.

6. The centre of gravity of the hand in playing should fall inwards, i. e. towards the thumb.

7. Let the position of the hand generally, as we have also said of that of the person, be perfectly easy and natural—a precaution very essential to a good style of playing.