

BOSWORTH EDITION, No. 601^a.

THE
PRINCIPLES OF FINGERING
AND
LAWS OF PEDALLING

ALSO

The Distinction between Touch-Species and
Touch-Movements,

EXTRACTED FROM

“MUSCULAR RELAXATION STUDIES”
FOR PIANOFORTE

BY

TOBIAS MATTHAY

(Professor, Examiner and Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, London; and Founder of the Tobias Matthay Pianoforte School.)

Copyright.

Price 1/6 net.

BOSWORTH & CO., LTD.,

8 Heddon Street, Regent Street, London, W. 1.

LEIPZIG. BRUXELLES. ZURICH. VIENNA. NEW YORK.

15915.

PRINTED IN ENGLAND

CONTENTS.

	Pages
The Principles of Fingering	4
The Distinction between Touch-Species and Touch-Movements	9
The Law of Pedalling	12

NOTE.—The page-references in this „Extract” apply to the original work, “Muscular Relaxation Studies.”

78.3
M43p

FOREWORD.

FINDING, at the L.R.A.M. and other Examinations, &c., how lamentable is the ignorance displayed by Candidates (and by their Teachers) relative to all rules and general principles of Fingering and Laws of Pedalling, I included a chapter on these subjects in my "Relaxation Studies." The present Extract is issued to render more accessible these pages on Fingering, and those on Pedalling, and on the elucidation of the distinction and relationship between the Touch-movements and Touch-actions.

January, 1911.

TOBIAS MATTHAY.

998382

3

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE CHOICE AND MEMORIZING OF FINGERING.

Examinations reveal the fact, that even in this comparatively simple matter one finds no general knowledge of the *laws* governing the choice of fingering, or of those relating to the memorizing of the fingering chosen. In fact, there even seems to be very little suspicion, generally, that such laws exist! There are indeed plenty of excellent musicians who fancy that the determining of fingering is a purely arbitrary matter, not coming under any natural laws. True, there are some amongst the more capable teachers, who *do* recognise some of these laws and rules; these particular laws not having been left so totally undiscovered as those relating to Tone-production and Agility.

There is no space here to go at length into the many details connected with Fingering; attention can only be drawn to a few of the more salient principles.

Fingering Groups. The first and main point, is, to recognise that all fingering consists of *groups* of fingers lying upon groups of notes—groups forming either complete or incomplete sets of *five-finger positions* on the keyboard. These five-finger positions may lie, (a) on five adjacent white keys (or white and black keys), or (b), they may be contracted into five adjacent semitones, or even into repetitions of the same note, or any combination of such; or (c), they may be extended into every variety of chord-position, ornamented or not with passing notes, &c.

Groups of *fingering positions*, thus formed, may be connected by lateral motions of the thumb and hand (and arm) into chains of successive groups, either similar or diverse in composition, and in this way we obtain scale and arpeggio passages of **all kinds**—diatonic or chromatic, with passing notes and repeated notes, or without.

Copyright, 1908, by Bosworth & Co.

ON FINGERING

Choosing Fingering.

Our first concern in choosing fingering, must therefore be to analyse the passage we wish to finger, so that the most convenient groups of notes may be found upon which to place the fingers. In doing this, two things must be borne in mind, 1), the particular conformation of each hand, and 2), the places on the keyboard best suited for the process of "turning under" the thumb, or "turning over" the fingers, so that the successive and co-related groups of fingers and notes may be most easily connected-up into unbroken passages.

Memorizing Fingering.

In memorizing Fingering, precisely the same process has to be pursued. In itself, it is *of no use* remembering that "the thumb goes here," or that "the little finger goes there"; it is only when these particular fingers are used as landmarks, to suggest to us *where* the successive finger-note *groupings* commence and end, that we can proceed to memorize the fingering. For we can only memorize Fingering in one way, and that is, by making sure that we recognise the successive complete or incomplete *sets* or groups of fingers, and by then forcing ourselves to connect these sets of fingers mentally with the particular sets of notes on the keyboard concerned in each group.

Diatonic Scales.

Thus, in learning the diatonic scales, we find that they all consist of *two groups* of fingering—123, and 1234; now we can only proceed to memorize the fingering, by associating these fingering-groups with the particular portions of the keyboard to which they have to be applied; and the moment we succeed in thus forming a fixed association of fingers and notes, that moment we "know" the scale in question.*

The same thing applies with equal force to any other kind of passage we may wish to learn,—the only way is indelibly to connect *finger-groups* with *note-groups*.

Rhythm and Fingering often conflict.

In thus looking for fingering-grouping, the beginner is often extremely puzzled, by the fact that the fingering-grouping is far more often than not totally at variance with *the rhythmical groupings* of the notes, for instance in the following example:



* Vide Note, page 84, "On the incorrectness of some of the traditional Scale-fingerings."
See also, Practice Card, No. 1, "Double-Third Scales, their fingering and practice."

ON FINGERING

This CONFLICT between the groups of rhythm and the groups of fingering must therefore constantly be borne in mind, both when choosing fingering and when learning fingering, so that the rhythmical accentuation of the passage may not mislead us into choosing uncomfortable fingering-groups.

Turning under the Thumb.

As regards that very important matter, choice of the position for turning under the thumb, the point is, to enable it to "pass under" wherever possible while one of the other fingers is upon a *black key*,—or, put the other way: to enable the crossing of the fingers over the thumb to be effected *towards a black key*; or, when no black key is available, to arrange matters so that the turning point may offer the least necessary extension. As an instance, the following example (for the right hand) shows the proper place for the thumb:—

Ex. N^o 46.

a)

not:

When the interval after the black key is inconveniently or unusually large, this rule may be disregarded, for instance:—

Ex. N^o 47.

not:

Fingering of Chord-positions.

Another point which puzzles many students, is, whether to take the ring finger or the middle-finger in common-chord positions and their inversions. A very simple rule here is, to use the *middle* finger after the little finger, when the interval between those fingers is so large as a *fourth*, viz:—

Ex. N^o 48.

but to use the *ring*-finger instead of the middle-finger when the interval is only a *minor* third; viz:—

Ex. N^o 49.

ON FINGERING

We may use *either* of those two fingers, when the interval next to the fifth finger is a *major* third; large hands usually preferring the ring-finger, while smaller hands usually need the middle finger.

Then there is the question of fingering sequential passages. When a passage consists of sets of notes repeated in ascending or descending sequence, it is found far easier to take each with identical finger-grouping,—it is far easier to keep the finger-figuration in agreement with the note-figuration than to confuse the performer's finger-rhythm sense by altering the fingering of the successive groups (of similarly sounding notes) in accordance with the laws of key-position. It is often easier in such cases even to finger quite irrespective of the claims of the white and black keys, the thumb even going on black keys when necessary. Thus in the third group:—



Re-iterated Notes.

When notes are reiterated in close succession *during finger-touch passages*, it is found more easy to “think” such passages and to play them more clearly, if we substitute fingers while repeating the notes. It is found far easier to control the *tone-inflections* (and the rhythm generally) of such repetitions when we substitute fingers, than when we repeat the same finger in close succession. This even applies when one or more notes intervene between such repetitions—in the case of mordents, &c., where an accent is required on the last note. The rule does not apply so strongly in Hand-touch or Arm-touch passages, since these are slower in *tempo* than quick finger-passages, and there is therefore in this case more time to direct the tone-inflections. Also, the mental mechanical advantage is not so great then, as the movements are identical for each note in Hand-touch.*

It is, however, always well to employ the device of substitution of fingers, when a double-note passage consists partly of repetitions; thus:—



* When strong accents are required in passage-work of all kinds, we should remember that the easiest and most effective way is always, whenever possible, to give such accents by means of the *next species of touch* to the touch normally used during the passage. Thus, in a *first-species* passage, the strong accents should be given in *second-species*; while in *Second-Species* passages the accents should be done in *Third-Species Touch-action*. Or, in any of the *Species*, the accents may be provided by help of the rotary exertions of the Forearm.

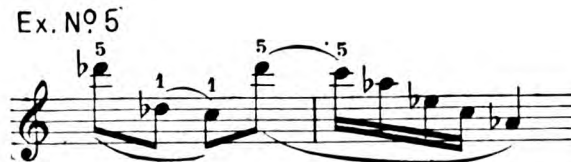
For a full exposition of the application of the Rotary-principle (and it applies *everywhere*) refer to the *Supplement "The Act of Touch"* and "First Principles"—"Some Commentaries on Pianoforte Technique."

ON FINGERING

This last fingering would either endanger the *legato*, or else the clearness of the reiterated notes—they would probably become tied notes.

Sliding of Thumb, &c.

Amongst other subsidiary matters, is the occasional use of the *slide* from a black key to a white key, taken either with the thumb, or the little finger, and sometimes also with other fingers. For instance:—



Enough has here been said to convince the intelligent student how necessary it is to look rather for the principles of things, than to rely on mere haphazard results—even in this matter of Fingering.

For practice in the application of these *Principles* of Fingering the admirable "Examples of Fingering" by Carlo Albanesi (Ricordi) can be recommended.

CORRECT SCALE FINGERINGS: Here it is well to point out how wrongly conceived are some of the scale fingerings to be found in all Scale Manuals until recently, and thus wrongly fingered from time immemorial, owing to the inability of successive generations of teachers to diverge from well-trodden but bad ruts. Unless for sequential reasons, the only common-sense principle which should determine the fingering of any passage, is, to choose the fingering-groupings so that the hand *may most easily lie over the required notes* and so that the connection of those fingering-groups, *laterally*, may be effected as easily as possible—by means of the turning-under movements of the thumb, &c. On applying this last principle to the Scale, we shall find that the following divergencies from the traditional fingerings are desirable:—

RIGHT HAND:—Major scales all correct. Also the minor scales, except perhaps
C minor (harmonic) which might have ring-finger on the E flat.

LEFT HAND:—(whose convenience seems to have been quite overlooked!)

- D major: Ring-finger on F sharp.
- G major: Ring-finger on F sharp.
- A major: Ring-finger on F sharp.
- F major: Ring-finger on B flat.
- C minor: (harmonic) Ring-finger on A flat. *
- G minor: (harmonic) Ring-finger on E flat. *
- F minor: (harmonic) Ring-finger on D flat. *

*This would, however, be unsuitable for those possessing inadequate extension between ring-finger and middle-finger.

A minor is perhaps not worth altering, since the increased turning-under from the ring-finger on G sharp would, with some hands, counterbalance the advantage gained.

D minor, with ring-finger or middle-finger on B flat, would, however, certainly be a better fingering for many hands than the old fingering.

Several of the melodic minor scales could be improved for the left hand on this principle, but the descending fingerings would have to differ from the ascending ones. Try the melodic minors of A, G, F, C and D.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN TOUCH-SPECIES AND TOUCH-MOVEMENTS.

This presents very little difficulty to those having no prejudices on the subject. Children, indeed, generally find it simple enough to grasp, easily and fully—they having no wrong preconceptions to fight against.

But the case is widely different with those who have been brought up in total ignorance of the true laws of Touch; and this, not because it is inherently difficult to understand how the effects of Touch are wrought by the various simple combinations of Arm-weight, Hand-force, and Finger-force, accompanied by certain co-ordinated and optional movements; but because such sufferers have formed certain wrong ideas on the subject, and find it an extremely hard task to reverse these mental impressions. These sufferers have, in fact, learnt to regard the idea of MOVEMENT as the sole constituent of Touch—not movement *of the key* or *with* the key (as one should conceive it), but movements of the Arm, Hand, and Finger *towards* or *at* the key, and these sufferers are hence fixedly imbued with the mistaken notion that all distinctions of Touch depend on the mere preliminary movements *towards* the Keyboard. Nevertheless, these very preliminary movements are so unessential, that they may be entirely omitted if desired!

Once learnt, it is extremely difficult to eradicate such upside-down notions, and to learn instead to regard all *preliminary* movements as of small account, and to realise that even the movements of the limbs *with* the keys are merely the outward accompaniment of those many and quite distinct *muscular changes of state* which are the true cause of all distinctions in sound-quantity and quality, and which are indeed the cause of those very movements themselves! Indeed, until such fallacies have been quite effaced from the mind, it seems hopeless to try to understand the true nature and rationale of any Touch-effects—as first demonstrated in “The Act of Touch.” The whole matter has been so fully gone into there (and also even in “First Principles”) that it almost seems supererogation to add further explanations. A few additional comments may, however, help those who are unfortunate enough to have such wrong preconceptions to fight against.

The first point, of course, is to disabuse the mind of that fetish-idea, that Touch consists of movements of the limbs *towards* and *at* the keys. True, the term “Touch” does include all those movements of the limbs which accompany the act of playing—preliminary and otherwise,—but remember, the term also includes the movements of *the keys themselves*, and the particular actions and inactions of our muscles (most of them invisible),

TOUCH-SPECIES V. TOUCH-MOVEMENTS

which enable us to *move* each key in the required way, by means of the various energies communicated to our Finger, Hand and Arm—changes sometimes accompanied by one kind of *movement*, sometimes by another. And the term moreover includes the act of producing all the differences of *duration* associated with the words Legato and Staccato—Duration as to the time the keys are held down or are not held down *after* the completion of the act of making the sound itself.

In a word, “Touch” is merely a generic term, including *everything* that appertains to the physical act of playing—the Act of Tone-production—the act of sounding notes at the Piano.

Hence we can speak of:—

I): *Species of Touch*—

—referring to the muscular actions and lapses of action by means of which we produce the effects upon the key which cause the tone—and besides the three chief forms (or Species) of such Touch-Construction there are innumerable varieties, combinations, and mutations.

II): *Movements of Touch*—

—referring merely to the movements which may *accompany* the previously referred-to actions and lapses—movements optionally of the finger, hand and arm (and of the forearm, rotarily) towards and with the keys.

III): *Duration of Touch*—

—referring to Legato and Staccato, with all the intervening differences, and which differences depend upon what we do to the key *after* the sound has been made.

Possibly those suffering under the before-mentioned persistent preconceptions might find their way smoothed, if for a moment they merely substituted another term, the word “Playing”, in place of “Touch”? Thus—

- 1): The three chief Species of *playing*.
- 2): The three chief movements of *playing*.
- 3): The absence or presence of Duration in *playing*.

As to the teaching of these related but distinct facts of Species and Movement, one may commence at either end. One may begin by taking a *movement*, say Finger-movement, and show how we can sound notes by using *only* (and solely) finger-force (First *Species*), this being of course accompanied by finger-motion, and then point out how we can also apply *hand-force* “behind” the finger, and so enhance the tone (Second *Species*), and how this additional energy thus supplied by the *action* (exertion) of the hand, and received by the finger at its knuckle-end, may nevertheless exhibit no other *motion* than that of the finger itself—provided the finger-exertion is slightly in excess of that of the hand, and thus *prevents* the hand from displaying to the eye the work it is indeed doing

TOUCH-SPECIES V. TOUCH-MOVEMENTS

during such "finger-touch". After this, we can demonstrate how this same mere *finger-motion* can have its tone still further enhanced by allowing *arm-weight* to be set free during the moment of each key-descent (Third *Species*); the force derived from the weight of the arm being here received by the correspondingly exerted finger and hand, and thus brought to bear upon the key, while only *appearing to the eye* to consist of finger "action"—oh, how much misunderstood word!* In this way, we can take "finger-touch" (i. e. Finger-movement during Touch) and show how its three Species can be built up *by addition* as it were.

Or, we can commence the teaching of this matter in the reverse way, and show how the three Species of the Touch-act can take different forms of Movement. In this case, we should begin with Weight-touch (third *Species*)—and indeed it is usually best to start at this end—and show the pupil how the keys can be weighed down into sounding, apparently by the mere lapse of the arm-supporting muscles. Having thus instructed the pupil how to obtain *pp-weight-touch tenuto*, after this, we should proceed to teach the cessation of Weight at the moment of tone-emission (the "first Muscular Test," in fact) thus obtaining *staccato* purely by cessation of all force upon the key at the right moment; and follow this, by the production of *forte* Weight-touch. Then show, how this same Weight-touch really consists of the three elements: (1) Arm-weight, (2) Hand-force, and (3) Finger-force—and at the same time show how this triple combination may be accompanied by a *movement* optionally of the arm, hand or finger.

After this, show how the arm-weight may be deleted—thus leaving *second* Species, and illustrate how this again may optionally show either *finger-movement* or *hand-movement*. And lastly, delete the hand-force, thus creating *first* Species, with of course its sole form of accompanying movement—that of the finger.

In any case, it is best to go over the ground with each pupil not only by "SUBTRACTION" like this, but also in the preceding way of "addition,"—the very contradiction there seems in these two ways, helps to make the paramount facts clearer, and also helps to obliterate the difficulty as to the relationship of Species and Movement.

The acquisition of the innumerable varieties of Touch-species and movements (including the important hybrid second-third species forming "arm-vibration," etc.†) follows easily enough, once the fundamental distinctions here discussed have been thoroughly realized and mastered.

* Most Piano-people quite misapprehend the word "action" in relation to Piano-playing, and imagine it must always signify *movement*, quite forgetting that we can "act" with any degree of muscular force, and yet not produce any motion whatever.

† *Vide*, pp. 51 and 52, &c.

THE STUDY OF PEDALLING.

PREAMBLE.

While "pedalling" does not properly come under the heading of Touch—or Key-treatment—yet this work on "Relaxation" would not be complete without reference to this important department of Piano-playing. Indeed, it is quite impossible to exaggerate the importance of good "pedalling"—the use of the Damper Pedal. However excellent the Key-technique may be, its effect musically may be totally wrecked by inefficient Pedalling. Not only is bad pedalling capable of ruining all clearness of phrasing and beauty of harmonic effect, but on the other hand good pedalling can materially assist even the actual tone-beauty of our Touch, and it forms one of our most potent Means of Expression. There are three chief features requiring attention in the use of the Damper Pedal:—

- I): Judgment as to when to depress it.
- II): Judgment as to when to lift it.
- III): The requisite Technique of depressing it, and lifting it.

Undoubtedly the most important of these points is that referring to the *lifting*. In fact, so important is this point, that advice as to Pedalling might be summed up in these words:—

- a): "Up at the right time."
- b): "Sufficiently up."
- c): "Sufficiently long up!"

PART III—SPECIAL EXERCISES

That is: *a*) "let it rise early enough"—so that the dampers may descend early enough and may thus prevent any over-lapping of the harmonies, or of the phrases; *b*), "let it rise sufficiently"—so that the dampers may really reach their strings, and thus prevent smudging; and *e*), "keep it sufficiently long up"—so that the beautiful effect of sound-prolongation may be used as economically as possible, and may thus be intensified in its effect.*

Judgment as to the use of the Pedal, as to the proper occasion for its use, is a matter which belongs to the province of *I n t e r p r e t a t i o n*—like the proper application of the various forms of Touch in performance. The discussion of this part of Pedal-technique is, therefore, here out of place.†

Part of the problem of pedalling, however, depends on the mere *FOOT-TECHNIQUE* of depression and ascension, and this certainly does come into the province of this Treatise. Several points must here be studied :

I): The Descent of the Pedal.

As regards the actual putting down of the pedal, this should nearly always be done sharply, swiftly, and yet without using unnecessary force, and certainly without *hitting* it. The heel should, in resting on the ground, take the weight of the leg, so that the toe may rest quite lightly on the pedal at its surface-level, and continuously so, except when its depression is required. ‡

* How often indeed do we find a pianist labouring under the delusion that he is phrasing most clearly and distinctly because he is taking his hands off the keyboard at the right moment — while all the time he is "fogging" his whole performance by carelessly continuous pedalling! Remember, not only must you be attentive "with your fingertips against the keys," but also, you must be equally attentive WITH YOUR FOOT;—for no amount of hand and arm-lifting will in the least help the listener, if you retain your pedal depressed at the ends of your phrases and sentences; and although to yourself the phrasing may seem clear as crystal, to the listener it will be but a dirty, muddy slough of despond! In short, realise that your foot "holds down" notes not only as effectually as do your fingers, but far more so. It is quite absurd to be careful about the details and inflections of *Legato* and *Staccato* from finger to finger, and meanwhile to nullify all such care, through gross carelessness on the part of your right foot. Yes, be indeed careful to listen for the inflections of Duration dependent on your fingertips; but remember, that your foot has even a vastly greater say in the matter. Listen not only *for* your fingers, but also *for* what that right foot of yours has to do, and is doing—or un-doing all the time.

The glamour and fullness wrought by the Damper-pedal in prolonging masses of sound, forms indeed a terrible temptation. Nevertheless, like the "Brass" of an Orchestra, it is precisely by eliminating the effect wherever possible, that we can enhance its value. The total absence of "Pedal" for a whole line, or more, is in itself often a striking effect, — yet how rarely does the player realise this! A careful "Ear" for the pedal has indeed greatly contributed to the charm of such players as LISZT, RUBINSTEIN and PADEREWSKI for instance, to quote only from among the older players.

† The judicious use of the pedal, like the judicious application of Touch-forms, depends on our having a properly-formed musical Taste and Judgment — acquired by the study of Music itself, or through the help a real teacher can give in these matters.

There are certainly some few rough and ready "RULES OF THUMB" which can be learnt, such as the following :

Never hold the pedal *through* two different Harmonies, — nor do so when the harmonies are ornamented with "passing notes" in the lower registers; and certainly never destroy the clearness of your phrasing, by holding the pedal beyond the ends of phrases. Also, do not hold it through important rests and intended *Staccato*-marks — unless for special effects. Again, do not interfere with melodic clearness, — but while "changing" the pedal sufficiently often for this purpose, do nevertheless use it, not only to give the requisite prolongations of the melody-notes, but also to enhance their Tone-quality and carrying power. In the meantime do not forget to let it rise sufficiently to enable the dampers fully to reach their strings — that is the most important point of all.

‡ There are cases, in *legatissimo*—when an extremely delayed syncopated pedal is required,—for super-legato, etc., and a comparatively slow descent may here contribute towards the required lagging effect. See Section V, p. 128.

Further information as to the *Application* of Pedal effects will be found in the author's "*Principles of Interpretation*."

ON PEDALLING

It is, however, with regard to the *Ascent* of the pedal that considerable variety of procedure is possible:—

II): Syncopated Rising of Pedal.

In the first place, there is the problem of *Legato*-pedalling. We must for this purpose learn to use it “in syncopation.” That is, when playing passages legato by means of the pedal—such as chord-passages, and bass and melody notes depending for their prolongation on it, the pedal must be kept depressed *as a normal position* for the whole duration of each phrase, being in the meantime momentarily raised, wherever the changes of Harmony or Melody and Bass notes, or passing notes, &c, require it. Such “change” (in prolongation) must be effected by letting the pedal *rise at the moment* that the new harmony or melody note, &c., IS SOUNDED; its re-depression following immediately and automatically after such sounding of the notes.

In such passages, therefore, the pedal *RISES* at the very moment the new notes begin to sound, and immediately afterwards resumes its depressed condition, and this is done automatically—each sound being thus “damped” (by the descent of the dampers) at the very birth of the next sound, and thus causing the Legato effect.*

III): The Pedalling of Detached Chords.

Only for the first note of a phrase, or for detached chords and notes, can the pedal be put *down* at the same moment with the fingers. It is often advisable to do this in such cases, for the sake of obtaining the fullest possible resonance.

IV): Duration of Ascent.

The duration of the *depression of the Dampers*—the “upness” of the Pedal—must be considered next. In Legato pedalling, as just considered, the pedal must not go down *too soon* after its ascent, otherwise it will *fail to damp* the preceding harmonies, &c., and there will be a bad case of “smudging,” exactly the same as if the pedal had not been allowed to rise sufficiently to enable the dampers thoroughly to rest upon their strings.

We see, therefore, that the pedal must not only rise *sufficiently*, but it must *remain up LONG ENOUGH* to serve its purpose—that of killing the previous sounds.

* That is, the pedal goes *up* as the keys in question go *down*, and the pedal then drops down, like an echo—the descent thus being a syncopation closely following upon the sounding of the notes, and yet soon enough after the sounding of these, to prevent their dampers from descending—as they would do were the fingers to quit the keys concerned before their sounds had been “caught” by the Pedal.

PART III—SPECIAL EXERCISES

And the lower the pitch of the notes the more powerful are the strings, and the longer, therefore, must the dampers be allowed to remain in contact with them—before again allowing the pedal to re-descend.*

V): Super-Legato Pedalling.

And not only do we require such “syncopated” pedalling to produce the effect of precise Legato in such passages, but we sometimes must even exaggerate this syncopation to such an extent, as will suffice to create an actual *overlapping* of the sounds—thus producing the effect of *super-legato* (over-legato) similar to that produced by the fingers in such cases.†)

VI): Speed of Ascent.

This brings us to another very important point, and that is the *actual speed* at which the pedal is allowed to rise. There is, in fact, a distinct difference between damping *suddenly* and damping *gradually*; although this difference is not so marked as the difference between “sudden” *key-depression* and “gradual” *key-depression*.

Just as in the case of Touch, you must learn both kinds of Pedal technique—since the one is sometimes appropriate, sometimes the other.‡

VII): Half-Damping Effects.

An OVER-SHORT damping is, however sometimes required, and this for an effect occasionally to be met with, viz.; when a Bass-note is required to be prolonged against moving harmonies, &c., above it. This effect is not possible in all passages, but it is available, provided the Bass-note is sufficiently low to have strongly vibrating strings, and provided that the moving harmonies are in the form of comparatively lightly sounded notes, well removed from the Bass as to pitch.§

* When a large bell or gong, &c., is sounding, manifestly it is of no use merely tapping at it with the finger-tips or hand to stop its sound—you must *remain in contact* with the bell, &c., long enough really to stop its vibrations.

† An excellent instance of the employment of *Super-Legato* pedalling is found in the slow movement of Beethoven's “Appassionata” Sonata. The true effect of this movement cannot be obtained if we let the pedal instantly fly up at each change of harmony. On the contrary, we must here allow it to *rise quite gently*,—with the *un-percussive contact* of the dampers as next described; and the damping of each preceding chord must be so late, as thoroughly to *mellow* the chord-successions by its overlapping-legato. The sympathetic effect of the “Weight-touch” required in this movement is also very materially enhanced by this means. See last Note, p. 126.

‡ The ascent of the pedal must however not be slow *beyond a certain measure*, else this may cause an unpleasant “twang” from the strings.

§ Of course, where the Piano is provided with the so-called “*sostenente*” pedal, there is no difficulty of this kind. This extra pedal, by the way, requires simply the same treatment as the ordinary damper-pedal, as used syncopatedly for Legato.

ON PEDALLING

We can in this case, by employing a sufficiently short-lived "damping," manage to efface the upper-harmonies, while still allowing the more strongly-vibrating bass strings to continue sounding. The pedal, being up only for an instant, does not here stop the vibrations of the low, strongly-sounding strings, while the upper ones, owing to their being far thinner (and, therefore, less persistent), are nevertheless sufficiently affected by the momentary damper-contact. In fact, we here purposely employ the inefficient damping discussed under *IV*,—"The duration of the Ascent."

This kind of pedalling has often been faultily described as "half-pedalling," which would mean, either an *insufficient* raising of the dampers for them to leave the strings, or else, an insufficient rising of the Pedal, insufficient to allow the dampers to touch their strings—and alluded to as a fault under paragraph *IV*. (p. 121), and under "Rules of Thumb". (Note, p. 126.)

The effect just described, that of holding "half" the notes—the lower ones, and killing the higher ones, is, however, not at all produced in this supposed way; on the contrary, it is only by the too sudden re-depression of the pedal, as previously described, that the effect can be accomplished.

PEDAL EXERCISES.

We will now consider some exercises bearing on these chief varieties of pedal use:

EXERCISE I: *For the study of Legato (syncopated) pedalling:—*

DESCRIPTION;

Play a double-octave scale, as in Example No. 42, slowly and *forte*. By means of the pedal make it Legato.

To succeed in this, keep the pedal *continuously depressed*, except at the moment that each successive sound appears. That is, the pedal must allow the dampers to reach the strings of the notes already sounded, at the very moment that the new strings are set in motion.*

After damping the previous sounds in this way, the pedal must at once resume its previous, depressed position.

This descent of the pedal must take place *soon enough* to prevent the dampers of the notes just sounded from falling—owing to the keys being quitted; and must yet be *sufficiently late*, thoroughly to damp the previous sounds.

SEE next page for Ex. No. 42.

In a word, the pedal must reach its upper limit, at the very moment when the fingers reach their lowest limit.

PART III—SPECIAL EXERCISES

Ex. N^o 42.

Moderato.

The black line of arrows is intended to suggest the required movements of the pedal. Do not sound the octaves too staccato, otherwise the exercise becomes extremely difficult. Remember the following points:

- I): Let the pedal come up *at* each next chord.
- II): Let it come up completely.
- III): Let it remain up long enough.

EXERCISE II): *For the eradication of "up-jerk"—over-suddenness in "changing" the Pedal:—*

DESCRIPTION:

This exercise is practised without sounding any notes. Depress the pedal, count a bar of common time, and at "one" of the next bar let the dampers touch the strings for an instant.

While executing this action as quickly as possible—the action of the pedal rising and being re-depressed, you must nevertheless let the pedal rise *so neatly* that the dampers *do not cause the least sound* in coming into contact with the strings.

If the pedal is allowed to fly up too suddenly, or is re-depressed too soon, the strings will be set into motion more or less strongly. The slightest sounding of the strings must, therefore, be regarded as proof that pedalling has been inefficient.*

You must, therefore, learn to put the pedal *down* quite promptly while nevertheless letting it *ascend comparatively slowly*, i. e.,—without *hitting* the strings by means of the dampers.

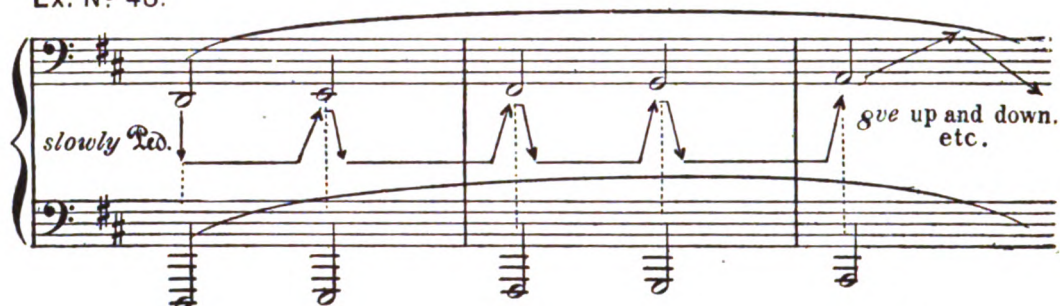
* If the pedal is allowed to fly up too jerkily, not only are we likely to occasion a nasty noise from the strings and pedal itself, but such over-suddenness in the ascent, and too short a duration of the "up" position, will inevitably cause bad smudging of the passage, as the dampers do not then remain long enough against their strings to stop their vibrations. Refer to §§ IV and VII of this Set, pages 127 and 128.

ON PEDALLING

EXERCISE III): *Test for over-sudden pedalling:—*

Further to guard against such over-sudden pedalling, practise a scale in the low bass, quite legato, in Finger-touch, as in Example No. 43.

Ex. No 43.



Play this quite slowly while applying the "syncopated" pedalling to it.

A scale pedalled like this, forms a good test whether the lesson of the previous exercise has been learnt, or not,—always provided, of course, that you hold the pedal down each time up to the very moment of sounding each new note.

EXERCISE IV): *For "Half Damping":—*

As an exercise for sustaining bass notes, &c., while damping the higher notes, practise passages of the following nature:—taking care here to make the pedalling so "sudden," as NOT to stop the bass notes. The pedal must not remain up even for an instant.

Ex. No 44.



The line of arrows indicates the movement of the pedal—a mere little "jerk" upwards.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON HALF-PEDALLING AND HALF-DAMPING.

Reference has been made, on page 129, to the many possibilities offered by allowing the Pedal to remain up too short a time to damp out the Bass strings. Yet another Pedal effect, however, remains to be noted.


This is obtained by purposely depressing the Pedal only sufficiently just to *ease* the dampers off the strings. With the dampers in this condition (not fully pressing on their strings) any notes sounded, and particularly the lower ones, *will faintly continue sounding* in spite of the keys being allowed to rise. This renders possible "atmospheric" effects not attainable by ordinary full-pedalling, or by the half-damping (or pedalling) previously described. I suspect it is an effect most of us have used all our artistic lives without being aware of doing so! Nevertheless, like the previously described half-pedalling, it also offers great possibilities when musically applied. For instance, take the return to the first subject in the slow movement of Beethoven's Sonata in G, Op. 31, No. 1. To keep the Pedal fully depressed for a whole bar of the left-hand semiquavers:




(or even during a complete group only) would render this passage far too heavy and clumsy. Whereas, without any Pedal whatever, the effect would be absurdly pedantic and unsympathetic—not in the least suggestive of that sense of String-Quartet playing evident throughout this movement. The only true solution is to use the Pedal just slightly depressed as here in question—enough slightly to loosen the pressure of the dampers upon the strings; a slight blurred resonance or reverberation is thus achieved, in keeping with the gentle character of the passage.

Similarly, a rising arpeggio with Pedal fully depressed is quite a gross effect compared to the same arpeggio with the dampers only just eased off the strings.

This form of pedalling also solves many problems in BACH-playing, since, to my mind, this may be applied on occasion, without entailing much loss in clearness of the part-playing, which would certainly happen with ordinary fully-depressed Pedal.

With regard to Nomenclature, it is most unfortunate that the terms half-pedalling and half-damping have been so loosely used. May I now plead that "half-pedalling" be restricted to that sharp up-and-down movement of the Pedal which allows us to continue Bass-notes under changing harmonies above them; and that "half-damping" be restricted to this playing with the dampers not fully active (half "off" the strings) which has given rise to this Note? Also, it would be well to restrict the sign P  to

ON HALF-PEDALLING AND HALF-DAMPING

the notation of the *half*-pedalling device, as used by myself and others, and not (as some have unfortunately done) to the expression of legato-pedalling—for which a more correct notation, anyway, would be: P  Notation is only confusing unless there is unanimity in its application.

Finally, it is well to remind the student—and the artist—that the most important point in pedalling is not the sustaining of sound but the *stopping* of sound!

In this connection I am often asked whether the old rule still holds good, that the Pedal should never be used during a scale-passage. Indeed, it is quite a good rule, but needs breaking at times! Passages with passing notes (such as the scale) in the lower registers cannot be sustained by the Pedal without very ill effect. On the other hand, scales high up can often bear pedalling while the harmonies beneath are sustained. Also one can sometimes use the extreme effect, of holding the Pedal throughout a rapidly played rising scale, provided the resulting *roar* be promptly stopped with the last note. I should venture thus to play those last rising scales near the close of Chopin's *Ballade in G minor*—and also the *forte* rising scale in Brahms' *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 76.

To my mind, a very charming effect can sometimes be obtained by holding the Pedal throughout a rising scale in the right hand, while the left hand *silently* “picks up” (silently depresses the notes of) the implied harmony in the middle of the instrument, which harmonies are then disclosed, sounding, when the Pedal is raised at the end of such scale. I should not hesitate to use this device, for instance, even in certain scales in the C minor and D minor *Fantasias of Mozart*!

Many cases will suggest themselves where a similar pedalling “trick” with subsequent holding of picked-up notes will be felt to be quite sound, artistically and musically.