

**PRIMER OF
PIANOFORTE
PLAYING**

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Primer of Pianoforte Playing by Franklin Taylor

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FRANKLIN TAYLOR

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BY

FRANKLIN TAYLOR.

WITH NUMEROUS EXAMPLES.

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PIANOFORTE PLAYING.

1. THAT the pianoforte cannot be learnt from reading a book is an undeniable proposition. In all the arts, and certainly not least in music, precept and example must go hand in hand, and many lessons must be conscientiously given and attentively received before even mediocrity can be achieved. But the most painstaking pupil will often find that there are matters in which explanation and assistance in the intervals between lessons would be very desirable, and that questions will continually arise which it would be a great advantage to have answered. Such questions are those which relate to systems of fingering, by the help of which the execution of difficult passages may be facilitated; methods of phrasing, by which the musical signification of certain passages may be rendered more clear; rules relating to the proper rendering of various so-called graces and ornaments, and the correct interpretation of the signs by which they are expressed, and so on. It will therefore be my endeavour in this Primer of Pianoforte-playing to give such hints and suggestions on the above and similar subjects as appear best calculated to lessen the inevitable difficulties of learning

to play the pianoforte, in the hope that whoever shall make use of the book may find in it at least something adapted to his needs ; and to this end it will be well to take for granted that the reader has already made a commencement in his art, that he is acquainted with the rudiments of music, and is in a position to read simple pianoforte music with correctness as to notes and time—in a word, that he can already play well enough to have an earnest desire to play better.

2. If we listen to the performances of two pianoforte-players, one good and the other bad, and try to analyse the differences which exist between their renderings of the same composition, two points force themselves chiefly upon our attention, and this even supposing both players capable of playing all the written notes correctly. The first of these points is **touch** ; the passages of the good player being distinct and brilliant, while those of the other are slurred and ineffective, and in listening to them one cannot always feel sure that each note of the written passage has been fairly struck. Again, the *cantabile* or melody playing of the one is rich and full in tone, and the expression vocal—the instrument seems to *sing* ; whereas a melody played by the supposed bad performer is weak and short in tone, and often overpowered by heavy accompaniment. The second of the two points of difference to be noticed is the different rendering or conception of the whole work given by the two players. In the one case the whole is intelligible and satisfactory, while in the other much of the music appears vague and unmeaning, and one is inclined to wonder what the composer could have meant by it. No doubt the question of the general conception and reading of a complete composition is

a wide one, and must necessarily include a great number of details, extending even to the capability of the performer to enter into and understand the intentions of the composer; still, in this book we have to do less with the intentions of either composer or performer, than with the mechanical expression of those intentions, supposing them to have been correctly conceived, and from this point of view it will be found that the chief difference between the readings of our two imaginary performers lies in their good or bad **phrasing**. Touch and Phrasing will then chiefly claim our attention, and first of all

I.—TOUCH.

3. Touch is to the pianist what a good management of the voice is to the vocalist, or a good action of the bow to a violinist—the means of producing agreeable sounds and of executing difficulties. True, the tone produced by an inexperienced hand on the pianoforte is not so disagreeable as the earliest attempts of a beginner on the violin, because the former is a more purely mechanical instrument than the latter; still, a good touch is one of the greatest excellences of a pianist, and to play good music with bad touch is very like attempting to read a fine poem in a language which one is unable to pronounce properly.

4. Touch is of two kinds: **legato**, or connected, and **staccato**, or detached touch. Of these legato-touch is by far the most important and the most frequently used, and it must therefore be considered first.

5. There are three kinds of legato-touch—namely, brilliant touch, suitable for rapid passages; *cantabile*,

or melody-touch, used for sustained melody; and accompaniment-touch. Each of these may be employed either singly or in combination; thus the touch proper to melody and that belonging to accompaniment are naturally generally met with together, and other combinations are perfectly admissible in their proper place. Moreover, although the classification here given is sufficiently practical, there are cases in which the most appropriate touch seems to partake of the qualities of two of the above kinds; for instance, a passage may be sufficiently melodious and not too rapid to require somewhat of a cantabile touch, or so light and delicate as to be best rendered by a touch approximating to that proper for accompaniment.

6. Of the three kinds of legato-touch just mentioned, the touch for brilliant passages is at once the most difficult to acquire, and the most important, as being the foundation of all other kinds. It consists of a rapid and decided blow, struck with the tip of a bent finger (but rather rounded than angular), and just escaping the finger-nail. In order to ensure a correct position of the hand for this kind of touch, the best method is as follows:—Place the middle finger of the right hand on any note—say E, the fourth space of the treble stave; let the back of the hand be kept level, so that a pencil laid upon it would not roll off, and then point as nearly straight upwards as possible with the three free fingers and the thumb. Now lower the front joints of the first and third fingers, slowly and gradually, but without altering the position of the joints at which the fingers are connected with the hand, and watch for the gradual disappearance of the finger-nails. As soon as this has taken place, and

the nails are just hidden from view by the bend of the finger, the hand is in a good position, and the first finger is ready to strike D, or the third finger F, as may be required. As for the thumb and little finger, they will, in all probability, have become slightly lowered during the bending of the other fingers, and will now be on a level with the back of the hand, but stretched out, which is their proper position.

7. The hand being thus well placed, and resting on the note E played by the second finger, with all the other fingers (including the thumb) held at a distance of about two inches above the keys, let us now consider the best way of striking the next note, D, so as to produce a bright, full, and decided tone. To this end three things are requisite: the blow of the finger upon the key must be **rapid, vertical, and from a sufficient distance**. Any one or two of these qualities might be present without the others. For example, the finger might fall rapidly and in a vertical direction, but from an insufficient distance; or, the distance being sufficient, the blow might yet be oblique, from the fingers having been too much or too little bent, or slow in movement, and therefore deficient in percussion. In none of these cases would the touch be good, but if all three qualities are present, and if the finger which is already upon E leaves its key at precisely the moment at which the first finger strikes D, and in springing upwards observes the same rules—that is, moves rapidly, vertically, and to a sufficient distance—then the note D has been played with good touch, and the second finger is in a position to play E again in the same manner.

8. It will be readily seen that when the hand has once been correctly placed, as described above, it is