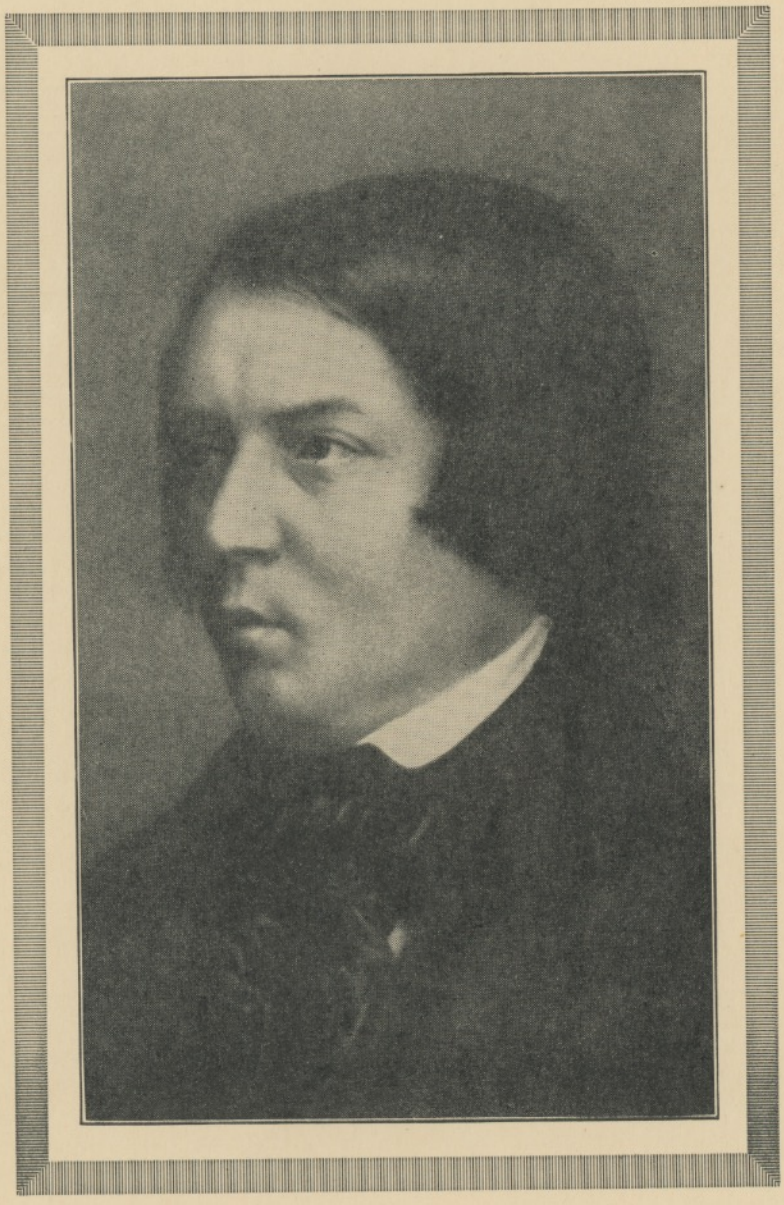
THE BIRD AS PROPHET

Op. 82, No. 7

By

ROBERT SCHUMANN



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By LEOPOLD GODOWSKY

FORM AND STRUCTURE, AND HARMONIC ANALYSIS
By EDGAR STILLMAN KELLEY

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH, GENERAL INFORMATION AND GLOSSARY
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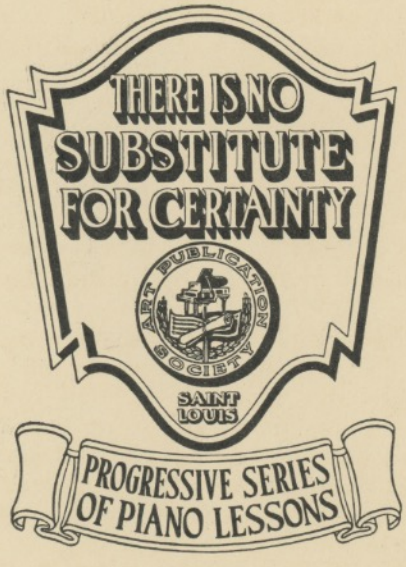
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THE BIRD AS PROPHET.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH—ROBERT SCHUMANN.

Born at Zwickau, Saxony, June 8th, 1810.
Died at Endenich, near Bonn, July 29th, 1856.

ROBERT ALEXANDER SCHUMANN was the son of a bookseller in the little town of Zwickau, Saxony. His father had dabbled sufficiently in literature to appreciate Robert's literary and musical aspirations. Moreover, Schumann the elder was able to leave his son an income of five hundred *thaler* a year, which gave the young man opportunity to study and compose without the ever-present fear of destitution.

There has been much written by comfortable Philistines about the advantages of poverty. Never has a greater myth been foisted upon the unthinking multitude. No artist of real ability was ever hampered by having an adequate income. There never was a time when the world paid enough for its music; the prima donna may have flourished, but seldom has the composer been duly rewarded.

Perhaps John Paul Richter was the strongest influence in Schumann's literary life, while Schubert and Mendelssohn were his musical divinities. In a romantic period Schumann was an arch-romanticist. It was only his strong, artistic perceptions and ideals which saved him from the maudlin effusions peculiar to that period. With all due respect to John Paul Richter, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and certain of their imitators, we realize that the romanticists overestimated themselves and their place in the history of art. This must not in any sense be taken as a lack of appreciation of the music of Schumann, for we may rightly consider him as the flower of the romantic movement.

After studying law at Leipzig and Heidelberg for three years, Robert Schumann decided that he would not follow the profession of law, but devote himself henceforth to music. He returned to Leipzig, where he lived for two years in the same house with Frederick Wieck, the famous piano pedagogue, and assiduously applied himself to the study of the piano under Wieck's guidance. Here he was brought into close relationship with Wieck's talented daughter, Clara, whom he married in 1840, in spite of her father's objections. Clara Wieck was already a pianist of considerable fame and her father naturally considered the young suitor as ineligible from the financial standpoint. The result of this strongly defended paternal opinion was a case in court, where Schumann used to advantage his small juristic knowledge and succeeded in proving that Wieck's objection was trivial.

At this time his pianistic ambitions were shattered by his over-practice with a finger-strengthening device of his own invention, which ruined the muscles of the fourth finger of his right hand. So he naturally turned to composition and literary work.

During the long winter evenings of 1833-34, in the restaurant "Kaffeebaum" (Kleine Fischergasse, No. 3, Leipzig), the idea of a musical journal was conceived and discussed. This should be a departure from the mild "honeydaubing" critical sheets extant in Germany; it should be written in a style that would cause the Philistines to tremble. The "Neue Zeitschrift für Musik," edited by Schumann for over ten years, lived up to the ideals of its founders and became the leading music journal of the day.

Schumann did most of his composition in the different forms at separate periods; his piano works were largely written before his marriage, after which there was a period of song-writing; then came the chamber music and symphonies, and lastly the operatic and choral works. But this tremendous output of music extended over so few years that the effort undermined his health, and he suffered from lack of memory and melancholia at frequent intervals. Indeed the last two years of his life were spent in the private asylum of Dr. Richarz at Endenich, near Bonn, where he had only short periods of lucidity. His wife was very brave throughout this unhappy time, continuing her concertizing and introducing her husband's works to the public. The letters of Brahms to Clara Schumann give us a sad picture of Schumann's last days.

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POETIC IDEA: This composition is the seventh of a set of nine pianoforte pieces, called "Wood Scenes." One must a little realize Schumann's method of work to understand the titles of these small pieces. He seldom had any program in mind, but more often began with an abstract musical idea, to which he afterwards happily put a name. His imagination was so active that he found little difficulty in discovering appropriate titles for his works. In his song-writing he was often obliged to find the words after having conceived the musical idea.

The "Bird as Prophet" was not composed at his most prolific period of piano composition, but comes rather in a middle phase, after his songs and before he took up the composition of larger works on any extended scale.

FORM AND HARMONIC ANALYSIS: The student will doubtless note the peculiarities of the song form and trio as modified by the demands of Schumann's poetic subject, "The Bird as Prophet." The main theme, key of G minor (m. 1—18) falls naturally into three parts, part I (m. 1—8), part II (m. 9—16), and part III (m. 17—18), the latter being an unusual contraction of part I. Part I consists of a period with the following grouping of measures: 1—1—2—1—1—2.

Part II is developed from the same rhythmic figure, thus: 2—2—2—2. But we must not forget that these two measure members are differently constructed from those in part I. Furthermore it will be noticed that the sixteenth-note figure in the soprano in m. 9 is imitated in the lower voice in m. 10. The overlapping of the voices in m. 15 affords an instance of "close" rhythmic imitation, the entrance of each part following at the distance of but a single quarter.

In spite of the originality of the main theme suggesting the feathered songster, Schumann felt the necessity of the element of contrast, and secured it by means of a very rudimentary trio in the key of the tonic major (m. 19—24). In fact, so primitive is it in construction, that we find it to consist practically of but one phrase. The first measure is repeated, then follows a two-measure section (m. 21—22), then the first measure once more (m. 23) and now introduced in the key of E flat major—the sixth degree of the tonic minor (m. 24), which leads back to the main theme in the original key repeated exactly (m. 25—42).

The harmonic outline, which is simplicity itself, has been rendered mystical by means of the long changing notes preceding the arpeggio figures, suggestive of the bird's call. For instance, in the first two measures we find nothing but the chords of the tonic and subdominant (key of G minor), and even in the subsequent modulations the chords are equally simple.

In the trio, observe in m. 19, 20, 23, that the A in the tenor on the third beat is an unprepared suspension. This explains the accent which insures the full esthetic value of these curious phenomena.

METHOD OF STUDY: The whole atmosphere must be clearly imagined; the fluttering birds, the spring morning, the delicate aroma of leaves and flowers. This is a sylvan picture expressing the mood of the poet in these surroundings.

The little phrases must be clearly stated with quite definite pauses between them. The moments of silence in this composition are of extraordinary value. It is all in the half-light of a wood and the dynamic shadings should remain subdued. If the student plays without delicacy and with long sustained pedals, he will destroy the whole illusion. One may imagine distant horns in the middle section, with an even more distinct echo at the end of measure 23 and in measure 24. At measures 9 and 10, and again at 33 and 34 the student should pay close attention to the *staccato* marks and slurs indicated.

GLOSSARY.

NAMES

Schumann,	pronounced	Shoo-män.
Zwickau,	"	Tswĭ-kow.
Thalers,	"	Tä-lers.
Wieck,	"	Vēk.
Kaffeebaum,	"	Cä-fā-baum.
Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,	"	Noi-a Tsīt-schrĭft für Moo-zēk
Brahms,	"	Bräms.

TERMS

lento e con molto tenerezza, pronounced lĕn-tō ā kōn mōl-tō tĕn-ĕ-rĕt-tsä - slowly and greatly sustained.

langsam, sehr zart, " läng-säm, sair tsärt,, - slowly, very tenderly.

una corda, " oo-nä kŏr-dä, - one string, (soft pedal).

espr. (espressivo), " ĕs-prĕs-sē-vō, - with expression.

tre corde, " trā kŏr-dĕ, - three strings, (release soft pedal).

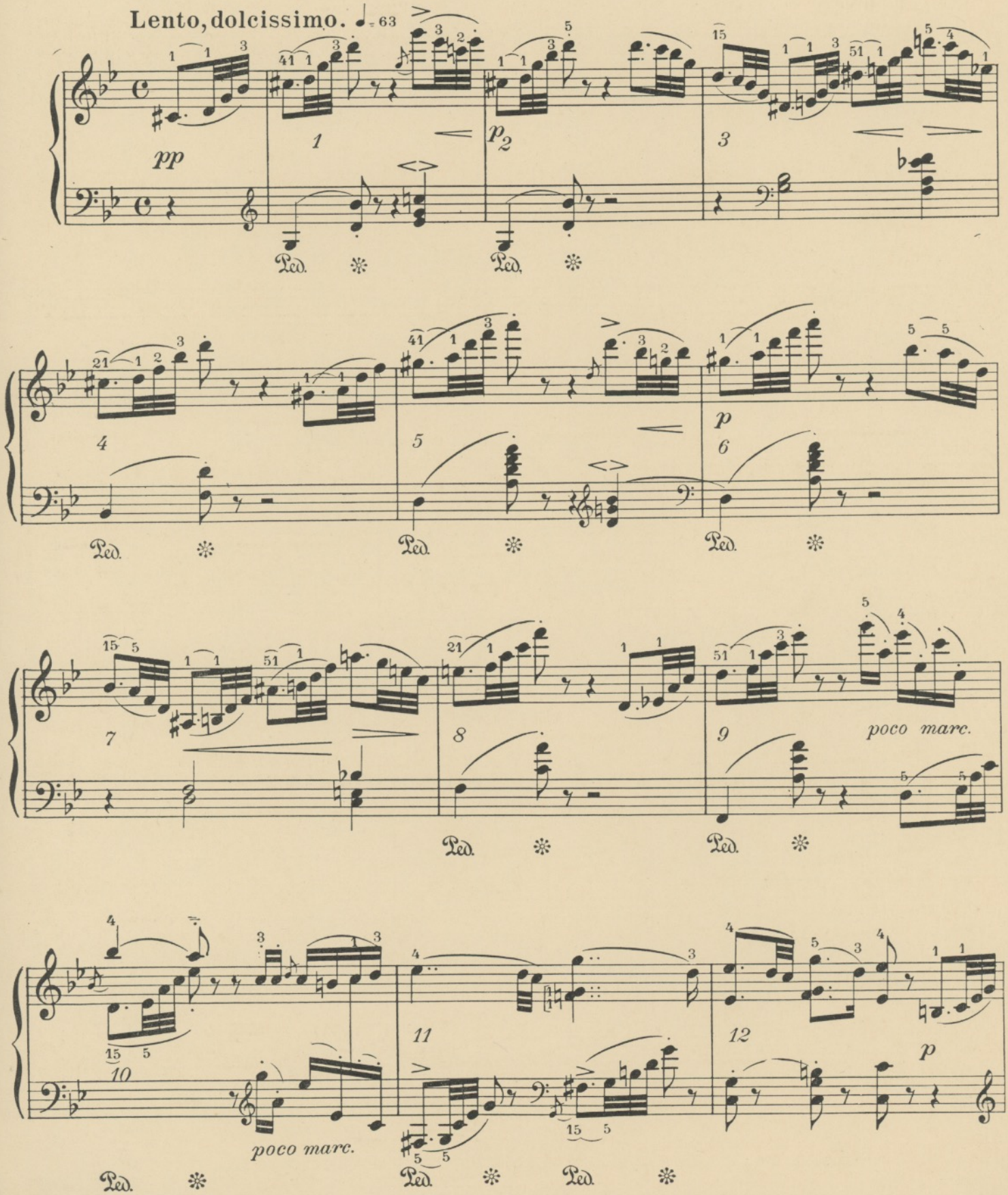
più lento, " pē-oo lĕn-tō, - more slowly.

The Bird as Prophet.

Vogel als Prophet.

Edited by W. D. Armstrong.

R. SCHUMANN, Op. 82.



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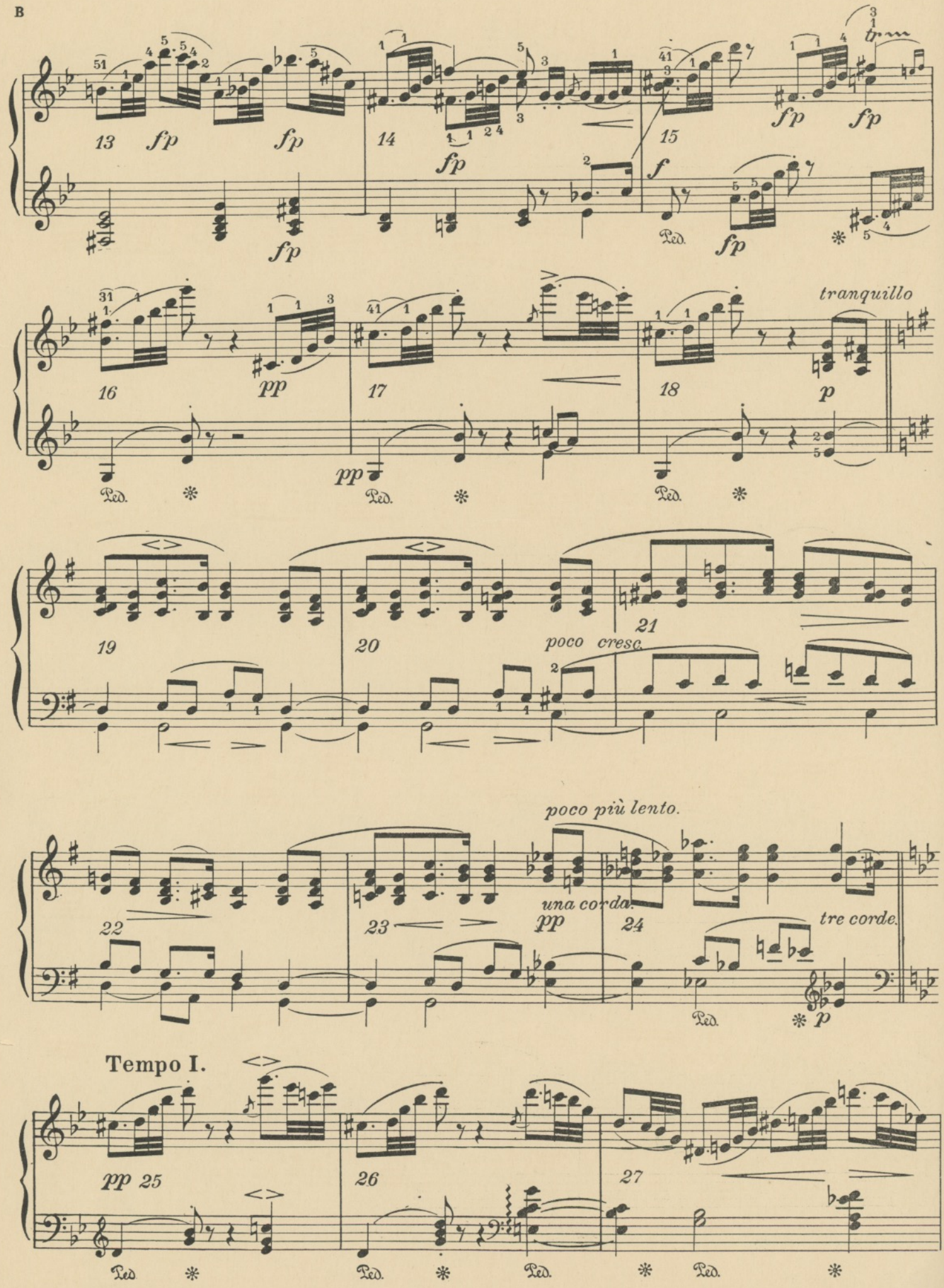
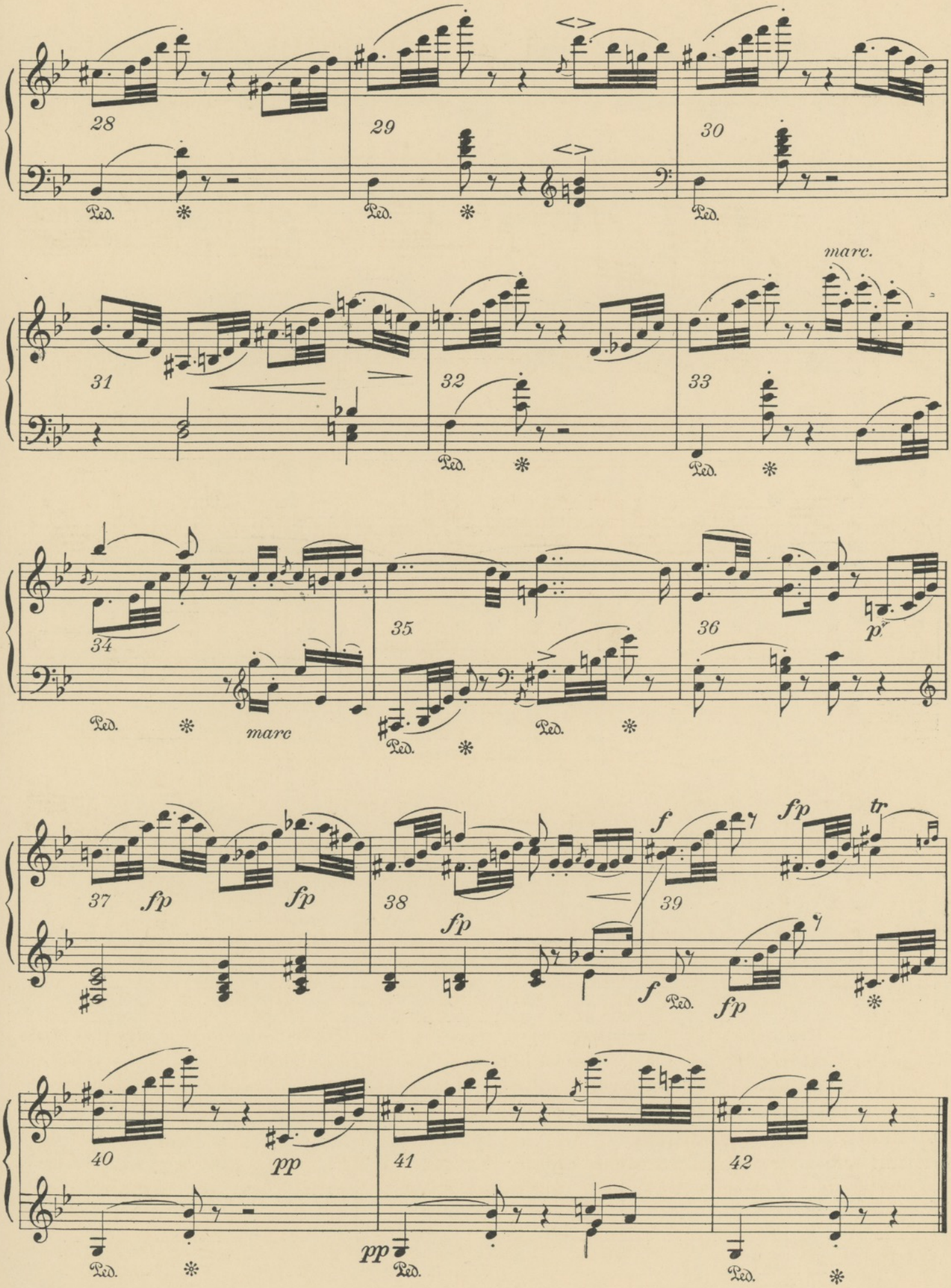
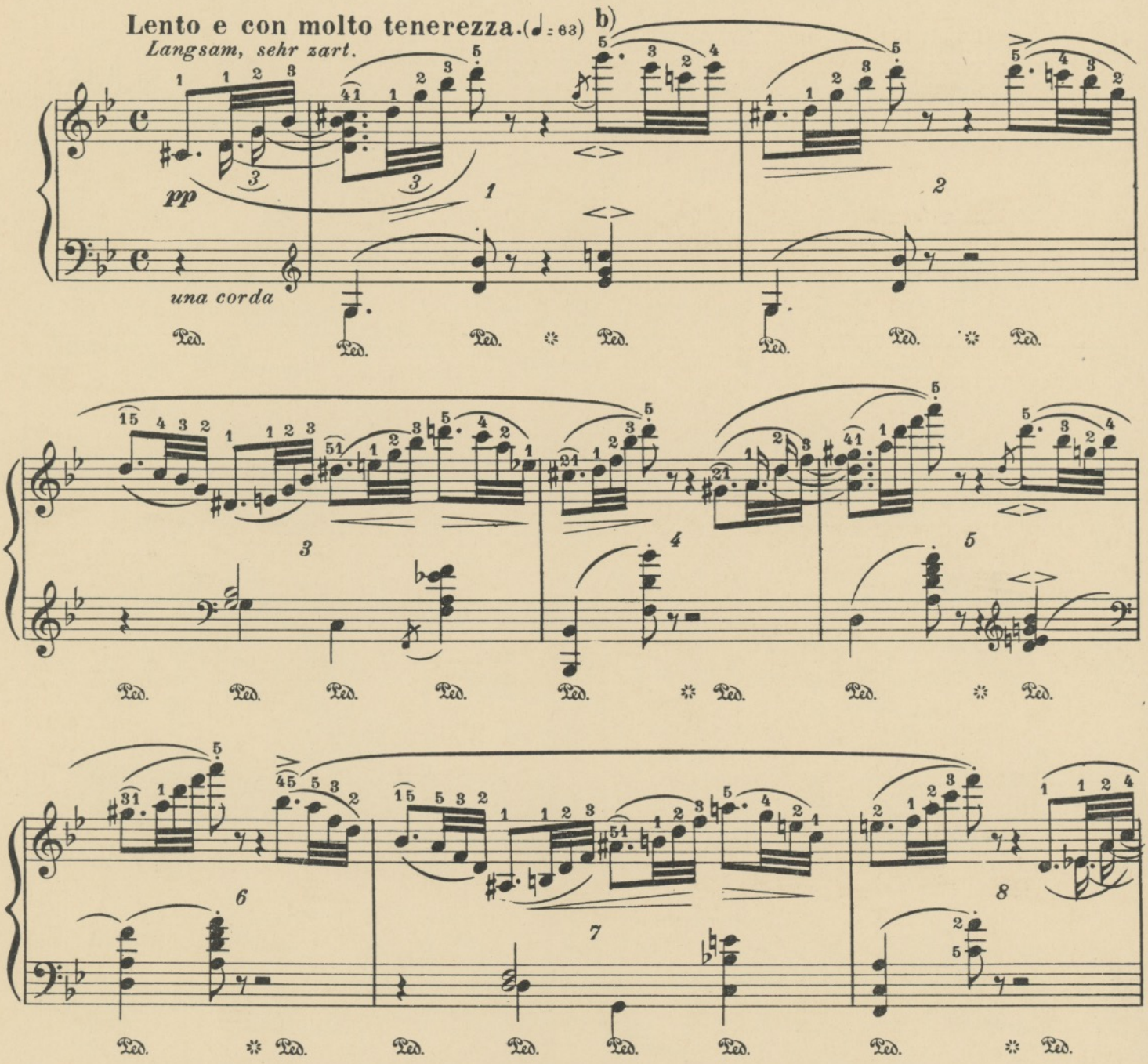

13 fp fp fp
14 fp
15 f fp fp fp
tranquillo
16 pp
17 pp
18 p
19
20
21
poco cresc.
poco più lento.
22
23
una corda.
pp
24
tre corde.
p
Tempo I.
pp 25
26
27
Ped.


28
29
30
Ped.
31
32
33
marc.
34
35
36
p
marc
37
fp
38
39
f
tr
40
pp
41
42

a) The Bird as Prophet.

* *Edited by Leopold Godowsky.*

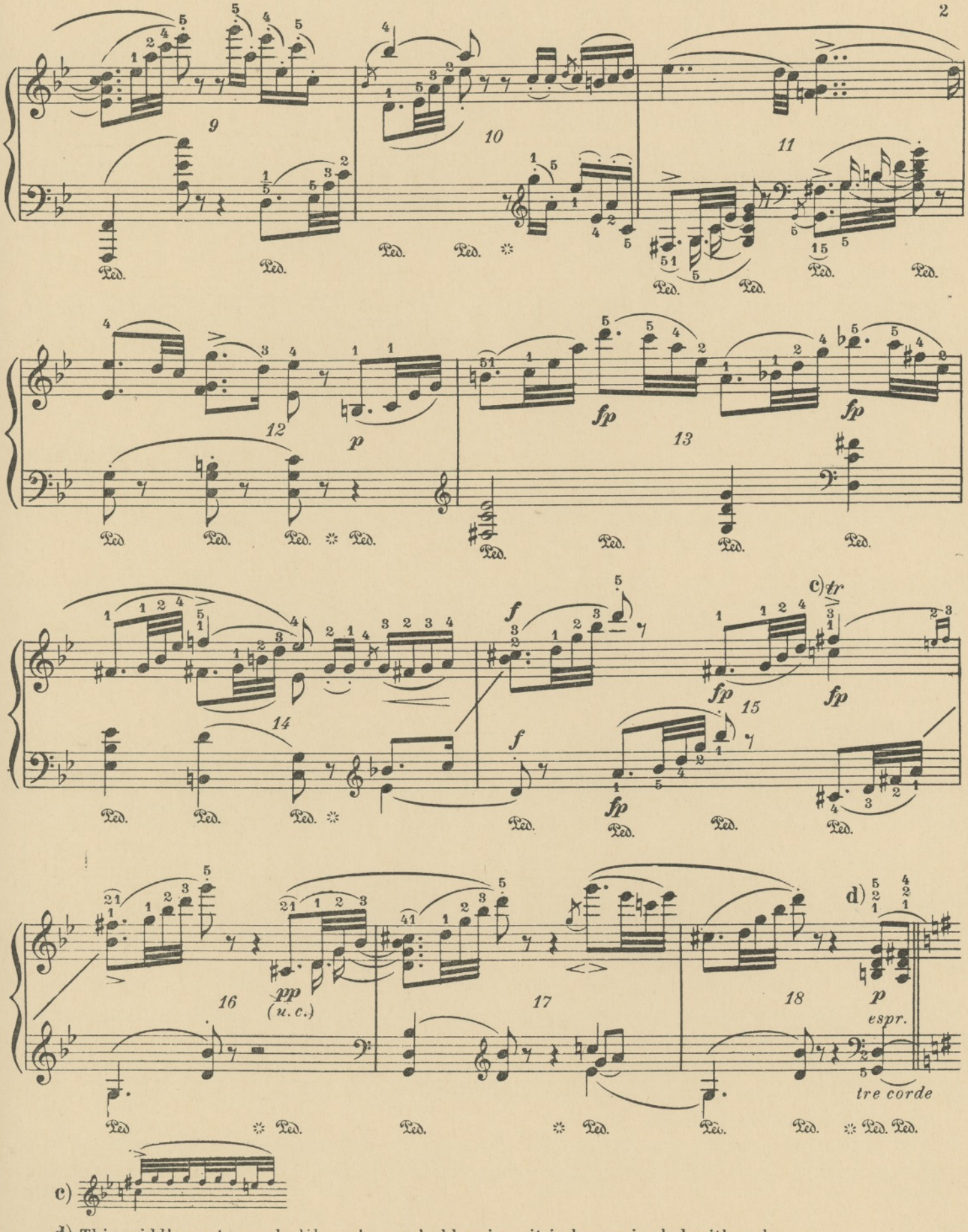
Robt. Schumann, Op. 82, No. 7.



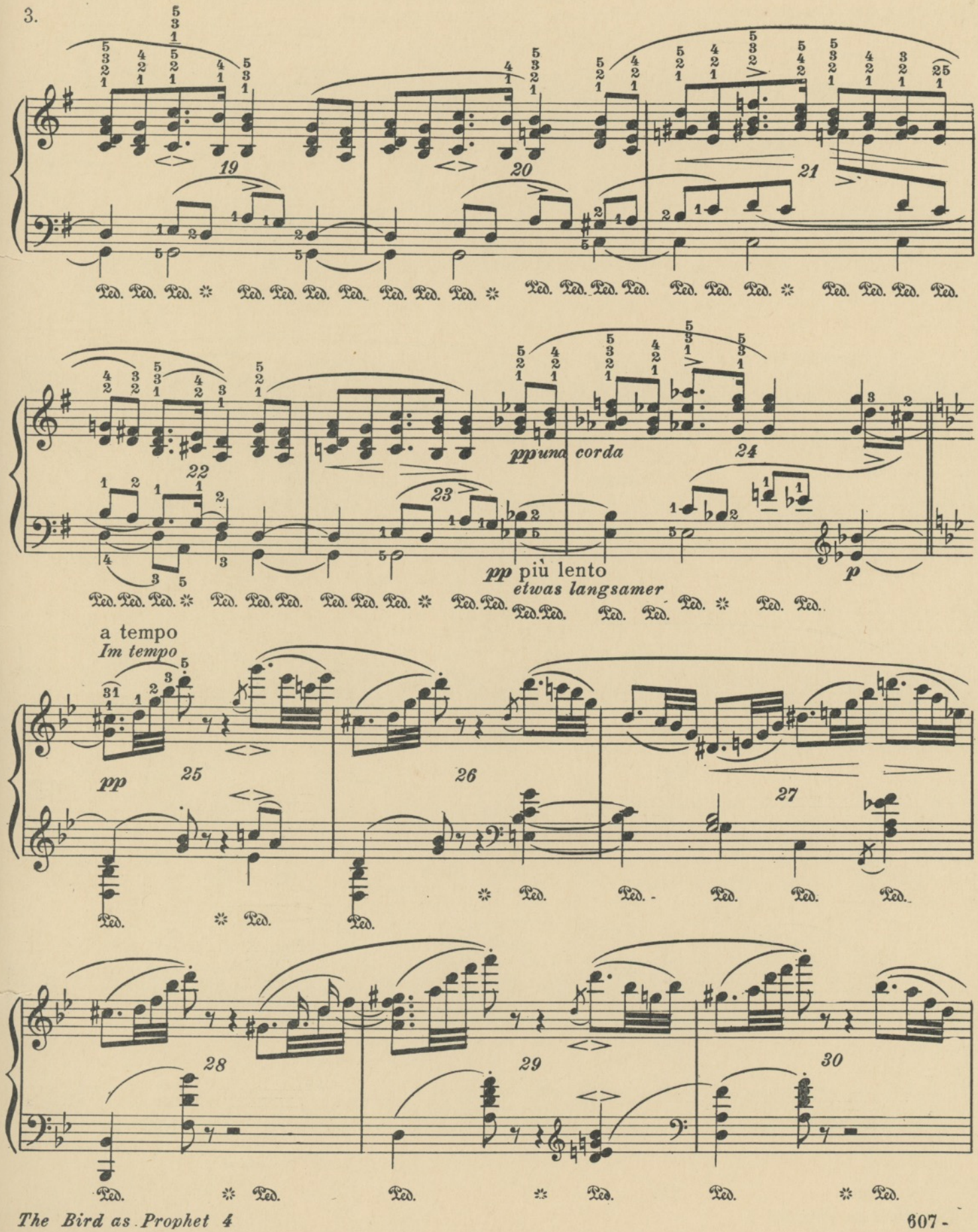
a) This fanciful composition of Schumann, being replete with tenderness and sentiment, demands of the performer a velvety touch and an ethereal lightness. The dotted eighths must be fully sustained and slightly emphasized. All the short notes (32nds) must be played fast and extremely light and soft.

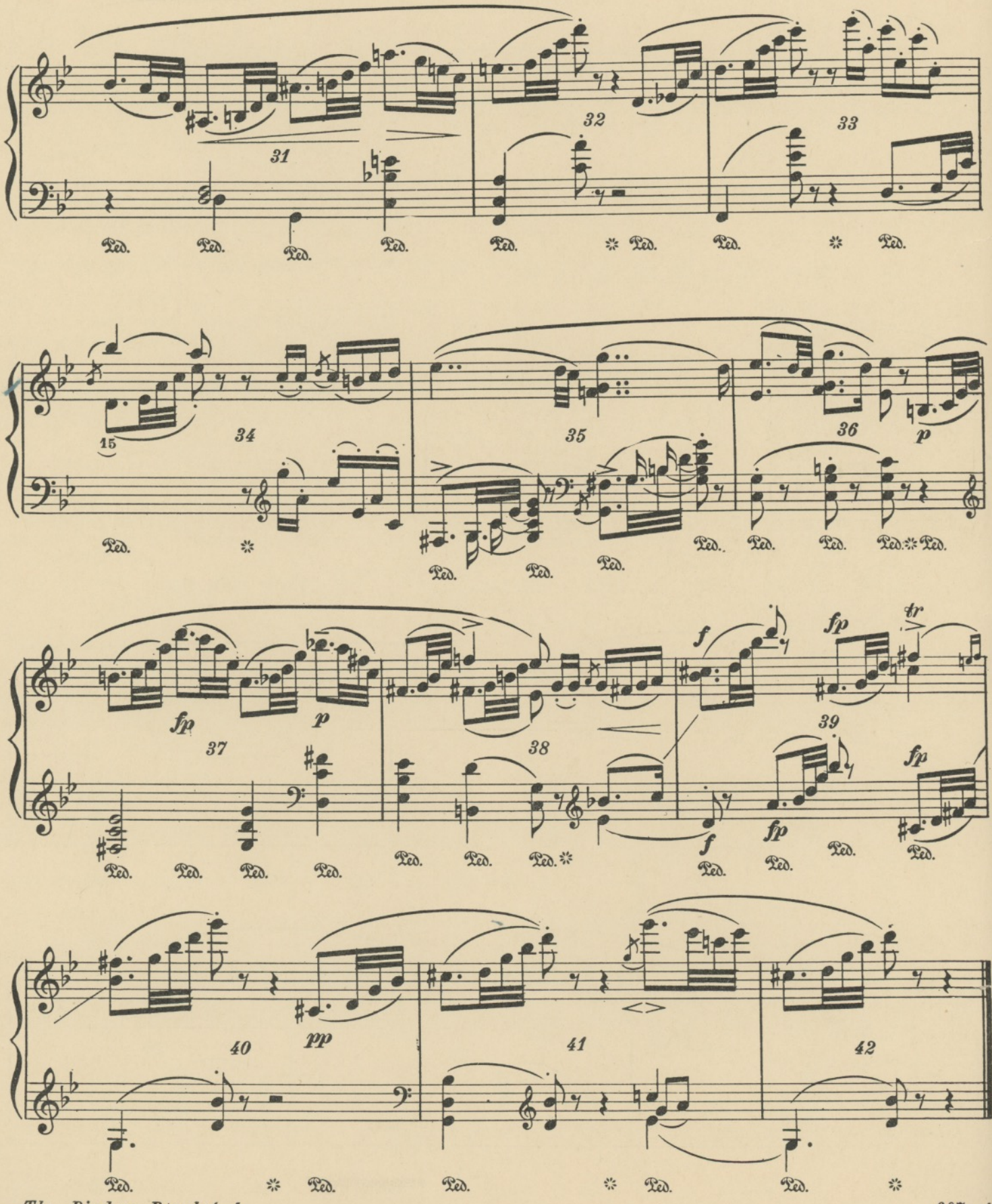
b) The indication <> on one chord or one tone signifies an espressivo accent- tender, subdued; more of an agogic than dynamic nature.

* This edition varies slightly from the original. (See page A). The changes have been made by the editor in order to obtain better sonority. This version is used by Leopold Godowsky in his concert repertoire.



d) This middle part sounds like a heavenly blessing; it is hope mingled with sadness.


3.
19
20
21
22
23
24
una corda
più lento
etwas langsamer
a tempo
Im tempo
25
26
27
28
29
30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p
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Ped.