

## ACHILLE P. BRAGERS

1887 — 1955

ON MAY 29th OF THIS YEAR, ACHILLE P. BRAGERS died in New York City of a heart condition. With his passing, Church musicians and the work of the church music apostolate have suffered a great loss. As organist, teacher, composer, counsellor, and friend, Achille Bragers helped to shape the careers in church music of countless organists in the United States. His quiet and unflagging devotion to his vocation in the field of church music was and will be a source of inspiration and encouragement to all who came in contact with him personally or through the medium of his published works.

In the picture shown on this page Mr. Bragers is receiving the Catholic Choirmaster's Liturgical Music Award given him by the Society of Saint Gregory on March 12th, 1951, the Feast of Saint Gregory. HIS EMINENCE, FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN of New York made the presentation. With His Eminence and Mr. Bragers is shown REV. JOHN C. SELNER, S.S., President of the Society of Saint Gregory. This award, presented shortly after the announcement of his retirement, was the last distinction to come to Mr. Bragers during his life.

Achille Bragers was born on Saint Valentine's Day, 1887, in a small town near Brussels, Belgium. At the age of 15 he accepted the post of organist in his native village. In 1907 he graduated from the Lemmens Institute at Malines which was then under the direction of EDGAR TINEL. The same year he moved to America and became organist and choirmaster at the Cathedral in Covington, Kentucky, where he worked for some three years. In 1918 he became a naturalized citizen of this country and in 1922 he was invited by MOTHER GEORGIA STEVENS, R.S.C.J., to become a member of the faculty of the then newly-formed Pius Tenth School of Liturgical Music at Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart in New York. At this institution for the next quarter of a century and more he dedicated himself to a work that was to be the most fruitful of his career.

The start of Mr. Bragers' tenure at the Pius Tenth School marked the beginning of his spe-



Cardinal Spellman, Father Selner and Mr. Bragers

cialization in the field of Gregorian Chant accompaniment. The skills which he himself acquired in this phase of his professional life he passed on to the many students who came to the school for instruction. His method of accompanying the chant has been preserved in a book on the subject which is widely used as a teaching manual. What is perhaps more significant than his class and private teaching of chant accompaniments from the point of view of the number of people who have been helped by his contributions is his list of published chant accompaniments (See list below.) The volume and quality of these are unmatched. In the aggregate they have helped to make the singing of Gregorian Chant acceptable and functional where otherwise chant might never have been used at all and they have been instrumental in eliminating from general use the old style romantic-type accompaniments that formerly were so harmful to the chant. If he had completed the Kyrie and Proper of the Time alone his task would have been considered gigantic. Before he died he completed all but 40 pages of the Proper and Common of the Saints, the first volume of which (Advent through June) will appear in published form in November of this year. The unfinished portions have been completed by former pupils of his.

Although his written accompaniments are widely used, admired and consistently provide a prayerful background and support to the chant melodies, these are but a faint reflection of the mood of prayer which he himself through his organ playing could produce during a liturgical service. When he joined his skillful accompaniment of the chants of a mass, for example, or of vespers, with his inspired transitional improvisations, the resulting total experience of the service became unforgettable.

His published compositions in a modern idiom, though not nearly so numerous as those of chant, are like his other works well-known and used. Both the Reginae Pacis and Sacred Heart Masses have appeared in several arrangements for different combinations of voices.

Achille Bragers' imitators and pupils are many; his friendship was precious. Musicians found him a keenly sensitive artist whose self-effacing work was his prayer. His friends knew this too and in addition loved him for the mild and gentle person that he was, a true Christian soul at peace with God.

*May the choirs of angels sing in joy to welcome thee*

*And with Lazarus who once was poor*

*May thou find eternal peace at last.*

"In Paradisum"

Published Works of A. P. Bragers  
McLaughlin & Reilly Co. Publications

*Gregorian Chant Accompaniments*

- 1000 Kyriale
- 1004 Chant Service Book
- 1400 Proper of the Time, Vol. I
- 1401 Proper of the Time, Vol. II
- 1402 Proper of the Saints (In Prep.)
- 1460 Standard Gregorian Chants
- 1270 Compline Service
- 1354 Confirmation Service
- 1995 Easter Vigil Service
- 966 Missa de Angelis
- 907 Missa cum Jubilo and Missa alme Pater
- 1440 Missa Lux et Origo
- 1965 Requiem Mass and Libera
- 1320 Proper of the 1st and 3rd Christmas Masses and Feast of Circumcision
- 1321 Proper of the Easter Mass
- 1803 Proper of Mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe
- 1838 Proper of the Mass for the Assumption of B.V.M.
- 889 Christus Vincit
- 1945 Christus Vincit —Christ Lord of Glory
- 1960 Te Deum Laudamus

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## THOMAS MERTON TRANSLATES EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESS HYMN

Leaflets containing a translation of the official hymn of the 36th International Eucharistic Congress which opened in Rio de Janeiro this month were distributed to the pilgrims in attendance at the Congress. The translation was made by THOMAS MERTON (Fr. Louis, O.C.S.O.), of Gethsemani Abbey, Kentucky).

Composed in Portuguese, the English translation of the hymn is as follows:

O come, O hasten  
From every side,  
The royal table  
Is richly spread.

Waters fall from heaven,  
Soak the earth with rain.  
Vines bring forth their clusters;  
Wheatfields give their grain.

The rough-handed farmer  
Gently strips the vine  
Bread comes from the wheatfields,  
Grapes turn into wine.

Grace comes down from heaven  
To Our Lady's breast.  
Mary, like a monstrance,  
Passes, bearing Christ.

Christ at mortal tables  
Comes and takes His place.  
In His Blessed Hands  
Signs are charged with grace.

Bread becomes His Body  
Wine is changed to Blood  
His the Cross and Passion  
Ours the grace and food.

March, O holy people,  
Strengthened by this Bread;  
In life, in death, victorious,  
March home to your God.

Other translations of the Congress hymn have been prepared in Spanish, French and German. The original hymn was composed by FATHER MARCOS BARBOSA, O.S.B. of the Benedictine monastery of San Benito in Rio de Janeiro.

must have felt the need of an audible check on what he put down on paper.

This practice of Beethoven merely reveals, if you wish, the terrible hunger for sound which the unfortunate master experienced. But the fact that he was able to compose in silence only proves that his inward ear, trained by the multiple experiences of his extraordinarily fine external ear, had become so perfect that he could prescind from audible sound. It means that Beethoven knew beforehand — because he could imagine it — how all the harmonic, melodic, rhythmic and orchestral material which he used, would sound. Finally, we believe that the miracle of a deaf Beethoven is explained by the fact that he had formed his external ear at the piano and by means of other musical instruments which he had heard so many times in a sensory way. And we advance the opinion, without fear of being disrespectful to the great master, that if he had been born deaf, he would not have left us as much as a bad tune.

#### ADVICE TO THOSE WHO NEED IT

Does this mean that only Beethoven could afford the luxury of composing silently? By no means. You probably know some composers who boast of doing by virtue what the illustrious deaf master did by necessity. Unfortunately, the great majority of their works are insipid and pedantic. But if some time you are curious to know to what degree your inward ear has been developed, try also to compose silently without the help of your external ear. You will then notice that, in the traditional style, due to the fact that its harmonic and contrapuntal combinations are very familiar to you, it is possible to compose with some assurance of satisfying results. The same is true of the modern style within the limits of your experience. But when there is question of something new and never heard before, your inward ear is of no use whatever, because there has been no previous experience and consequently you cannot rely on your judgment until the external ear comes to your assistance.

Something similar happens when we read silently a musical score. If it is written in the classical style, we can imagine its aural effect with perfect accuracy. But, if it belongs to an unknown work, who can guarantee that the inward ear will apprehend the strange music?

In conclusion, when anyone comes to trouble you with the well known fallacy, turn the argument against him by saying: "My dear Sir, if the piano could teach composition, we should have to call that man a cheat — and not only an ignoramus — who tried to pass off as his own what are really the creations of the instrument; but if as Schumann said: 'A mute CANNOT teach one to speak,' then *Quare conturbas me?* Why do you trouble me?"

Note: Schumann himself composed at the piano. When Clara, his wife, a famous pianist, was about to leave for Copenhagen in March, 1842, Robert addressed her in these words in his Diary: "The separation has once again brought home to me my strange and difficult position. Must I sacrifice my talent in order to act as your escort in your travels? And must you neglect yours because I am chained to the *Zeitschrift* and THE PIANO?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Schumann" by Victor Basch

(Translated by Paul L. Callens, S.J.)

#### A. P. Bragers

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1678 Credo (More Ambrosiano)

#### Masses

- 1249 Missa Reginae Pacis (2 Vcs.)
- 1299 Missa Reginae Pacis (STB Vcs.)
- 1500 Missa Reginae Pacis (SATB Vcs.)
- 1702 Missa in hon. Ss. Cordis Jesu (3 Eq. Vcs.)
- 1789 Missa in hon. Ss. Cordis Jesu (SATB Vcs.)
- 1826 Missa in hon. Ss. Cordis Jesu (2 Eq. Vcs.)

#### English Hymns and Choruses

- 1316 Mary's Lullaby (Med. Vc. solo)
- 1352 Easter Joy (2 Eq. Vcs.)
- 1804 To St. Francis of Assisi (Med. Vc. Solo)
- 2017 Holy Mary (Unison)
- 2018 O Christ Whose Glory Fills the Heavens (Unison)

#### Organ

- 1444 Christus Vincit

#### Hymnal

- 1864 Monastery Hymnal
- 1800 Pius X Hymnal (contains chant accompaniments, numerous arrangements and several compositions by Mr. Bragers.)

#### Other Publishers' Items

- Carl Fischer: A Short Treatise on Gregorian Accompaniment
- Catholic Education Press: Hymnal Accompaniments
- Catholic Education Press: The Forty Hours Manual

