

## LOUIS LAMBILLOTTE, S.J.

(1796–1855)

by Rev. Paul L. Callens, S.J.



THE SWEET AND LILTING MELODIES of Lambillotte which held a prominent place in popular hymnals of a former generation are fast becoming unfamiliar, although a few of his tunes are likely to survive for some time. "Come, Holy Ghost!" "Panis Angelicus" "On This Day, O Beautiful Mother" are still on the repertoire of most school children. In a few Jesuit novitiates, the strains of his melodramatic "Suscipe" are still heard on a Vow Day. But there is no doubt that the name of Lambillotte is hardly ever mentioned among church musicians.

The purpose of these pages is by no means to lament the neglect and oblivion into which the music of this church musician has fallen, but merely to call attention to a little known fact: Lambillotte spent the last twenty years of his life — he died on February 27, 1855 — laboring zealously, although immaturely for the restoration of Gregorian Chant.

Lambillotte was born near Charleroi, Belgium, in 1796. At the age of seven, he began taking lessons in solfège, piano and harmony from an Italian priest, who acted as chaplain in a neighboring manor house. He was a gifted little boy. It is recorded that when he was only twelve, he composed a duet which he sang with his younger brother Francis, at a public concert. He took lessons on the organ from an Augustinian monk and, for some years, he was organist first at Charleroi and later on at Saint-Dinant. In 1820, he was given the post of Choirmaster at the Jesuit College of St. Acheul, a post which he relinquished five years later in order to enter the Society of Jesus. He had two brothers, Francis and Joseph, musicians like himself who also became Jesuit priests.

Having gone through the usual formation, Fr. Lambillotte seems to have been allowed to devote all his time to music. Besides several masses, he composed many collections of hymns, motets and songs for all occasions. Sommervogel lists no few-



er than 64 published works under his name. When in 1842, Fetis, the editor of the "Revue Musicale," called the attention of the French clergy to the need of a restoration of Gregorian Chant, Lambillotte threw himself heart and soul into the work of research. Unfortunately, he had not received the training necessary for such a vast and specialized undertaking. He visited the principal libraries of Europe, and at the Abbey of St. Gall in Switzerland, he stumbled upon what he thought was an authentic copy of the Antiphony of St. Gregory. He proceeded to publish it with notes and dissertations, and as a result of his discovery he was honored by several learned societies and by Pope Pius IX himself who sent him a Brief of congratulation. However, a more critical study of the manuscript undertaken later by the Benedictine Dom Anselme Schubiger proved that the document was not the authentic copy which Lambillotte thought it was. The work of restoring

(Continued on page 73)

## PARTICIPATION AS A MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION

by Rosella Meyer



Rosella Meyer

GOD IS ENTITLED to the best. As long as we do not pray as we sing in church, what we sing is not worth singing.

There is no reason why the spirit should lag from what some call daily routine when there are several Masses every morning. Organists (and singers) should offer their talent to God and

ask His blessing in return upon their work. We must spiritualize our work offering our music in the spirit of prayer. When we (conduct or) sing a "Kyrie" we should think of the meaning of the words — asking God's forgiveness for our sins. At the "Gloria" we should join Mary and all the choirs of angels, and the saints in their everlasting hymn of praise glorifying God. Make the "Credo" an act of deep faith. At the Offertory, offer yourself in union with Mary and the priest, to God the Father. At the "Sanctus" you again join Mary and the choirs of angels and saints in praising the "Holy Lord God of Hosts." At the Elevation, in deep humility, offer to God the Father His Divine Son through Mary for her intentions. The "Agnus Dei" is again sublime adoration — the Lamb of God before our very eyes, Whom we receive sacramentally, and at later masses, spiritually. Keeping this deep inner meaning of the Mass ever before us in active participation, even the fifth or sixth Mass in one morning is not tedious — it is still an act of love and worship of God as was the first Mass that day.

People sometimes sympathize at the early hours of an organist! They would know it is a privilege if they but knew the efficacy of one Mass. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin says, "If all the prayers of all the loving hearts from the beginning of the world, and all the seraphic worship of the Thrones and devotion of the Virgin Mother of God, and

and Principalities in heaven and the burning love the million voices of the universe, of all the creatures of heaven, earth and sea, were offered up in one harmonious act of praise and adoration, they would not equal, or even approach in value and efficacy, the infinite worth of one single Mass."

When this idea of active participation is well formed in a choir, the result will be sung prayer coming from the souls of the singers.

We must always remember that if we do not pray as we sing in church, it is not worth singing. Church music is not a performance. Any music that draws attention to itself in church is not good. It is not a compliment if they say the *music* was beautiful. We must feel the life of the soul in our song. As sung prayer, it should be a spiritual experience for both the singer and the listener, drawing all to a closer union with God. We must pray through the music — as it is for God that we sing, not for the people, and God is entitled to the best.

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**Father Lambillotte, S.J.**

(Continued from page 49)

Gregorian Chant was indeed too great a task for one single man; it required the patient and time-consuming labors of several monasteries to effect the restoration which Lambillotte thought of accomplishing by himself. A great deal of ink was wasted by him and by those who sided with him in discussions and rebuttals concerning the correct reading and the proper interpretation of the Chant. However, if the Jesuit musician accomplished little, we can at least admire his zeal and interest in a cause so vital to the church. Because of his obvious sincerity in the search after the genuine and proper musical idiom demanded by the liturgy, we feel sure that if Lambillotte were living today, he would be the first to condemn his own masses, *Suscipes* and the rest of his melodies, and that he would be a most ardent promoter of reform in sacred music.

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