

“Plainsong” and “traditional melodies” have been identified by laborious study and papal authority, still the identification has been comparatively so recent as to justify the implied distinction between what used to be called *Plainsong* and the “traditional melodies” which are now authoritatively recognized as the correct Plainsong.

We earnestly solicit the attention of all interested in this matter of terminology to the problems presented by it; and we should be glad to offer the pages of CHURCH MUSIC for a thorough discussion both of terminology and of spelling.

“GREGORIAN RHYTHM: ITS THEORY AND PRACTICE.”

UNDER this heading the Very Rev. Dom André Mocquereau will publish in the pages of CHURCH MUSIC, beginning with the next issue, an authoritative treatise upon this most interesting and most important subject. It will serve the double purpose of giving to students and to scholars alike a thorough course of instruction in the most important element of Plainsong, viz., the rhythm, and of clearing up the many misapprehensions concerning the subject which have been productive, during the past year, of controversy and dissent.

GREGORIAN RHYTHM.

THE long and somewhat heated controversy which has been going on in the Catholic press concerning the Solesmes theory of rhythm in Plainsong does not touch upon the question of the melodies themselves, but rather upon that of their proper interpretation and execution. But this latter is indeed the really important consideration in Plain-

song ; for, after all, the melodies are not dead specimens for academic analysis, but living chants to be rendered in the service of God. Rhythm is the life of melody, and especially of Gregorian melody, wherein its practical importance may be said to dwarf that even of the traditional chants themselves. It is not surprising then that the various attempts of the schools of interpretation to place the question of rhythm on a scientific basis should have stirred up much interest and not a little controversy. In the midst of all this divergent opinion there was one school which, in offering a scientific theory and a consistently-practised art based upon it, could not but attract the closest attention on the part of students of Plainsong ; for, while the *Paléographie Musicale* dealt profoundly with the scientific theory, the monks of Solesmes were daily giving, in the solemn services of their chapel, exquisitely beautiful renditions of the chants in the very rhythm scientifically propounded in their *Paléographie Musicale*. Yielding to a very general desire that the theory should be popularized and the practice rendered more feasible, the monks issued their chants in modern notation, and added various marks, suggestive of rhythmic theory, to aid in the interpretation of the chants. It was not an easy matter to condense a large volume, such as the seventh of the *Paléographie*, into a brief "Preface" to the published manuals, etc., of the chants ; in addition to this, modern notation, although the only substitute at hand for the more ancient notation, had its own well-established connotations and values, which were not precisely those of the older notation ; and, finally (what is practically inevitable in such cases), various misprints crept in, not numerous relatively to the vast bulk of the characters to be printed, albeit of sufficient prominence to puzzle the close student of the new theory.

The London *Tablet* gave space, during the past year, to many correspondents who expressed their difficulties in understanding the well-meant service of Solesmes, and

sometimes their dissent from the theory as they apprehended it. The first of the long series of letters appeared, we believe, in the issue of December 17, 1904. The writer courteously remarks :

“Many earnest workers would be very grateful for a little guidance in a very vital matter which has not been treated in your recent articles. I mean the new rhythmical notation of the Solesmes editions of 1903-4. Of course this rhythm is not obligatory ; but many of us are rightly making every effort to understand whatever issues from Solesmes ; and on this one point I find that time and energy are sadly wasted over a notation and a nomenclature which are perplexing and self-contradictory. While these are unsound it may be possible to sing, but it is quite impossible to teach intelligently. As to the authoritative renderings that we are able to hear, I must leave it to each one to decide whether they are altogether pleasing, or an improvement on the freer rhythm taught us by the Solesmes of a generation ago,—that stately free rhythm, itself a spontaneous liturgical resurrection in which practice preceded theory, which inspired the writings of the heralds of reform, of Canon Gonthier, Dom Pothier, and Dom Kienle, and which has kindled intense devotion in many hearts.

“It may not be easy to defend free rhythm historically ; but we want to be very sure indeed of our ground before we modify it. The free rhythm is at least as near as is the new Solesmes rhythm, to the ancient Plain Chant rhythms, Greek and other, which I have been able to hear and to study at leisure at Cairo and at Jerusalem, and which seem to have scarcely changed since St. Augustine of Hippo wrote his treatise *De Musica*.

“I will say nothing about the recent editions in the *ancient* notation, and the comparatively few rhythmical marks they contain—largely adapted from the old Romanian notation—except to draw attention to the perplexing nomenclature in the Introductions on rhythm. For instance, I take my beloved *Liber Usualis*, p. xvii. We are introduced to the distinction made by ‘the ancients’ between the two parts of a spoken word : (1) the *Arsis, sublatio*, the upward part of which contains the accent ; (2) the *Thesis, depositio*, the downward part which ends the

word. The latter, we are surprised to hear, *will* also be called *Ictus*—‘*ictus nuncupabitur*’ . . . ‘*depositio seu rhythmicus ictus*.’

“This use of the future tense is significant. Here, surely, Solesmes and ‘the ancients’ part company.

“Next moment we are told to place the *thesis* (‘*depositio seu rhythmicus ictus*’) on the even syllables in the well-known line *CreAtoR ALme SIdeRUM*. But surely three of these four syllables are clear *arsis* at its very climax,—the tonic accent. How can they be *arsis* and *thesis* at the same time,—two opposites? There is anything but an ‘ancient’ ring about all this.

“But it is only when we turn to the editions in modern notation that we see the full effects of the new teaching. We take the *Kyriale* of 1903. On page vii we find as above: (1) *Arsis*, or *élan*; (2) *thesis*, *ictus* or *appui*. Soon after (p. xi) *appui* is suddenly used to render both *arsis* and *thesis*. ‘The chief point . . . is to know the position and intensity of the *appuis rythmiques*. To simplify the notation, we will mark with a single dot all these *appuis*, since their arsic or thesicc value is generally shown by the syllables to which they are attached. When they are well determined (!) the execution becomes easy.’ So, for simplicity’s sake, the same dot is to denote two opposites, *arsis* and *thesis*! On the same page we are told that the *appui* indicated by this dot will be ‘sometimes strong, sometimes weak, sometimes very weak,’—another pair of opposites!

“As a fair specimen of the strange effect of all this upon a piece of syllabic chant, we will take the *Gloria* of Introits of the 5th mode (p. 4) and mark the *ictus* by capitals. There is one note to each syllable; the *ictus* is to be strong or weak according to the nature of the syllable.

“‘GLORIA PATRI, et FILIO, et SPIRITUI SANCTO. SICUT ERAT IN PRINCIPIO, et NUNC et SEMPER, ET IN SAECULA SAECULORUM, AMEN.’

“What chance, we ask, has the unfortunate tonic accent (which, we are told on p. ix, is the very life and soul of the word) of making itself properly felt, in the midst of a notation which seems to take a perverse pleasure in giving overwhelming prominence to almost every syllable *except* the accented one?

“To conclude. Is not the only natural explanation of the above perplexities to be found in certain well known peculiarities of the French ear in the matter of rhythm? Without casting the

least reproach upon the authors of this system, might we not with advantage have a little light thrown upon it from the point of view of Italian, German, or English scholarship?

“C. RAYMOND-BARKER, S.J.”

The above letter has been printed in full, as it sums up with sufficient fulness the difficulties which might confront even an earnest student of rhythm, and suggests the value of a consecutive and more elaborate treatment than the various published collections of the chants could give in their condensed Prefaces or Introductions. It will be interesting to give also the answer made to this letter by a close student of the Solesmes rhythm, in the next issue of the same periodical:—

“The Rev. C. Raymond-Barker’s letter in your last issue setting forth certain perplexities and supposed ‘self-contradictions’ in the new rhythmical notation of the latest Solesmes editions is most useful and interesting as an illustration of the difficulties that constantly beset the Benedictines of Solesmes in their efforts to impart their lore to other people.

“The Fathers are only too pleased to do all they can to help earnest students of the traditional chant, and the letters and visits of inquirers are always heartily welcomed at the monastery. Personal interviews have hitherto proved the most effective means of dissipating difficulties, for in the majority of cases the acquisition of rhythmical science, like faith, comes most readily *ex auditu*. This was shown by the words of a Bishop, himself for twenty years a student and lover of Plainsong, who spoke thus at the end of the Summer School held this year at Appuldurcombe House. ‘On coming there,’ he said, ‘they had all very properly assumed the attitude of humble learners and had all been convinced of their abysmal ignorance, and of how much they had even still to learn.’ These remarks were applauded by the students present, who included many skilful and experienced musicians.

“The short Prefaces of the *Kyriale* and the *Liber Usualis* are not intended to be used as manuals of instruction. Even the more extended introduction of the *Missæ Officiorumque Manualis*, to which the reader of the Preface of the *Kyriale* is referred, is

not full enough to enable it to suffice for a teacher's handbook. The English edition, entitled *The Solesmes Transcriptions*, is sold separately for a few pence, and gives some elucidatory notes.

"But the Preface to the *Kyriale* is so compressed that it is not surprising that anyone should find perplexities. Nevertheless such difficulties hardly justify the charges of 'self-contradictoriness' and 'unsoundness' brought against the terminology and nomenclature of the latest Solesmes editions. This conclusion is reinforced by an examination of the Rev. C. Raymond-Barker's two examples brought in support of his accusation.

"After telling us that the Preface of the *Kyriale* says that 'the *ictus* is to be strong or weak according to the nature of the syllable,' he proceeds to represent the rhythmical *ictus*, wherever it occurs in the *Gloria*, by capital letters, as if it were everywhere strong, even if it coincides with a weak unaccented syllable. And this he calls a 'fair specimen.' Again, after quoting the *Kyriale* as saying that the dot representing the *appui* or *ictus* will be 'sometimes strong, sometimes weak, sometimes very weak,' and nevertheless replacing it everywhere by capitals, he suggests that the new notation 'seems to take a perverse pleasure in giving overwhelming prominence to almost every syllable *except* the accented one.' Is this, one might ask, 'fair' comment? Is there as much 'perverse pleasure' or 'overwhelming prominence' in the poor little dots as in the big capitals. The dots, we are told in the *Kyriale*, are 'sometimes very weak,' and we shall make a serious mistake (*vehementer erres*), if we treat them like the strong beat after the bar in modern music; but the capitals in the two examples given by your correspondent suggest that always and everywhere they are strong.

"In the second example,

Creátor álme síderum,

the *ictus* on all the tonic syllables receives strength from the accent, but on the last syllable the *ictus* will be 'very weak,' yet it is printed in big capitals.

"Line 1 of the next verse of the same hymn well illustrates the true character of the musical *ictus*, shown by the italics.

Qui daémónis ne fraúðibus.

Here the *ictus* receives strength from the tonic syllables *dae* and *frau*. It is weak on *nis*, which at most has but a secondary

accent. It is very weak on *bus*, because it is the end of the verse. Yet all four of these *appuis* would be represented by your correspondent by the same capital letters.

“The *ictus* of musical rhythm, however, does not belong to the order of stress, but of movement. It marks the end of a rhythmical unit. In contracted binary rhythm, like the above, it also marks the beginning of a new unit, except at the end of the verse. Hence it has often both an *arsic* and a *thesisic* aspect, according as it is regarded as the end of one movement, or the beginning of the next. It is rather a mental than a material feature of rhythm, and its presence is rather felt inwardly as the satisfaction of a psychological demand than detected sensibly with the sense of hearing. But this is especially the case at the end of a phrase, where it is always ‘very weak,’ because the rhythmical movement in Plainsong there gently and softly alights in order to cease. This weakness of the final *ictus* is a clear proof that the theory of the new notation has nothing whatever to do with the ‘well-known peculiarities of the French ear in the matter of rhythm.’

“This meaning of *ictus* is indeed borrowed from Latin writers, who used it in this sense to explain the rhythm of their language long before French came into being. All this, and the whole theory of Gregorian rhythm, are to be found demonstrated in full in Volume VII of the *Paléographie Musicale*. Chapter II of that volume convincingly demolishes the strange myth of a supposed change in the rhythmical execution of Solesmes since the days of Dom Pothier. Moreover, the oldest Fathers now at the monastery assert emphatically that the rendering of the chant has never varied in their time.

“The new notation is simply an effort to show how the melodies have always been rendered. Whatever Dom Pothier taught has not to be unlearned: but the new notation has the advantage of coming after nearly another generation of constant practice. Its underlying theory explains the chant without modifying it, and harmonizes with facts without manipulating them. It leaves the rhythm as free as it ever was. Any one who so interprets the new notation as to modify or hamper the rhythm, which has always been adopted at Solesmes, has failed to understand what he professes to explain.

“I cannot, however, attempt to give a *résumé* here of the

Paléographie Musicale, and there is less need to attempt it, as an abridgment of Volume VII is in course of preparation for the public.

“ I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
“ DOM MOCQUEREAU’S TRANSLATOR.”

The issue was thus fairly joined, and the protagonists were soon assisted by volunteers who, however, largely indulged in guerrilla tactics, so that the points in controversy, instead of being fully threshed out, or at least considered with exclusive consecutiveness, received accretions and developments that did not make always for clearness. It is not our purpose to follow the controversy farther, save to note its climax in the publication of a pamphlet of 25 pages by the Rev. T. A. Burge, O. S. B. (who had already largely contributed to the *Tablet* discussion), entitled “ An Examination of the Rhythmic Theories of Dom Mocquereau—Vol. VII of the *Paléographie Musicale*.” It issued from the press of R. & T. Washbourne, London, as a reprint from *The Ampleforth Journal* for April, 1905. The pamphlet was extensively reviewed in the *Rassegna Gregoriana* by Sig. Giulio Bas, whose accompaniments to the chants of Solesmes show him to be a competent student of the theory of the Solesmes rhythm, and to have thoroughly mastered the puzzling doctrine of the “*thesis*.” A translation of this review appeared in the *Liverpool Courier* of September 30, 1905. From an introductory note to this (Englished) review, we regret to learn that the pamphlet has caused a heated discussion in the Catholic press of England. As our purposes are pacific and not polemical, we shall not enter into the discussion of the question at issue, but we do venture to congratulate our readers on the near appearance in the pages of CHURCH MUSIC, of the treatise on Rhythm, which may be considered the authoritative exposition of the Solesmes Theory of Rhythm and of its Practice as well.

Pending the appearance of this treatise, it may be well

to remove one possible source of error in the use of the Solesmes books, arising from a misconception of the purpose of the little dots superposed in all the Solesmes transcriptions into modern notation. The dots do not indicate the *accents*, but only the rhythmical *ictus*. The liturgical text takes care to preserve, in its printing, the proper indication of the syllable that is to bear the accent. Stress, in the Solesmes rhythm, is completely independent of the rhythmical supports or *theses*. Accent and rhythmical *ictus* (thesis) may happen to coincide, but they are not the same thing, and they may occur separate from each other. Neither the *arsis* nor the *thesis*, then, are connected with the accent, which may fall indifferently on either the one or the other.

REFORM ACTIVITIES.

THE "Summer School" at Appuldurcombe, I. W., England, and that at Conception, Mo., America, during the past summer, were dedicated principally to the study of the Solesmes chants, with particular reference to the proper methods of rendering the chants. Theory and practice went hand in hand. The International Congress at Strasbourg confined itself to questions concerning the Gregorian Chant, but dealt with the Chant after a larger fashion. The Congress at Turin concerned itself only slightly with the Chant, and took up the whole subject of Sacred Music. Meanwhile, individual work has been done in all lines by several competent church-musicians: amongst others, by Father Gatard in England; Father Guillaume in Canada; Mr. Gibbs in Covington; Father Manzetti in Cincinnati. Several helpful Pastorals have been issued by Bishops to their diocesans; especially earnest in its tone was the letter of the Most Rev. Diomedo Falconio, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, written to the editor of *The Ecclesiastical Review* apropos of the *Manual of Church Music* issued recently; and at least at one Diocesan Conference a paper