

**Dark Dawning**

Gerald Mallett '44

I heard the dawn lilt the grey unsmiling field,  
 It caught its breath beside a gaunt transfigured tree;  
 I saw it smother hollows where ling'ring shadows reeled,  
 And crush the moody night that hung close to the sea.

Out o'er the deadened waves the sky was dimly smeared,  
 And sunlight fought uselessly behind impris'ning clouds;  
 For past the slapping shore thunder murmured low and  
     weird,  
 And broke the deathly thread of night's mysterious shrouds.

**Gregorian Chant**

Francis O'Connor '41

In recent years a movement has been on foot within the Church to reinstate many of the liturgical practices of the early Church. This movement is becoming stronger every year with the result that in many churches we see the ancient table altar taking the place of the elaborate structures which are now in use. Also the early vestments are being adopted more and more to replace the extremely modified forms that are in use today. Many other ancient customs are being reinstated, but the one I wish to speak of particularly is that of Church music.

The official liturgical music of the Church is Gregorian Chant. It received its name from Pope Gregory the Great who, in the sixth century, gathered together all the music of the Church, organised it, and made it the standard form for the Universal Church. Gregorian Chant is not a music to delight the senses as is the case with other forms of music; it is a most expressive form of liturgical prayer used by clergy and faithful alike. It is essentially a single line of melody with free measure and rhythm, flowing serenely without the startling transitions and heavily stressed beats which make other music so distracting. It is the elevation of the soul to God.

Besides pure Gregorian, there are Plain Chant and Polyphony in Church music today. Each of these is in-



dicative of a decline in liturgical music. Plain Chant is a modified form of Gregorian, and Polyphony is the only prescribed form of part music in the liturgy.

The history of Gregorian Chant goes back to the psalmody of the Jews. This along with the early Greek and Roman sacred music is the source of the Chant. It remained for the great music lover, Pope Gregory, to organize it in his Antiphonary in which form it remains to this day. For a thousand years there was strict adherence to the Chant of Pope Gregory, but abuses gradually crept in; other lines and harmonies were added which were not in accordance with the sacred character of the Chant.

In the sixteenth century Palestrina was called upon to effect a reform in the music of the Church. This he did by creating a new type of music which is known as Polyphony. The new music was part music of a character which was approved by the Church and so it came into use almost everywhere. The Renaissance with its pomp and display was the cause of even greater abuses in Church music than ever had been before so that the sacred character of Church music was almost completely lost in the florid and irreverent compositions to which the sacred prayers were set.

For many years reform was advocated, but little progress was made until the early part of the nineteenth century. Then interest was aroused and people began to see the beauty and appropriateness of Gregorian Chant for all Church services. The Monks of Solesmes Abbey in France, who had preserved the ancient chant in its purest form, became the teachers of the world in this all but lost art. On November 22, 1903, Gregorian Chant was prescribed by Pope Pius X in his *Motu Proprio* as "the supreme model for sacred music." In the *Motu Proprio* we read further; "Sacred music, being a complimentary part of the solemn liturgy, participates in the general scope of the liturgy, which is the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. It should, consequently, possess in the highest degree the qualities proper to the liturgy and, in particular, sanctity and goodness of form which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality. These qualities," the Holy Father continues, "are to be found in the highest degree in Gregorian Chant, which is, consequently, the chant proper to the Roman Church, the only chant she has inherited from the early fathers, which she has jealously guarded for centuries in her liturgical codices,



which she directly proposes to the faithful as her own, which she prescribes exclusively for some parts of the liturgy and which the most recent studies have so happily restored to their integrity and purity."

It is not only ecclesiastical writers who testify to the beauty, holiness and appropriateness of Gregorian Chant. Halevy, a celebrated French composer, wonders why Catholics allow the poverty of modern music into their churches when they themselves possess the most beautiful religious melodies on earth.

Therefore is it not a pity that we see Catholics searching for modern harmonised Masses for special occasions and leaving their own beautiful Masses for ordinary services? It would seem that our church music is subjective, ministering to our feelings, rather than objective, leading us upward to God Himself. It is gratifying to note, however, that within the last few years Gregorian Chant is again coming into its own. With great leaders appearing in this field, one can now look forward to the day when all our churches will resound with the sincere and uplifting melody of Gregorian Chant.

