

Preface to the first Edition.*

Plain Chant (*Cantus Gregorianus*) arose as pure melody; it was invented and composed without harmonic accompaniment and without time, with free recitation of the text. The text gives clear insight into the mode of rendering this chant; in other words the execution of the chant must be of the same nature as the correct recitation of the text. By this rule any mode of execution that appears "tedious, drawling, dry, all alike, or tasteless" is judged and condemned. As I cannot here treat of Plain Chant as such, but only of its accompaniment, I must refer the reader for that part of the subject to my "Historical Studies" in *Musica "Sacra"* for the years 1868 (P. 9.) and 1872 (P. 9.); as regards the accompaniment, however I lay down the following theses: —

1. Any harmonic accompaniment to Plain Chant is an evil; and it is a real misfortune for art when it is accompanied. The proofs of this and of my subsequent assertions will be found in the "Studies" above mentioned. The only exceptions are those simple antiphonal chants, which in early Christian times were sung by the people themselves. These were necessarily very simple—for the most part only a recitation of the text upon one note, with certain cadences, inflexions and melodic passages, according to fixed rules, at the full stops, commas &c. in the text. Such are the responses (P. 96 of this work) and the psalm-tones. These do not belong to the scientific chant proper, the chant which from the first was entrusted to specially trained singers, who wore the tonsure and the ecclesiastical dress; who were considered to belong to the clergy, but who were seldom priests. For this scientific chant, which forms by far the greater portion of the Gregorian Chant, any harmonic

accompaniment, even if it be by the first artist in the world, is the greatest misfortune; it is in fact its death. Twenty years' practical experience has convinced me that singers who always sing Plain Chant accompanied are quite incapable of singing it with proper feeling, and I consider that such singers ought to go through a regular course to enable them to sing it properly unaccompanied. An organ accompaniment, though liked by everyone almost (see Paragraph 2), is and must be monotonous;* a proper change of the registers, the perpetual accentuation and non-accentuation, the *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, with which the text declaims, and with which the chant must consequently be rendered, cannot by any possibility be managed on an organ. — The countless embellishments (*neumæ* on short syllables, 20 and more, in fact in old books from 160 to 200 notes on one short syllable) which resemble the arabesques round the initial letters in ancient illuminated Missals, and which must be treated with the same delicacy, become quite unmeaning with any accompaniment; moreover everything else becomes, to say the least of it, coarse, colourless and spiritless, and a want of spirit and of expressiveness, or singing everything alike, as people say, kills any music, any melodic outpouring of the soul or feelings of the heart. Yet this is almost infallibly the necessary consequence of any accompaniment to Plain Chant.

2. I know of only one choir that uses a vocal accompaniment (Alto, Tenor and Bass) for Plain Chant, viz: the choir of Treves Cathedral. I have not yet heard it, but am thinking of doing so, and will report in due course. But—the books used lie before me,

* Translation by H. S. Butterfield, Author of "The Reform of Church-Music in Germany &c." (Tablet.)

* The practice, common in Rhine-land, of accompanying if possible the *tonus orationum* &c. of the Celebrant as well as all the choral chants makes the evil worse, because the monotony is still greater.

and no matter how well trained the singers may be supposed to be — the accentuation, the declamation of the text may be ever so correct and precise, as if with one breath; it may sound edifying, flowing and even beautiful, yet to the connoisseur, to whom the soul of the chant has been revealed, to whom its spirit is an open book, this accompaniment, this "Plain Chant in 4 parts," will of a certainty appear strange; i. e. something familiar to which something strange has been added — a picture that is painted over with foreign substances; and therefore that unity of spirit, which is the first requirement of every work of art, is wanting. It is and it remains a foreign element. This is so true that even when men sing in octaves with the upper voices a discordancy arises, in untrained choirs, which spoils the effect, or at least weakens it; of course in the case of trained choirs, which sing together as one man and one spirit, the effect of singing in octaves is the same as that produced by a violoncello and double-bass played together, i. e. much clearer and much brighter. A vocal accompaniment well rendered is decidedly better than an organ accompaniment because it is more intellectual. The reason why an organ accompaniment is almost universally preferred is because it is far more difficult to train a large number of singers (say 12 only, 3 to each part) so that they shall sing with one breath, as it were, than to accompany with the organ. Such accompaniment is, as I have said, a misfortune for Plain Chant, its death, for the reasons given in Paragraph I. I proved this practically in the presence of 500 people on the 4th August, 1869, at the 2d General Meeting of the German Cecilian Society. To this hour not a single voice has been raised to contradict the facts which I stated in the following words: — "Although I had at my command the most beautiful, sweet-toned voices for the *Requiem*, which was accompanied by the organ, although the execution was exactly the same as with the *Missa in Dominicis Adventus et Quadrag.*, which had been sung without the organ, a great impression was not made, as had been the case with the unaccompanied Mass, and the audience seemed to have grown indifferent."

3. But as people will have this misfortune, this death of Plain Chant, at any price and everywhere almost, the only question for consideration is, how can this misfortune be made more bearable,

how can we make the form of this death less terrible? In the "Studies" referred to I have proved that the system on which Plain-Chant is founded (not its theory, but its system, i. e. the absence of time and harmony) has its origin from the Greeks. But the Greeks used an accompaniment, and therefore the only question is, how did they accompany? Write, it will be said, an ancient Greek accompaniment. Well, the accompaniment used by the Greeks as well as by the primitive Christians was in consonances; but of these there were only two, the octave and fifth (in reality the 4th note from above, counting from the principal melody). According to this system then the accompaniment to the melody of the *Asperges* would be as

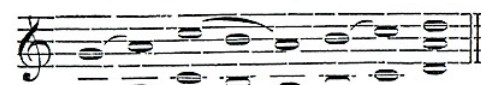
follows:



A - sper - - ges me.


In other words, they did not understand the contrary motion of voices upon which modern polyphony and harmony are based. This was not a harmonic accompaniment in the modern sense, such as I referred to above as a misfortune, but only the melody in another position. Whether the fifths of the chord were sung all through by the choir is very doubtful. I believe (and I am the first to bring this to notice) that the fifths were only employed at the end of a melodic group, therefore

probably thus:



A - sper - ges me.

If this hypothesis (for so I call it) be correct, the question as to what kind of ears our forefathers had to have been able to endure the fifths is satisfactorily answered, and all difficulties in regard to the historical question as to the Greek mode of accompaniment, which, as all writers unanimously agree, was in fifths and octaves, are solved (compare *Fliegende Blätter* 5th year, Page 61).

From what has been said it follows that the best accompaniment for Plain Chant is in octaves, with harmonisation of the cadences indicated by bars . The rule for a systematic accompaniment would then be this: The organist is to play all neumæ, the melodies,

the uppermost notes, in octaves only (without the pedal), leaving out all the chords in this book, and bringing in the fifth at the cadences. But if this systematic accompaniment does not suit it is *absolutely* necessary that organists, who are not sufficiently skilled to play the accompaniment in this book in that very rapid and flowing manner required for Plain Chant, should play the melody in octaves (without the pedal) and use the harmony for the cadences only.

A specimen is given in the Appendix, P. 99, of a Plain Chant accompaniment according to the Greek system, as I believe it to have been, which system is at the same time that of Plain Chant. This accompaniment is specially recommended because it is the nearest approach to the one described by me as systematic.

Better than the organ would be an accompaniment of Violins, Violas and Violoncellos, because these instruments are more capable of giving a *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, as well as all other *nuances*, and any expression required. The value of an instrument is determined according to the degree of its similarity or relation to the human voice. Now it cannot be denied that string-and-wood instruments "sing" better than an organ; even an accompaniment of clarionets and bassoons I consider more suitable than the organ. I do not mean to say by this that in certain cases apart from Plain Chant the organ does not render better service than the instruments mentioned; when, for example, the composer originally intended an organ accompaniment for his work, or when bad violinists or wind-instrumentalists would take the place of a good Organist. I am thinking too of an accompaniment by violinists and wind-instrumentalists in octaves only, with the exception of the cadences. I also take it for granted that the players are sufficiently skilled to follow the singers, and that they understand the art of rendering Plain Chant. It will perhaps be said: "If the 'systematic accompaniment,' or the one nearest to it, is to be adhered to, why is it represented by one example only, and not by the whole book?" Because every idea, every truth, which, like this, is expressed for the first time, requires time to convince the great mass of people, who would therefore scarcely accept at once an accompaniment on my historical principles, so that the object of this book would not be attained. If my principles were carried out perhaps my organ accompaniment would not have been at all necessary, as then it would be a question

of a few chords familiar to every organist who understands Plain Chant. I believe this, that practical experiments will help to force my principles through, because people will soon convince themselves that by means of an accompaniment with the stringed and wind-instruments* mentioned the power of the singers can be materially increased, should a really fine choir, which of course would not require instruments, not be obtainable without; that by this means the way would be prepared for a closer connection between Plain Chant and our orchestral Church music, because the character of orchestral music would be foreshadowed in the Plain Chant (imagine the Introit sung chorally with the accompaniment suggested, followed by an orchestral *Kyrie*); and, lastly, that the singers by help of the instruments would keep the pitch better, and, as they would be assisted in striking the intervals, they could sing with more freedom, and so breathe forth the whole spirit of the chant. That very many of our Plain Chant melodies are of later date than the others; what influences this had upon their construction, for example upon the Easter "Ite Missa est;" what influences again this must have upon the accompaniment, I will shew in *Musica Sacra*. This modifies also that which has been said about the ancient Greek accompaniment.

4. It was the practice to give a chord to every note of the chant; and this brings me to the impracticability of J. G. Mettenleiter's system. Now even if we imagine to ourselves a true virtuoso, who really is able to play his accompaniment with the rapidity required to give proper effect to the chant, yet unbearable monotony must be the result because innumerable chords and chord relations of the same kind are constantly occurring. I was the first to express a desire to employ the system of "passing notes," as used by the masters of the Palestrina style, in the accompaniment for Plain Chant, and Könen was, as far as I am aware, the first to make at least some timid experiments in the organ accompaniment for the Cologne Gradual, in order to verify my theory, which I communicated to him verbally. The advantages of this theory are fourfold: a) The accompaniment is easier to play because many notes have

* I need not be reminded that the scarcity of good violinists and wind-instrumentalists will be advanced as an argument against the use of stringed and wind-instruments.

not their own chord. b) It suits the simplicity of the chant better, and is therefore less monotonous. c) In the melodies themselves all the notes are not of equal importance (accented); many are "passing notes;" and this is decisive for my theory.* It allows the melody to be more prominent; for a melody over a held-out chord stands forth much more boldly, and is therefore more effective. — Supposing the following rendered by 4 singers:

Cantus.
Altus.
Tenor.
Bassus.

the melody of the soprano will stand out much more prominently than if every note had its own chord. — The awkwardness too of an organ scrambling along with endless chords after the melody has also to be considered. — Another question arises as to whether the Greek plan of rendering the music in 3 parts, something like this perhaps,

would not allow still more justice to be done to the Greek system, though the accompaniment is not precisely in octaves and fifths, but in passages of thirds and sixths, which according to history afterwards took the place of the accompaniment in octaves and fifths (see *Musica Sacra* I. P. 18). Should this be the case fresh proof would be gained for my theory. — Of course this system of passing notes must not be carried to such an extent that the other parts become quite stationary, producing thereby an effect similar to that produced by bag-pipes. Everything that has not motion in it is dead and brings death to everything else; the best course is to be satisfied with the proper proportion of these notes; but then this is just the difficulty, and consequently there will always be disputes as to

* Of course when the melody has few passing notes there should be more chords in the accompaniment.

which is the proper proportion. One will have it this way, another the other; with regard to a particular passage one will think that there are too many chords or passing notes, another, that there are too few. My opponents would therefore in this respect be sure to find an opportunity of blaming me, no matter how I might have acted.

5. Though on the point referred to above I never could and never shall agree with Mettenleiter, yet in regard to the following matter I have always defended him. Father Schneider, it will be remembered, laid down in the *Cæcilia*, in opposition to Mettenleiter, the principle, which has since been repeated over and over again, that "as the Plain Chant melodies are diatonic, the accompaniment must be so too," i. e. no diësis must appear even in the harmony of the cadences, the notes C \sharp , D \flat , E \flat , E \sharp , F \sharp , G \sharp , A \sharp , G \flat &c. must never appear excepting in cases of transition, i. e. when a piece is pitched a second or third &c. higher or lower. This view is carried still further by Gevaert and Van Damme. They say for instance: The notes, which do not appear in the melody, even if they are in the diatonic Scale, must not appear in the accompaniment; so that if a chant has a range of five notes, only those notes must be used in the accompaniment, particularly as regards the bass; and they appeal, as I do, to the Greek system.

Now I by no means wish to deny the ingenuity of their system, but if they carry it out logically they must 1) use only octaves and fifths in the accompaniment, not triads, as they do, and as the Greeks did not; 2) they must not employ the *motus contrarius* (contrary motion) in any case, in the other three parts. But then if I differ in these two essential points from the Greeks, if I employ harmony in the modern sense, I prefer to go a step further and employ the diësis in the accompaniment, because by it I obtain many advantages. For although the saying, "the melody is diatonic and therefore the accompaniment must be so too," sounds very true and very forcible, yet there is a very strong objection against it. For melody is one thing, harmony another; so much so that the nature of their laws is quite different. A melody can be imagined without diësis; indeed, strange to say, whenever modern Opera composers wish to attain religious pathos, religious sublimity, they involuntarily forsake the chromatic scale, at all events in the melody, and adhere to the diatonic, and this is clear evidence of the correctness of the system

of Plain Chant and the Palestrina style. The so-called prayer in most Operas proves this; the *Gralmotiv* in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Elsa's prayer (Pianoforte Edition P. 28. Full score P. 49) are purely diatonic as regards the melody; even the prayer of the king, that marvel of melody and harmony (P. 80 of the score), which is repeated by the choir, is so mainly. Indeed in the celebrated passage, "Mich sollst du nicht befragen," Wagner expresses Lohengrin's "divine art" by a transition into the major mode otherwise common with the masters of the 16th century only. In what then does the wide difference between melody and harmony consist? **Why, melody can make a perfect cadence without the diësis, but harmony cannot.** Therefore by following Schneider's plan an incongruity arises much oftener than necessary, and even by my procedure it is not entirely avoided. In short, the incongruity which arises because the melody makes a perfect cadence and the harmony does not — the unsuitability to each other of melody and harmony becomes much more apparent when a perfect close is not made in the harmony by using the diësis. This is so indisputable that from the day on which the laws of modern harmony became clear the diësis was used in cadences; in fact the otherwise unalterable Gregorian melody was altered rather than that this natural law should be broken.

Every perfect cadence needs a leading-note, a diësis therefore, unless this leading-note be already in the diatonic scale. If I avoid perfect cadences in the harmony I can seldom or never get a point of repose. Where there is no perfect cadence there is no conclusion; continuation is indispensable; there arises therefore frequently a sentence without a conclusion, and consequently unrest, the very reverse of the effect which Plain Chant should have, and which, when properly rendered, it does have; in other words Schneider's system injures Plain-Chant greatly and is of no service whatever to it.*

* That this opinion is correct, is proved by comparison between many of the old præ-Palestrina masters and the masters of the Palestrina style. The former very seldom ventured to use the diësis in compositions for the Church, though in their secular works we meet with it often enough. Hence those endless modulations, which may be compared to speeches which have no pauses. Some consider this an advantage, because the similarity to Plain Chant is greater. But this is altogether wrong, because Plain Chant can make perfect rests without diëses, but polyphonic music cannot.

I do not mean to say by this, certainly, that the diësis should be employed without rhyme or reason. In a Bavarian Training College for School Teachers the pupils were expected to accompany the Preface in the following ridiculous fashion in imitation of Homayer (I quote from memory; the MS. was before me some years ago):

Qui-a cum U-ni-genitus tuus, in substanti-a nostræ mortalita-tis.



Here the melody appears of secondary importance, and the motion of the bass part of the first importance; the same is the case in some parts of Schneider's accompaniment to the Preface where the bass has its own melodies to the dominant (*repercussio*) of the vocal part, and is therefore more prominent than the melody of that part. In imitation of him I gave in *Fliegende Blätter* for 1867, P. 1. of the music supplement, an incorrect organ accompaniment to the words *cæli cælorumque virtutes*. The proper limit can be learnt from what has been said above, according to which the diësis is only allowed in order to make the cadence perfect. It is a maxim in law that the object of a law should rule its application; I apply this maxim here.

The connoisseur will not be offended because I have here and there used a diësis for the purpose of effecting a transition better, or to avoid monotony. Most of them can however be omitted, and then even the adherents of Schneider's system will have no cause to complain of too many diëses. Gevaert, feeling the defect in Schneider's system, has remedied it by leaving out the third in the harmony at the perfect closes in the melody, in this way therefore:



But as he uses a modern harmonic accompaniment (as I have said before) the listener will always think of the failing C#, i. e. the

diësis. It is quite different as regards the closing chord D, as here the listener is left in doubt as to whether he is to think of F \sharp or F. The omission here of the third can be justified in quite a different way.*

My application of the diësis in the accompaniment has still further advantages. a) It lessens the monotony, which is simply unbearable if one accompanies long pieces with the two or three chords which can be made without diëses; b) It distinguishes the modes better. Thus, Phrygian closes like these



are much more distinct by use of the diësis; for the Phrygian close E, D, E, harmonised without the diësis, must appear almost as similar to the Doric D, C, D, as one egg is to another, whilst with my harmonisation this is not the case at all. Still I by no means allow that motives of utility decide the matter. I attach far more importance to the fact that melody and harmony are two different things and must therefore be differently treated; every rule that holds good for Plain Chant melody is not applicable to the accompaniment, because the latter is in a straight-jacket, which it can hardly tolerate.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to suppose that because the Plain Chant is harmonized, D, C, D; G, F, E; or E, D, E, in the melody may be changed into D, C \sharp , D; G, F \sharp , E or E, D \sharp , E, since without such changes only half closes are possible in the Dorian and Phrygian modes. For in Plain Chant the melody is *alone* justifiable; the harmony is unjustifiable because it is an incongruous addition to the system of Plain Chant. Altering the melody in the manner indicated means justifying the unjustifiable, making the servant the master. It is true that D, C \sharp , D, G, F \sharp , G appear in ancient books,

but this is only for the sake of the foreign element, the accompaniment, and we must not conclude from this that we may continue the wrong thus done to Plain Chant.* The masters of the Palestrina style certainly added the diësis to the Plain Chant melody for their polyphonic arrangements — with reason, for having once changed the essence of the chant by reducing it to measured time, I have made something quite different, and can do as I like.

If the indulgent reader will regard this attempt to provide a suitable accompaniment for Plain Chant from the point of view just indicated, much that may appear to him questionable will become unquestionable. It will, for instance, become clear to him that constantly occurring passages like this,



make the melody more conspicuous than it would have been had I merely held on the chord of D minor. But no matter how people may criticise; one thing is certain, and it this is; any accompaniment to Plain Chant will always be an experiment as to how the expression of the melody can be least spoilt or thrown into the shade: it will ever be a greater or less evil according to the extent to which right principles are carried out. But there is no such thing as an absolutely correct accompaniment for Plain Chant.

Stadtamhof, 20th May 1872.

Fr. Witt.

* I have therefore shewn above that with any accompaniment incongruity is unavoidable. For D, C, D, G, F, E, E, D, E, are perfect cadences in the melody, but cannot be made so in the accompaniment; therefore I wish to see the diësis employed whenever a perfect cadence is possible without altering the melody, so that this incongruity may at all events arise less frequently.

* In Gevaert's accompaniment the system of "passing notes" is also adopted.

Preface to the second Edition.

The Preface to the first Edition, which settled all questions at the time most in dispute as regards the accompaniment of Plain Chant, has remained almost entirely unanswered, and the "theses" which it contained have been either silently accepted or boldly acknowledged as correct.

One "hypothesis" has in the mean time become almost a certainty from the result of scientific research and especially from the tradition of the Greek Church (compare *Musica Sacra*, 1876, P. 36), namely that the Greeks and Christians of the first eleven centuries used harmony with their vocal music only at the last two (at most three) notes before the cadences or closes (divisions of the text). Up to our time the Sixtine chapel did the same thing. After singing their melodies in sequences of thirds (this absurdity originated at a later period — the 17th or rather the 18th century), they concluded with two or three perfect chords, and the indispensable trills! The example given at P. 99 of the first Edition shewed the ordinary accompaniment used in those times, with this difference, that only the fifth and octave (counting from the lower note) were employed, but not thirds. When I was giving a course of instruction to choirmasters in St. Gall (Fliegende Blätter 1873, P. 26) I always sung and played the Plain

Chant in accordance with this theory (pedal only at harmonic closes); my numerous audience not unfrequently burst out in involuntary exclamations of astonishment at the flexibility, delicacy and freedom of "gloomy" Plain Chant.

It is my wish therefore that the organ accompaniment in this book, which, though liked, must be looked upon as "a necessary evil," should be forsaken as soon as possible, and, if an accompaniment must be used, that the plan proposed in my preface should be adhered to.

In the present Edition there are only a few alterations, and these are of a practical description, not affecting principles. In the latest quarto and octavo Edition of the *Ordinarium Missæ* are included the *Te Deum*, and several Hymns and Antiphons de *Ss. Sacramento &c.* These, together with the Responses at High Mass, in several transpositions, have been harmonised by Herr J. Hanisch, Organist of Ratisbon Cathedral, and included in an Appendix (Additamentum).

Landshut, 21st April 1876.

Fr. Witt.

Preface to the third Edition.

None of the alterations in this Edition affect general principles. The greater number concern a mere external — the notation. Some are the result of following the rules laid down by Herr P. Piel, one of the Referees, in the Society's Catalogue, under Nr. 438. Then pas-

sages have been smoothed; for instance, the "horrible false relation" on P. 90 of the second Edition, at *acribus addictis*, will no longer be found. Proske, it is true, pointed out and commended these false relations as being correct, i. e., the usual modulations adopted by

VIII

the old masters and quite in accordance with their rules. Then simplifications have been made; compare, for example, P. 2: *Vidi aquam egredientem de templo*, or the accompaniment of the Paschal *Ite missa est*.

In the *Literarischer Handweiser*, Nr. 270 of 1880, W. Bäumker writes thus: "In the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* of the 24 February 1878, M. Lemmens, the celebrated organist and composer, is lauded as the inventor of a new system. He employs rhythm in rendering Plain Chant and passing notes in the accompaniment. His performance in Erard's little salle in Paris excited much astonishment. A *Sanctus* and *Salve Regina* rendered according to the new method gained the applause of the musicians present to such an extent that both pieces had to be repeated several times. 'Plain Chant melody', says the reporter of the proceedings, 'which hitherto had been killed by a really murderous accompaniment, once more gains its independence and swing. Plain Chant, again obtaining its varied rhythm and

pure melody, breathes once more and moves with freedom. This palsied body has recovered life and motion'. Now in Germany Lemmens's "new" system had long been known. Franz Witt in his *Musica Sacra* of 1868 (P. 9.) and 1872 (P. 9.), as also in his Preface to the Organ Accompaniment to the *Ordinarium Missæ*, clearly explained the correct rules for rendering and accompanying Plain Chant."

The fact is, as far back as 1862 I explained verbally to Canon Könen, Choirmaster of Cologne Cathedral, my system of accompaniment which is carried out in the present work, and I think I may say positively that M. Lemmens caught the idea first from my Organ book and Gevaert's imitation of my system, and then adopted the same.

Landshut, 14th September 1880.

Fr. Witt.

