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The rudiments of Gregorian  
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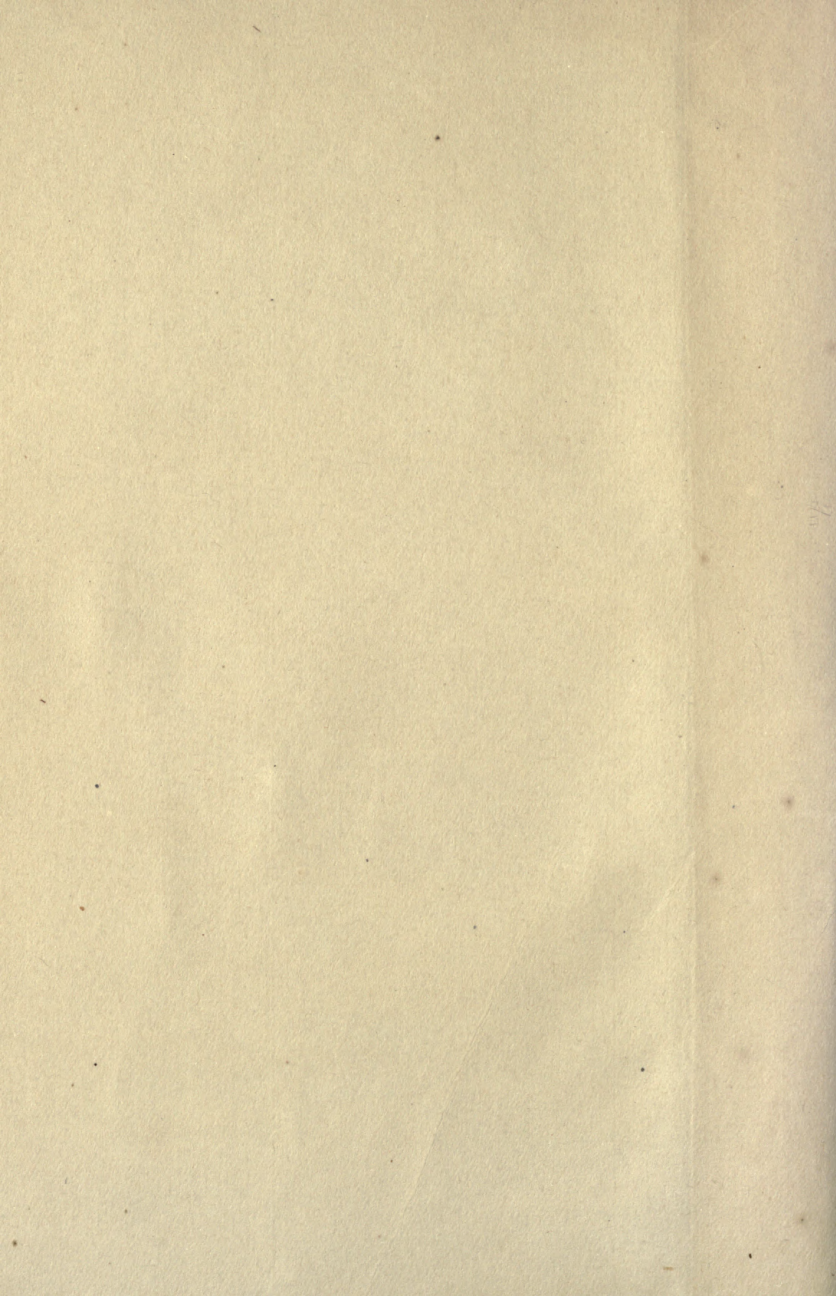


The Rudiments  
OF  
Gregorian Music

*Second Impression*

By FRANCIS BURGESS





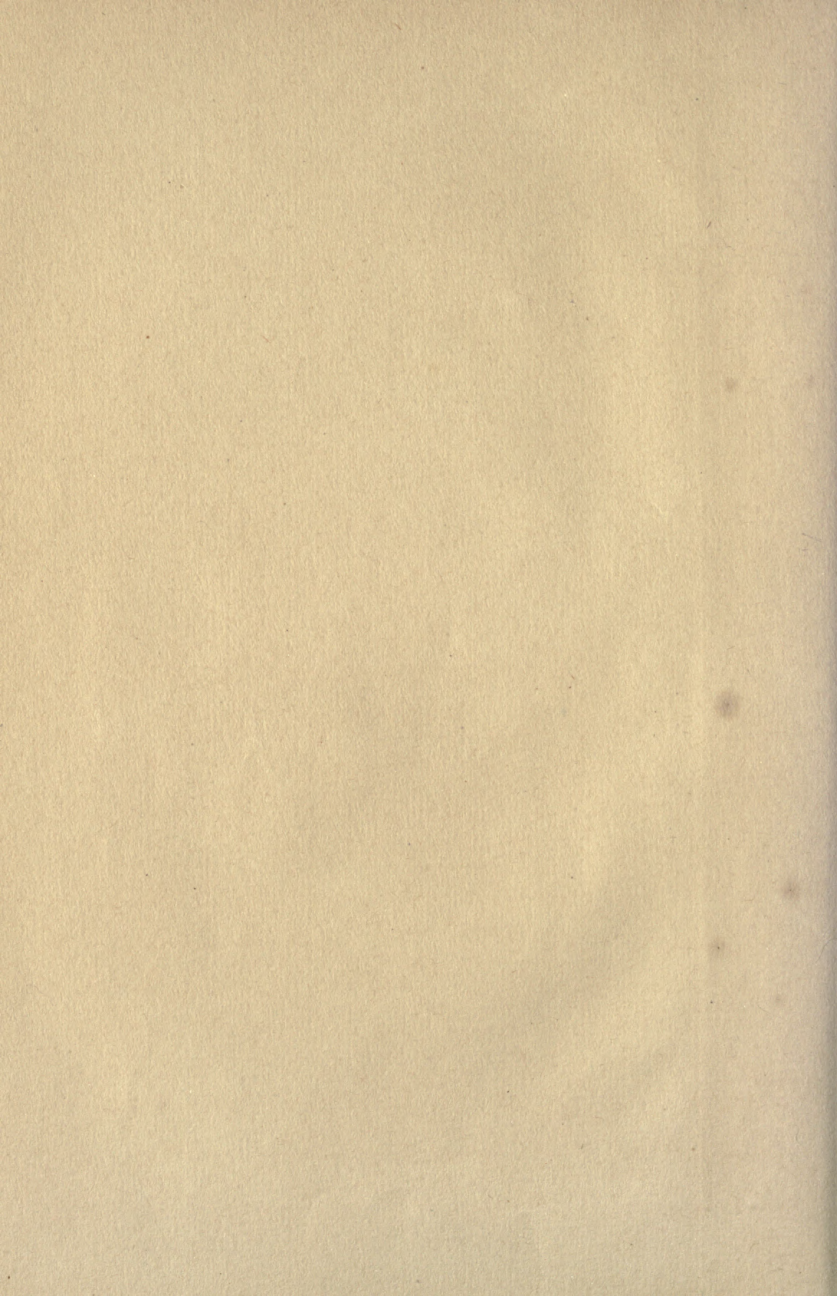
THE  
ELEMENTS OF  
GREGORIAN MUSIC

By  
FRANCIS W. GARDNER

Author of  
"The Elements of Music"

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RUDIMENTS OF  
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BY  
FRANCIS BURGESS  
F.S.A., Scot.

*Second Impression.*

WILLIAM REEVES      83 CHARING CROSS ROAD,  
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GREGORIAN MUSIC



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## THE RUDIMENTS OF GREGORIAN MUSIC.

**P**LAINSONG, or Gregorian Music, is the generic name given to that great system of ecclesiastical melody formulated by the primitive Church and retained in later ages as the official Chant for use during the most solemn acts of Christian worship. As a system it represents the accumulated knowledge of several centuries usually accounted great by those who respect Tradition, while its peculiar and characteristic solemnity marks it out as an ideal form of sacred music which the modern composer may study with profit.

Scientifically, Plainsong divides itself into two distinct categories:

1. Psalmodic (or Recitative) Plainchant.
2. Antiphonal (or Melodic) Plainchant.

The two species, which grew up together and were used alongside each other are not always easy to distinguish at first sight. The first may be simply described as a systematization of the oratorical inflexions of the human voice, not altogether unlike the older Greek system of declamation. The simplest forms of this species are to be found in the inflexions with which the ordinary ferial responses at Matins and Evensong are sung. They consist merely of a monotonic recitation with an oratorical cadence at the end, which may be said to represent in musical form the ordinary rise and fall of the human voice in public speaking. The Gregorian psalm-tones also belong to this category and it would save a good deal of misapprehension as well as a certain amount of ill-conceived and sadly misapplied humour, if it were recognised that these Tones are simple recitatives leading on to distinct melodies rather than self-contained chant forms.

The other species (the Antiphonal) comprises all that part of the music which has definite melody even in its simplest forms. The most ancient instances are to be found in certain of the Antiphons which in very early

times were sung as choruses between the psalm verses. The following musical examples will help to show more clearly the distinction between the two species. The first is purely recitative while the second is the melodic form into which the first leads.

*Psalm Tone I, ending 4.*

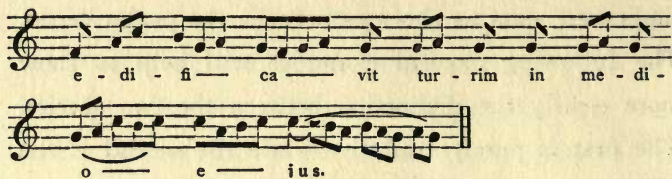
Be - hold, how good and joyful a thing it is:  
breth - ren, to dwell to - geth - er in u - ni - ty.

*Psalm Antiphon, Mode I.*

Be - hold, how good and joy - ful a thing it is

The reason for the difficulty which occurs in assigning certain melodies to their proper class is due to the fact that some of the Psalmodic music in course of time became rather ornate, its simple recitative character being somewhat obscured and overlaid by the elaboration which occurred. Thus, the following instance falls, technically, within the Recitative species in spite of its profuse ornamentation.





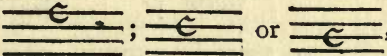
From the point of view of the performer no very great difficulty is to be apprehended from this apparent confusion of styles. The rules governing the singing of Plain chant apply with equal force to the melodies contained in either species. In an elementary treatise like this it would not have been necessary to touch upon the matter had it not been for the mistaken impression caused by certain ill-worded lectures which have allowed enquirers to think that the Psalmodic and Antiphonal species really signify Simple (i.e., syllabic) and Ornate (neumatic) melodies respectively.

Having dealt, then, with the technical classification of the music we may go on to observe that there is a practical classification also which has been in vogue for many centuries—that which distinguishes the Solo Chants from the Chorus Chants. From the earliest times it has been recognised that there is a real function in religious worship, both for the highly trained soloist and for the less skilled chorus singer, as well as for the

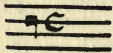
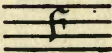
laity who form the congregation. The particular method of apportioning the musical parts of the service was not always and in all places the same. The scheme varied in different ages up to and, in some places, perhaps beyond the settlement of the music by Gregory the Great (died A.D. 604). In the Middle Ages those variable portions of the Mass known as the Gradual, Tract and Alleluya were reserved to the soloist, the remainder being left to the choir, while certain numbers (such as the *Credo*) were sufficiently simple to permit of all present taking part.

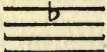
The notation, rhythm and general method of performance being practically identical, whether it be a psalm tone which is being sung or an elaborate Gradual, we may now proceed to consider the rules which govern the interpretation of the music. The first thing which the student should master is the

### NOTATION.

The C clef  , denotes

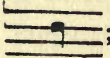

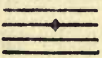
that the line upon which it is placed is C or *Do*, all other intervals above or below being reckoned from it as on the white notes of the piano.

The F clef  or sometimes  denotes that the line upon which it is placed is F.

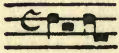
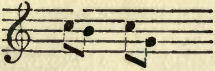
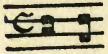
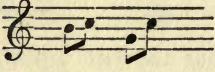
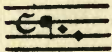

The more rarely used  clef denotes that the third space contains B flat throughout the piece, the other intervals being reckoned accordingly.

The following list of notes and note-groups (taken from the later mediæval MSS.) will be found in all trustworthy Plain chant publications of the present day.

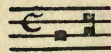
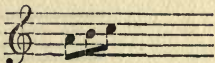
*Single notes.*

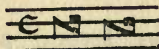
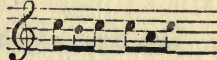
;  and  These are of equal value and each might be represented in modern notation by a quaver.


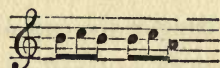
*Groups containing two or three notes.*

	a descending group equal to	
	an ascending group equal to	
	a descending group equal to	

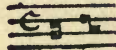
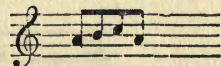


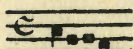

 an ascending group  
equal to 

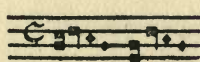
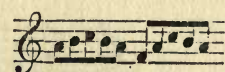
 a group equal to 

 a group equal to 

*Compound note-groups.*

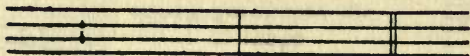
 a combination of  
Nos. 2 and 1. 

 a duplication of  
No. 1. 

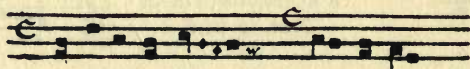
 a combination of  
Nos. 2 and 3. 

When the concluding note of any group is printed in small type it denotes the fact that it is allied to a syllable with a liquescent ending and that the note is shortened by being merged into the pronunciation of the final consonant.

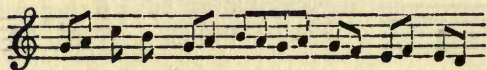
Other editorial marks in printed Plainsong books include :



The first signifies a "half breath," the second a breathing space of the value of one note while the third denotes the end of a phrase with a consequent *diminuendo* and *rallentando* in the melody. In a piece of extended compass the use of ledger lines is avoided by the transposition of the clef where necessary, as in the following example:



which would thus be transcribed into modern notation.



So far we have seen the meaning of the Plainchant Notation so far as its pitch is concerned. It would, however, be quite possible to render the music accurately, as regards its notes, while missing its entire meaning and character. Closely allied with the rules of Notation, therefore, are the principles governing Plainsong rhythm.

## RHYTHM.

The shortest phrase which can convey the idea of movement must contain at least two syllables or notes. An isolated sound cannot convey any feeling of rhythm. The shortest division possible in language or music is termed the Rhythmic Foot, and while it may not consist of less than two members it cannot contain more than three. The rhythmic foot may therefore be divided into two species :

*Binary*—that which contains two parts (one strong syllable and one weak).

*Ternary*—that which contains three parts (one strong syllable and two weak).

The following line is written in Binary form :

Praise the | Lord, his | glo-ries | show.

while Ternary form is shown by the phrase :

Praise to the | Lord, the Al- | migh-ty, the | King of cre- | a-tion.

All language may be divided up in this kind of way, and the fundamental difference between poetry and prose is that in the former the strong or accented syllables are regularly disposed at uniform distances while



in the latter the accents fall irregularly. That is to say in poetry the rhythm is fixed (being either Binary or Ternary) while in prose the rhythm is free, possessing both forms indiscriminately. This contrast illustrates the fundamental distinction between modern music and Plainsong. Historically, modern music is a development of the dance-form and is written in feet of uniform length. Plainsong is an artistic development of declamatory prose and is written in feet of varying length. This contrast, which is a commonplace of ancient musical history, may be regarded as a sufficient answer to those short-sighted partizans whose zeal in denouncing Plainchant as a barbarous and undeveloped form of modern music is only equalled by their lack of exact knowledge as to its rudiments.

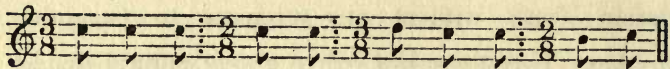
The practical application of the rhythmic principles of Plainsong may best be seen in the recitation of the Psalter, and, as a number of choirs sing this portion of the service to the ancient Tones even in places where the remainder of the music used is of later date, it may be well to give a few instances of the correct treatment of certain verses in the Psalms. For it must be confessed that, during the last forty years an unfortunate custom has arisen of chanting the notes of the Gre-

gorian Tones without any reference to Gregorian rhythm. This abuse has led to a very natural dislike of what is termed "Gregorian music" although the truth is that true Gregorian music has not yet received an adequate hearing in this country.

We will take one or two stanzas from Psalm 119, one of the most rhythmically beautiful of all in the Psalter. Verse 33, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes: and I shall keep it unto the end." Taking the melody of the third Tone, we will first of all see how it should *not* be sung.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy sta - tutes:  
and I shall keep it in - to the end.

It will be observed that it is possible to count two beats in a bar to the above except at the Recitation, which is often only a confused jumble of sound. We will now set it out, still in modern notation, making the rhythm of the melody follow the rhythm of the words.

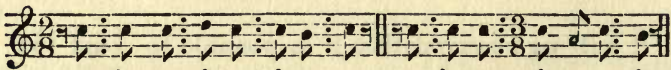


Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy sta-tutes:

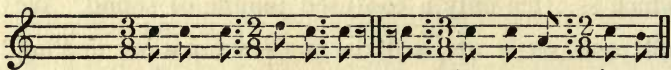


and I shall keep it un-to the end.

Now, if it be remembered that the single note in Plainchant (here represented by the quaver) is indivisible and cannot be split into two notes of less value (semiquavers) nor lengthened into a note of greater value (a crotchet) the result will be an effect of remarkable smoothness and evenness such as cannot be obtained under the debased method of chanting. One or two further instances of correct phrasing will serve to show the extraordinary flexibility of the Tone and, of course, the principles here enunciated apply, with equal force, to all the Tones and their endings.



The proud have dig-ged pits for me : which are not af-ter thy law.



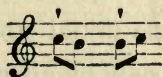
Bles-sed art thou, O Lord : O teach me thy sta-tutes.

If the foregoing instances be compared with the

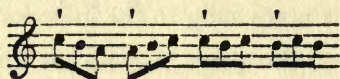


Tones as often sung it will be noticed that the syllables taken on the reciting note are more deliberate than usual while the notes sung to the inflexions are quicker. That is to say, the verse is sung at an even speed throughout and this is of the essence of good chanting. The only exceptions allowed are slight *rallentandos* on the concluding syllables of each half verse and these should also be sung rather more softly than the rest. Finally, it must be noted that strong accents are marked by a stress of the voice and not by dwelling longer on the accented syllable—that is to say, accent means *increased loudness* and not extra duration, a truth which is learnt from ordinary speech.

Having seen how the Binary and Ternary forms may be combined in the recitation of the Psalter we must now proceed to examine the rules of rhythm as they affect the more ornate specimens of the music. Here, apart from the words, the note-groups themselves have a definite rhythm, groups 1 and 2 of the examples of notation given above being Binary in form and consisting of a stress followed by a non-stress thus :



Groups 3, 4, 5 and 6 are in Ternary form having each a stress followed by two weak notes thus :



The single notes possess no rhythmic value apart from the syllable to which they are allied but the compound note-groups are phrased according to the accents of the neumes of which they are made up. Thus, the three compound groups given above would be rendered respectively :



The general rule, therefore, is that while a single note may be either accented or unaccented according to the weight of the syllable to which it is sung, a group of notes invariably has a stress upon its first member the exact weight of which depends on the importance of the syllable which it embellishes. Moreover, a group of more than three notes must, in accordance with the laws of rhythm, possess a subsidiary stress and this will be exemplified in the instances which are about to be given, but it is the initial stress that demands the greatest care, as it is only by giving it its proper weight

that the balance between accented syllables and non-accented syllables can be preserved. We will now consider the following quotation from the Introit for Ascension Day :

VE men of Ga-li-lee, why stand ye  
ras-ing up in - to hea - ven? al-le-lu-ya

In interpreting the above we have first to safeguard the sense of the text by selecting the accented syllables apart from any musical stress whatever. In the transcription printed below all accentuated syllables will be found printed with an accent mark over them. These demand in every case an emphatic stress in the music whether they are allied to a single note or to a group. Then we have to go on to analyse the note-groups. When these fall on a strong syllable their initial stress is already provided for. If they fall on any other syllable a musical stress must be provided for them but in no case must it be sufficiently prominent to sound like a syllabic accent. All note-groups with more than three members must have a secondary stress but this should be so slight as to be barely dis-



cernible. In the following transcription three degrees of stress are used :

1. The syllabic accent preserving the rhythm of the words, marked with the sign  $\times$ .

2. The musical stress used for the initial note of a group placed on a weak syllable, marked by the sign '.

3. The subsidiary stress used in groups of more than three notes, very slight in character, marked by the sign  $\cdot$ .

Ye men of Ga - - li - lee, why stand ye  
gaz - ing up in - to hea - ven? Al - le - - lu - - - ya.

Another example may be given of a melody which, though not syllabic, is rather less ornate than the foregoing :

GLO-RY be to God on high and in earth peace,  
good - will to - wards men We praise Thee.  
We bless Thee. We worship Thee.

which would thus be transcribed :

The image shows two staves of musical notation in a single system. The top staff contains the first line of the melody, and the bottom staff contains the second line. The melody is written in a single treble clef. Above the notes, there are 'x' marks indicating specific rhythmic values. Below the notes, the lyrics are written in a Gothic-style font, with some words hyphenated across lines. The lyrics are: "Glo - ry be to God on high, and in earth peace, good-will to - wards men. We praise thee. We bless thee. We wor - ship thee." The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The lyrics are: Glo - ry be to God on high, and in earth peace, good-will to - wards men. We praise thee. We bless thee. We wor - ship thee.

The rules of Plain chant rhythm as briefly given above apply with equal force to the Psalmodic and Antiphonal species and to the Simple and Ornate varieties contained in either species. It is essential that they be carefully observed as they are necessary to a successful rendering of the music. It is advisable that the more ornate melodies be memorized before performance and as these usually are reserved to trained singers there need be no difficulty in the way of this being done. Plainsong, having originally been unaccompanied, depends entirely on the voices of the singers for its effect. Any organ accompaniment which may be used should be restrained and modest in its scope, providing only the minimum amount of support necessary for maintaining the pitch.

It is impossible to conclude these remarks without some reference, necessarily inadequate, to the question of Plain-song tonality.

## TONALITY.

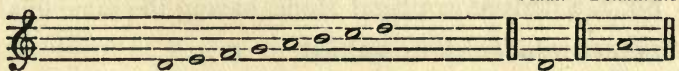
Here we have to exclude the whole of the Psalmodic species from the scope of our enquiry. That section of the music which is founded on the oratorical Recitatives is outside the Modal classification. It is not altogether unconnected with it for one of the musical examples already given has shown that an Antiphon in Mode I requires the use of Tone I for the accompanying Psalm. And a further examination will show that the reciting-note of Tone I is identical with the Dominant of Mode I. But beyond this there is no affinity and the whole of the Recitative species must be left outside any Modal classification. Nor must it be forgotten that the entire Modal systematization is a good deal later, in point of date, than a vast amount of the music itself. Possibly the early Plainchant writers composed their melodies without being fettered by any highly developed system of tonality. It is generally believed that the method of modal classification which now applies to the Antiphonal species of Plainsong was evolved somewhere about the ninth century. Probably the earlier compositions were then fitted into the system by a certain amount of alteration. Even then we are



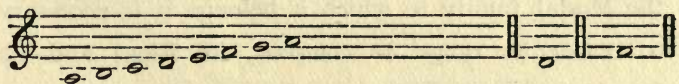
left with certain compositions which show the characteristics of more than one Mode.

The following table will show the compass of the Eight Church Modes together with the Final and Dominant of each. It will be recollected that modern music contains but two distinct Modes, the Major and the Minor (the various keys are only repetitions of one or other of these at varying pitches). The old writers had a considerable choice of melodic variety therefore which we are largely out of touch with in these days. It should be explained that the Dominant in the Modes is not regarded harmonically as the fifth from the Tonic, but in the much more important sense that it actually dominates its Mode, being really of greater importance than the Final.

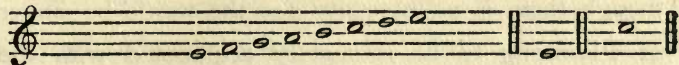
I. Final. Dominant.



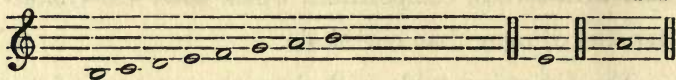
II. derived from No. I. Final. Dominant.



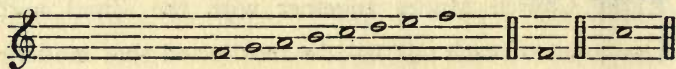
III. Final. Dominant.



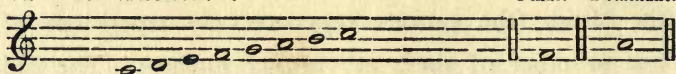
IV. derived from No. III. Final. Dominant.



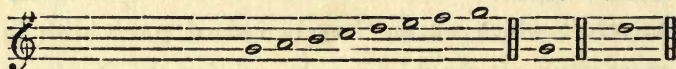
V. Final. Dominant



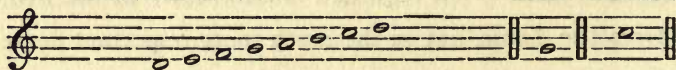
VI. derived from No. V. Final. Dominant.



VII. Final. Dominant.



VIII. derived from No. VII. Final. Dominant.



It will be noticed that the Modes run in pairs. Thus No. 1, an authentic or governing Mode, is followed by No. 2, a derived or plagal Mode, having the same final as that with which it is allied.

In examining a melody with a view to ascertaining the Modal family to which it belongs it is necessary to notice its range or compass, its Final and its Dominant round which the melody usually circles. Although there is no necessity for the would-be singer of Plainsong to be intimately acquainted with the

Modal system, it is important that an organist who has to accompany this type of music should thoroughly steep himself in the tonality of the various modes if he wishes to endow his accompaniments with the spirit of the music in which he is assisting. Nothing can be more distressing to a cultured listener than an organ part which betrays not only an absence of appreciation or affection for the music which the Church has hallowed by many centuries of usage, but also a lack of knowledge as to the fundamental law which governs the tonality of the ancient melodies.

The foregoing account of the rudiments of Plainsong is necessarily very brief and inadequate. The writer trusts, however, that he may have succeeded in arousing enough interest in the subject to induce the earnest student to embark upon a more detailed study of the Chant. With this desirable object in view the titles and publishers of a number of works which may be consulted by those desirous of obtaining further information is appended.

#### LIST OF WORKS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

“The Elements of Plainsong.” (Plainsong and Mediæval Music Society).

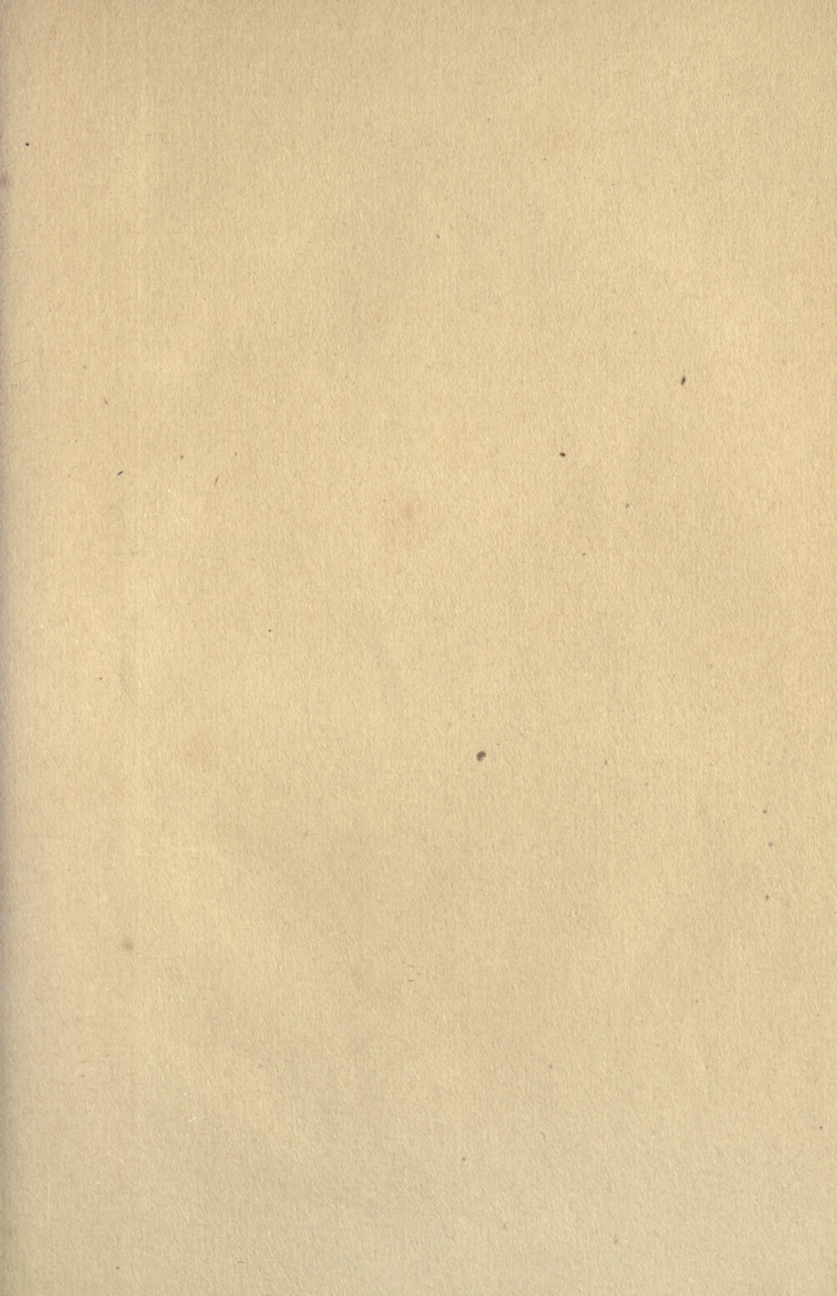


"A Grammar of Plainsong." (Burns and Oates, Limited).

"Gregorian Music." (Art and Book Company, Limited).

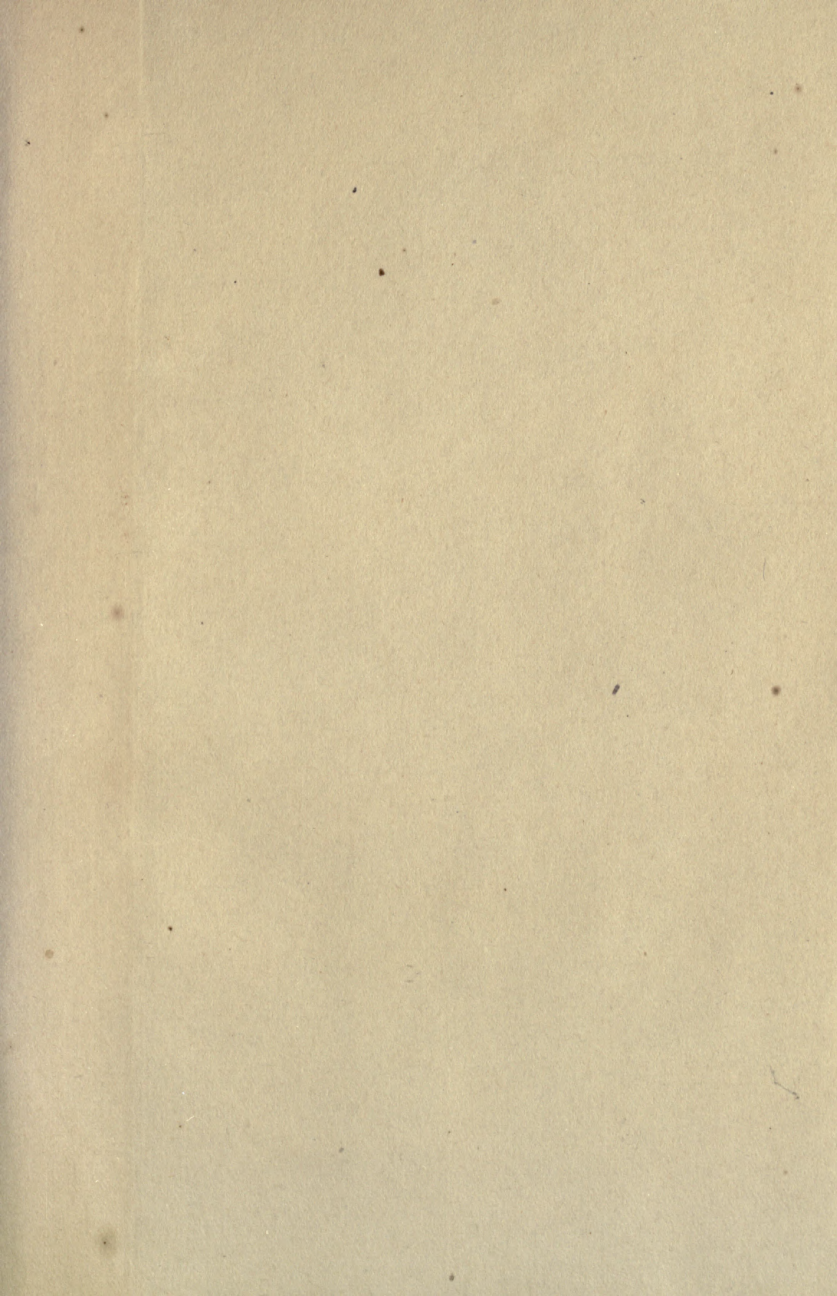
"A Textbook of Plainsong." (Vincent Music Company, Limited).

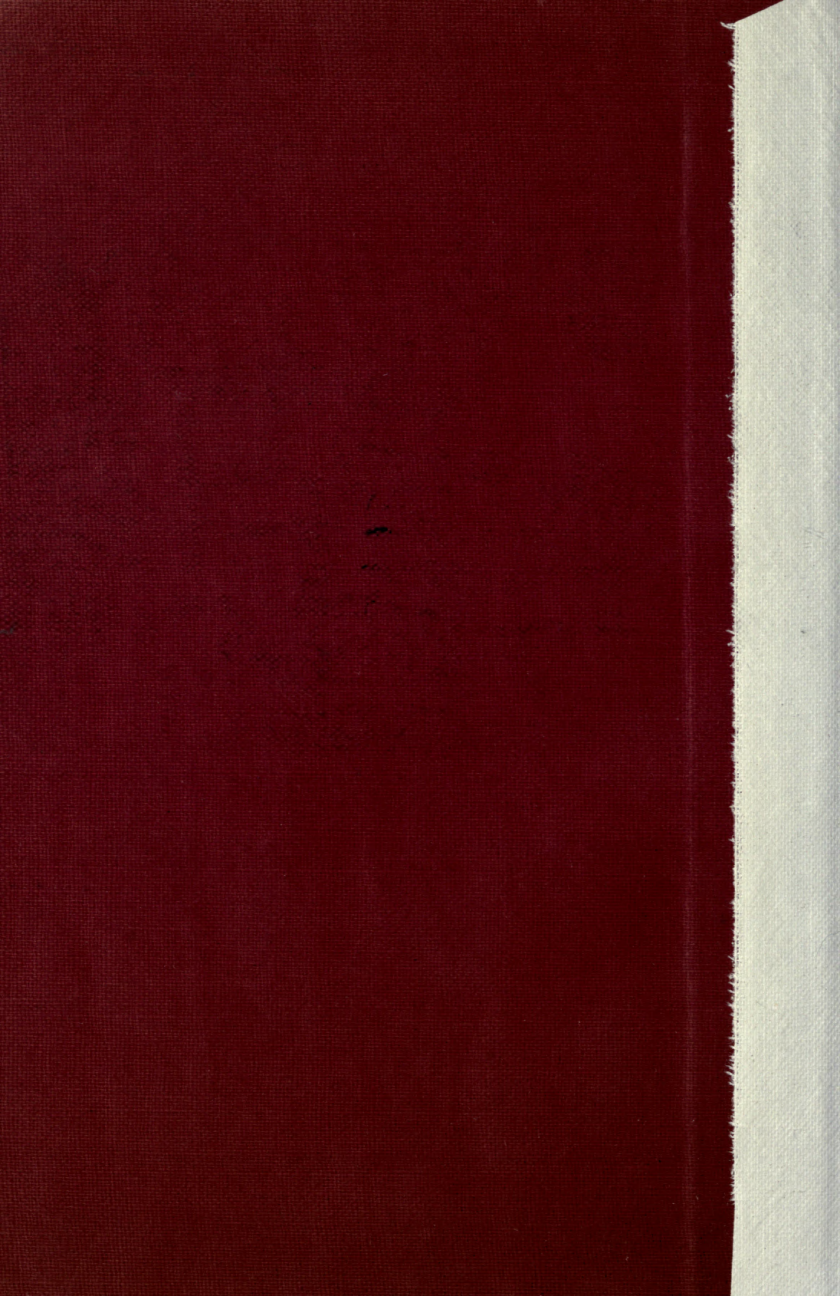
"Primer of Plainsong." (Novello and Company, Limited).













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