

When I first became involved with Mediaeval Latin it soon became apparent that spelling and pronunciation were not always what I was accustomed to in classical usage. Very often the classical AE appeared as E. Girls appeared frequently in love poetry, and instead of PUELLAE it was common to find PUELLE. Eventually it became clear even to a beginner like myself that PUELLE was not a mistake due to ignorance, but rather that AE and E had come to have exactly the same sound in pronunciation. Sometimes what had been simply E in the classical period was now written as AE: for example, ECCLESIA became AECLESIA. This word also illustrates a common phenomenon: Greek words, especially in church usage, were frequently taken over into Latin. Thus we find the word for headless as ACEPHALUS. Here another change can also be seen. The classical C always had a hard sound, like the Greek K. This is not always the case in Mediaeval usage, and so we find ACEPHALUS also spelled as ASEPHALUS and even as AZEPHALUS. As with AE and E, the sounds had become the same, and C and S were interchangeable. A little goose, ANSERULUS, may be spelled ANCERULUS. ACETUM becomes ASSETUM, ASCENDO becomes ASSENDO, and ACIDUS becomes ASIDUS. All these examples come from British Latin, and in many cases the change from classical to modern pronunciation had become evident. The classical spelling, however, is often retained. We write, as did the Romans, ACID and ASCEND, but we use the altered pronunciation.

These and the many other changes are of interest mainly to linguists, but many who are neither linguists nor Latinists become involved with them, especially at the Christmas season. Many of the old songs and hymns are still used, and classicists are often asked how the Latin should be pronounced. A very common response is to advise the use of "Church Latin." Although the Roman church has now generally given up the usage of Latin, there are still many whose first or only Latin was heard and learned in church, or in church schools. In past years I usually had in any large class at least a few students who pronounced Latin as they had heard it from Dominicans or Jesuits or Augustinians. The usual belief is that this "Church Latin" was universal in Roman Catholic usage, and represents Mediaeval pronunciation. An interesting little book, less known than it should be, showed fifty years ago that the belief in a universal "Church Latin" is not founded on fact. The author, F. Brittain, shows clearly that as Latin changed from the classical period and the modern languages developed, the pronunciation of Latin depended on the principles of pronunciation followed in the vernacular in the various countries. Brittain's title is Latin in Church, and he demonstrates that in church as elsewhere Latin was pronounced differently in different countries, and that there never was a uniform pronunciation of Latin, either ecclesiastical or secular. What is commonly referred to as Church Latin is in fact simply the Italian version. Brittain refers to a dialogue of Erasmus, published in 1528, on proper pronunciation of Latin and Greek. A major theme there is the absence of any international pronunciation, and Erasmus cites a recent illustration. Several ambassadors had appeared before the Emperor Maximilian, and all addressed him in Latin. The Italian thought that the French ambassador was speaking French, so Gallic was his accent. A German member of the court replied, and his Latin was so Germanic as to provoke laughter. A Dane spoke next, and then a Dutchman, and one could have sworn that neither of the two was speaking Latin. This was in the 16th century, and local or national pronunciation of Latin continued for 400 years at least. At the Vatican council in 1870 there was no expectation of uniformity, and indeed reporters were specifically trained to record French, Spanish, and other national pronunciations of Latin. Such training was needed: the Latin of the Bishop of Portiers was so French that the Italian bishops protested that they could not understand him. His reply was "Gallus sum, et Gallice loquor." The French did not give up their practices easily. As recently as 1930 a priest founded a Bulletin des amis de la prononciation française du latin. In my own experienc

even secular classicists from different countries vary noticeably in their pronunciation of Latin.

Why then, when there was such a longstanding history of different pronunciations of Latin, has the particular Italian usage become so widely adopted? It has been suggested that part of the answer is that the last century has seen an increased centralization of the Roman church on the papacy. Another reason may be the great interest of Pius X in Gregorian music, and his belief that use of the Italian pronunciation would help in its restoration, and also help to consolidate the liturgical unity of France brought about by its adoption of the Roman liturgy. One of the great centers of Gregorian chant is the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, and here the advice of Pius X has long been followed. In our age their influence is far from local. Recordings of their singing are excellent, and very naturally widely disseminated, enjoyed by laymen, and used as models by choir directors and singers. F. Brittain is a true British bulldog, and he resents the "alien taint" of the Italian sounds. Whether he has won many followers I do not know. I myself find the Italian usage very pleasant, but it is worth remembering that it never used to be universal, and that there are indeed equally valid alternatives.