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A BATHURSTIAN IN ENGLAND

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Dear Mr. Editor,—After leaving Birmingham upon the completion of a highly successful and thoroughly enjoyable tour, I went to Bournemouth, where I played at two performances a day for one month, under Mr. T. J. West's management, and, being in my best solo form, quite crept into the hearts of those enthusiastic people who form absolutely some of the most musical and critical audiences in England. They have been splendidly educated by the excellent opportunities offered at the Winter Gardens by Mr. Dan Godfrey and his fine orchestra, so that they insist upon listening only to the best music.

Then I returned to London, and all its manifold wonders struck me afresh after my 20 weeks absence. The streets seemed so busy after the provincial towns, and I felt that it was good to again watch that rushing tide of humanity, also the veritable monarch of the streets—the London omnibus—which seems to me the most popular vehicle in the wide world, in spite of the fact that it possesses less inherent romance than any other known means of transit. And although the method of the omnibus is essentially one of leisured dignity, the colossal traffic on the streets forbids anything else. It is the attempt of the motor buses to override existing conditions that has resulted in their co-operative failure, for rushing along at a restless pace they not infrequently find an ignominious resting-place in the gutter—what time that unrivalled master of repartee, the driver of a passing omnibus, makes amusing remarks, such as "Any dead 'uns this time, Bill?" I think that the chief glory of the omnibus is in the splendid opportunity it affords for easy and restful surveys of the city, when time is of no particular importance, and close inspection not convenient; and there is so much going on simultaneously that one is sure to be entertained, amused, and interested all the time. The taxi-cab has become tremendously popular, and is indeed a delightfully

comfortable way of getting about, and seems very cheap for the first eight pence, but after that the two-pences seem to register with amazing rapidity. Although there are many hundreds of taximetres in London, it is very difficult to secure one after the theatre, especially in Piccadilly Circus or Leicester Square where the theatres are so congested. But what struck me most of all upon my return to this marvellous city was the unparalleled beauty of the parks. Hitherto, I had only seen the leafless trees in November, looking very quaint but decidedly bleak, so that my first glimpse of them clad in their summer glory simply delighted me. What a wonderful place Hyde Park is? In the heart of it one could almost imagine oneself in the country, with hundreds of sheep grazing, quite unconcerned at the increasing procession of carriages, motors and horsemen. Then the Serpentine is so beautiful, and most popular for boating. And the fairy-like trees, with their dainty foliage and varied greens are so much more beautiful than anything we get in Australia or New Zealand. There are two delightfully pretty spots in Hyde Park (one near Queen's Gate and the other nearer to Kensington Gardens), which always remind me of scenes in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," and "As You Like It." Well, there are so many diversions in London, and I seem to have wandered far from my subject, for I meant to talk of matters musical. During the musical season in May and June, when for two weeks in May there were on an average 50 concerts a week (Thing of it as compared with all the concerts in Australia in a year). I heard Ysaye and Pugno in three Sonata recitals, each of which proved memorable performances, for both violinist and pianist were artists of absolutely equal calibre, and I shall never forget their wonderful rendering of the celebrated "Kreutzer Sonata"; then that truly delightful violinist, Fritz Kreisler, who plays old-world music, collected in many instances from the old monasteries, and arranged by himself; also the technically perfect Jaques Thibaud, whose beautiful tone and dainty style of playing sounded to perfection at his recital in the Bechstein Hall. An interesting feature was the presence of every celebrated violinist—in London for the season. They were scattered all over the hall, and formed a most critical, but enthusiastic, audience. During his performance of the "Bach Chaconne," Thibaud's "E" string broke, and Kubelik (who was present) had the very same experience in the same solo a week later at the Queen's Hall, a truly strange coincidence! Kubelik returned from Australia with a warmth of tone and abundance of expression, which he lacked when I heard him in Brisbane, and it was much

commented upon in London. His playing simply forms the embodiment of executive genius, and at his two recitals he was in magnificent form. I also heard Busoni, Godowsky, Montz Rosenthal, and many lesser lights in the pianofore world. I cannot say which of those four really great artists I preferred, each was wonderful in his own way. There were delightful vocal recitals by Elena Gerhardt, Marie Breme and Nordica, endless delightful orchestral concerts conducted by Arthur Nikisch, Weingartner, Richter, Dr. Cowen, Henry Woods, also Thomas Beecham, who conducts the new Symphony Orchestra, and who, by the way, is a son of the celebrated Beecham's pill man. I must not forget to tell you of Vea-dimer de Pachmann, the greatest Chopin player in existence, who gave a wonderfully enjoyable Chopin recital at the Queen's Hall. It was indescribably beautiful—his conceptions of that great master are unrivalled. He is very eccentric, and at times almost pantomimic in his gestures; for instance, whilst playing a most delightful passage he turns to the audience, saying "Isn't that lovely? Last time I played it differently, but I think I prefer this reading." Ah, you are so good to listen to me." I am sorry, I have forgotten the 'A flat' ballade (touching his forehead); it is gone, but I shall play you the 'Fantasie Impromptu' instead." Most of his remarks were addressed to Marie Corelli who sat in the front row of the sofa stalls, facing the great Pachmann. I saw "The Merry Widow" four times, to which Londoners proved so faithful for two years, and enjoyed very much the delightful acting of Lily Elsie and Joseph Coyne. Huntley Wright was inimitable in the "King of Cadonia," and Ellaline Terris proved most dainty in the name part of "The Dashing Little Duke." Gertie Miller and Edmund Payne and George Grossmith carry off the honours in "Our Miss Gibbs." Rost Stahle was excellent in "The Chorus Lady," and in that very clever comedy "What Every Woman Knows." Gerald Du Maurier, Hilda Trevelyan and Edmund Gwenn acted most beautifully. Julia Neilson and Fred Terry made a huge success with "Henry of Navarrai," as did Guitz in his powerful French plays at the Adelphi. Weedon Grossmith has made a big hit in "Mr. Preedy and the Countess," and Irene Vanburgh is drawing London to see her as "The Woman in the Case," also Marie Tempest in "Penelope," and "The Best People at Wyndham's" is a big success. The bollies always provide a delightful evening's amusement in their imitations and burlesques, and Adelaide Genee is fascinating crowded audiences nightly at the Empire with her wonderful dancing, in whose particular dainty and fairy-like style she stands alone. I have seen

all these productions, so you see I am making good use of my time. Then last, but not least, the Covent Garden grand opera season. What a quaint old building, and what an extraordinary position next to the markets! I thought the design, with so many tiers of boxes most fascinating, especially when one saw those boxes occupied by beautifully dressed woman, with their dazzling displays of diamonds. Such marvellous wealth is almost appalling, especially after the opera, when one sees unfortunate beggars crouched against the market walls, looking absolutely hungry. I saw Tetrazina in the "Rigolette," "Traviata," "Lucia di Lammermoor," and "La Sonnambula," and thought her extremely overrated, for although a better actress, as a singer and artiste she does not compare with Melba. Her upper register is marvellous in its strength and beauty of tone, especially from C to F, but she gets the effects in a most inartistic way, and her lower register is very ordinary indeed. Rumour hath it that she will not sing at Covent Garden next year. And everywhere one could hear complaints of Melba being so much missed. Kirkby Lunn (the only great English lady vocalist) possesses a most beautiful voice, and she used it to perfection in "Aide" and "Samson," and "Delila," and her rendering of the famous excerpt (so often heard on the concert platform) in the second act, was truly magnificent. Mdlle. Destinn, the famous young dramatic soprano, made a delightful "Madam Butterfly." I also heard the great Scotti and Sammarco, Zenatello and Anselmi during the season. Fortunately, some friends of mine had a box, and so I saw the operas under most luxurious conditions, and shall always remember the season with great pleasure. I have played at many "At Homes," including one at the house of Mr. Alfred Beit, the South African millionaire, for which I received the magnificent fee of 30 guineas. I also played at the Ritz Hotel, Savoy and Waldorf. On August 30, I began a 15 weeks' tour as conductor and leader of the ladies' band in George Edwards and Charles Frohman's production of Strauss' "Waltz Dream." I am to be paid an excellent salary, and only 20 minutes playing at each performance, in the band stand on the stage, second act, which is supposed to be a Viennese Garden. In my next, I shall tell you of my visit to Bayreuth. With kind regards to all in dear old Bathurst.

LIELA WADDELL.