

To these lovers of Italy, of whom, I know, there are a great number among the poets and authors of America, I wish to express my appreciation and thanks for what they have done and are doing.

"Very truly yours,

"BEVERLY R. MYLES."

Moved by this effort of the poets, Mr. David Bispham writes to the New York *Sun* to aline the singers and musicians in this work:

"In the name of the singers of America an earnest appeal is hereby made to all vocalists, native or foreign, as well as to instrumentalists and music-lovers in general, to contribute at the earliest possible moment at least one million dollars to a similar fund to aid the wounded of the Land of Song, to whose art and artists our country owes an everlasting debt of gratitude."

BAIRNSFATHER'S "BILL" ON THE STAGE

THE WHOLE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, for British combatant as well as for others is summed up in a line of *Old Bill's*: "If you knows of a better 'ole, why don't you go to it?" *Old Bill* is the bristly walrus that the humorist Bairnsfather has created out of the middle-aged British fighting man, and the "'ole" is a safe-as-any shell-hole which the German whiz-bangs have so far overlooked. It was natural that this character with his pragmatic philosophy should eventually reach the stage from the pages of the London weekly, *The Bystander*, and Mr. Arthur Bourchier, who was fitted by nature to do *Bill* without too much exertion of make-up, declares that it is "the part of his life." London seems to be responding to the stage version as she has for two years past warmed to the figures of *Bill* and *Bert* in the aforesaid weekly. As a play "The Better 'Ole" "is not worth five seconds' consideration," says the critic of the London *Evening Standard*; but the Oxford Theater, where the piece is performed, can not hold the numbers who try to see it. The structure of the piece, as the following synopsis shows, represents the scenes in the trenches and behind the lines "with a simple frankness that is most convincing." Says *The Bystander's* comment:

"A play in two acts, which have been divided into the following spasms: Explosion I, Splinter I, 'The Gaff' (near the Base—somewhere in France). Splinter II, 'Outside the Café des Oiseaux' (near the Front). Splinter III, 'Billets' (just behind the Front). Explosion II, Splinter IV, 'The Way In.' Splinter V, 'In.' Splinter VI, 'H. Q.' Splinter VII, 'The Leave Train'; 'A Gas Attack' (end of Gas Attack)."

So far as it tells a story we read that—

"By accident *Bill* learns that German spies are going to blow up an important bridge after the French have crossed it, thus cutting off any chance of reinforcements. What does *Bill* do? Alone and unaided he crawls 'over the top,' and before the French can cross the fatal bridge on their outward journey he blows it up himself with his own good right hand. (It may be, of course, that he had to use both hands for the job; but I am shockingly ignorant on the subject of blowing up bridges.) On his return to the trench he is found with German papers

on him, and is about to be shot as a spy when extenuating circumstances are discovered, and he is decorated with crosses and medals instead.

"The plot, however, interesting as it is, does not occupy much of the entertainment, the charm of which lies in the vivid reproduction of many of the scenes with which we are familiar in Captain Bairnsfather's drawings. There are also *Bert* and *Alf* and the dossy little French girls to keep the fun at high-water mark all the time. *Bert* is the sentimental one, whose sentiment, however, is so prudently chastened by business acumen that one fancies he must hail from the north of the Tweed. When it is a question of having to decide between the rival charms of

two French beauties, *Bert* merely wonders whether he would be happier as the proprietor (by marriage) of an *estaminet* or of a thriving laundry concern. *Alf* has very little to do except to try to make a flint and steel pipe-lighter do its work; but those who have handled the elusive things tell me that that is all one man's job, anyway. . . .

"One scene of the play is full of timely jests at the expense of the War-Office, and they all promptly find their mark. There is the huge pile of official documents relating to the claim of a railway company for the sum of eight-pence, which threatens to be as complicated a case as that of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*. Then in the midst of an official investigation that may mean life or death to somebody, there comes a telegraphic inquiry as to whether there are any offers for two dozen oranges that have escaped distribution by oversight; and there is rich humor respecting the regulations governing the wearing of the military mustache and how it ought to be trimmed by the man who really loves his country.

"The entertainment is a joyous outbreak of high spirits from first to last, and it gives us besides the first authoritative picture we have had of life behind the front by one who knows."

On that latter point the critic of *The Evening Standard* instils some doubt. He points to authors like Mr. Siegfried Sassoon and Mr. Wilfrid Gibson, who "have attempted to express something of what passes in the minds of the rank and file of our fighting men in France." Others there are who are more widely popular, he says, "who have chosen to keep upon the surface and to illustrate in their work the accepted national tradition or pose of the Englishman in all times and places":

"Of this tradition Captain Bairnsfather is perhaps the most successful draftsman and 'Ian Hay' the most successful diarist. They show us the English soldier as outwardly imperturbable, slangy, jocular, unimpressed, and, above all things, shy—shy of his feelings, shy of his brave work and of the praise it brings, shy of anything that sounds heroically or calls for eloquence or fine gesture.

"Captain Bairnsfather's embodiment of this English attitude in *Bill Busby* is too familiar to need description. He appears at the Oxford as the hero of an entertainment which is sometimes a play, sometimes an exhibition of personality, and sometimes a *revue*. It is best seen and considered simply as an exhibition of personality—a series of opportunities for *Bill* and his friends to appear against a series of Bairnsfather backgrounds, and there to pass some characteristic humors and careers.

"As a play 'The Better 'Ole' is not worth five seconds' consideration, and as a *revue* it is too often an error in taste. Mr. Darewski's music hardly accords with the military zone in France, or even with *Bill* as the hero of an incredible spy romance; and the feminine intrusions are mostly disastrous. We must, hereafter, in thinking of Captain Bairnsfather's droll creations,



A LONDON ACTOR

Who thus visualizes Bairnsfather's philosopher of the trenches.

do our best to dissociate them from these supplementary delights.

"Mr. Arthur Bouchier's portrait of *Bill* is a triumph of ability over nature. He sings without a voice, and plays his part in the *revue* sections in complete ignorance of all the conventions. That Mr. Cochran should have secured him for the rôle is only another instance of that astonishing manager's divination. Mr. Bouchier, the amateur, deservedly scores the highest honors against such hardened, professional colleagues as Mr. Frank Adair, Mr. Tom Wootwell, and Mr. Sinclair Cotter."

GERMANY'S DECLINING MUSICAL SUPREMACY

A CRISIS in the question of German music may arise at the opening of the coming musical season. German opera and German performers underwent a share of public disfavor at the close of last season, when we were entering the war. What will happen when we begin to feel its bitter stings? Musical journals bespeak a large-minded attitude toward the classics of German music, Mozart, Wagner, Beethoven, urging us not to impoverish our esthetic life through national differences. But the fact is that an awakening is coming in foreign lands which bids fair to dethrone Germany from her former position of supremacy in this field. For some considerable time before the war broke out, points out a writer in *The Daily Telegraph* (London), "Germany, while an extremely powerful factor in musical life, was not so all-powerful as she once was."

People were beginning to realize by degrees that her conservatories were not the only places in the world where it was possible to obtain cheap and good training. It is in this particular phase of Germany's music future that the effects of the war are likely to be most apparent:

"Both in France and in Russia the revolt against the German influence came far earlier, and attained to infinitely greater proportions, than has ever been the case in this country, where, to judge by the results, too many of our professors still seem to think that music found its last word in Brahms, and that the highest ideal to which their pupils can aspire is to write as much like him as possible. But even here, with the rapid growth and constant improvement of good schools and colleges all over the country, the tradition that only in Germany could the budding musician obtain proper training had been severely wounded, tho it had not precisely received its death-blow.

"Still, the great conservatories of Germany continued to attract many thousands of students every year from all over the world. It was not only the excellence of the training that was responsible. It was partly, one might indeed say largely, the life. There was the cheap opera, where it was easy to become intimately acquainted with the glories of the world's masterpieces at exceedingly modest cost. There were the cheap concerts, where it was possible to combine good music with a mug of beer, a pipe of tobacco, and room to stretch one's legs; and who will deny that the comfort of the body assists marvelously on such occasions in the elevation of the soul? There was, too, the general atmosphere of Bohemianism so dear to the heart of the musician. These are things that it is not easy, indeed at times impossible, to obtain elsewhere, and they are not without their importance.

"It is sufficiently obvious that years must elapse before even an appreciable part of this flood of students once more sets in the direction of Germany, and that even then it will never reach its previous intensity. We forget quickly enough, but, even so, the anger against Germany will not die down for a very long while to come, and it is impossible to believe that Englishmen, Americans, Frenchmen, Belgians, Italians, or Russians will be willing to sit at German feet or to live, move, and have their being with Germans for a very considerable period after the war has ended. And, in the meanwhile, the German myth will have exploded. A new generation of composers, pianists, violinists, and so forth will have arisen whose work will afford proof positive that the training in their native lands is every whit as good as ever was that in the vaunted home of *Kultur*. There can, indeed, be very little doubt that Germany has lost the preeminent position which she once possessed as the world's principal music school."

In the matter of trade it is predicted that Germany will suffer heavily. The value of her annual prewar export trade in pianos is said to have been over \$12,000,000. Mouth-organs and concertinas, save for the troops, are no longer manufactured in

Germany. In 1913 they represented a weight of 4,700 tons, exported to all parts of the world. British pianoforte-makers are at work trying to solve those secrets whose possession made the names of certain German firms household words. *The Telegraph* is optimistic of England's ability to do for herself in musical matters just as Americans are often exhorted to the same ends:

"There are no two questions that they can, and, if they continue on their present lines, they will wrest a great deal of that trade from German hands. In publishing, again, she held a position that was practically unique. Ger-

many's cheap and, be it said, very good editions of the classics flooded the markets of the whole world. We produced some very excellent editions on the same lines in this country, but they could not hope to hold the field against, say, Peters or Breitkopf and Härtel. Germany's publishing houses must be practically idle now, but it is safe to presume that they will get very busy again as soon as the war is over. Their plants, of course, are enormous, for it was by practically monopolizing the market that they turned a narrow margin of profit into a vast total. Are we going to allow them to win back what they have, for the moment at any rate, lost? It is sincerely to be hoped that we are not. A number of young and very enterprising firms have lately arisen in this country who can do the work every bit as well. Experience in the literary field shows that in the art and science of publishing we have no rivals, and there is no conceivable reason why our cheap editions of Beethoven or Schubert should not be quite as good as our cheap editions of Shakespeare or Milton.

"Without being guilty of any insular prejudice, one would very much like to see this country far more self-supporting in the matter of music. There is no sense in going abroad for things that we can obtain just as well at home, and now that the old feeling against English music and English musicians is so rapidly disappearing, one would like to see the complete disappearance of the bad tradition that only out of other countries, and out of Germany in particular, can good come. Of course, it would be equally absurd and very dangerous to pretend that we can supply all that is wanted and to turn deaf ears to what is going on in other lands. There is not, however, much danger of that. But we have shown, in a comparatively small way, that there are far greater possibilities here than any one dreamed of for years. Let us hope that those possibilities will be developed."



OLD BILL AS AN ACTOR.

The *Bystander's* report of the performance of "Splinter II" of "The Better 'Ole," at the Oxford Theater, London.