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WHERE WE STAND

By THE EDITOR

I AM not sorry that various considerations have made it necessary to hold my tongue about the little "gadget" to which I referred in the April number of THE GRAMOPHONE, because it has enabled me to write about it in conjunction with the new instrument which His Master's Voice will have presented for the approval of the public by the time these words are printed.

Last spring the Rev. L. D. Griffith, Rector of Silvington, wrote to me to say that he had discovered a device which had greatly improved the tone of his gramophone and for which he had applied for a patent. Would I advise him what to do with it? Now many people write to me in that strain, and I had begun to think that the spring of my hope is growing a little weak under the demands that are made upon it. However, I asked him to let me try his invention if it was not too bulky for transport. In due course came a letter to say that he had sent it to me. I summoned all hands to the beach to help land the device when the boat arrived that morning, but the precaution turned out to be unnecessary, because the device was small enough to be carried in a waistcoat pocket. In fact, it was nothing but a little piece of indiarubber tubing apparently cut

off a garden hose and enclosed in two curtain rings. I felt a little discouraged, for it did not look as if it would improve a broken teapot, much less a gramophone. I turned my attention to the directions for use that accompanied it and read that Mr. Griffith's theory was that the reproduction of recorded music was immensely improved by a flexible tone-arm. My Peridulce is the easiest machine for this kind of experiment, and on the Peridulce my first experiment was made. But, from the record's point of view, just how much flexibility was desirable? I looked round for a record to spoil, and I had no hesitation in choosing—no, let charity stay my pen. I harnessed the sound-box to the tone-arm with the tube as directed and not only could not perceive the slightest improvement, but actually fancied a definite inferiority. I tried again by adjusting the curtain rings to achieve the miracle that Mr. Griffith had promised. It was no good. I tried it on the H.M.V. horizontal grand. Worse. I tried it on the Balmain. No good at all. The Orchorsol does not lend herself to these experiments. I tried the Jewel Portable. This time I fancied that there was a slight improvement, but not enough to bother about. In the end I decided that here was

another case of auto-hypnotism, produced this time by life in a solitary country parish. Then the next morning two more tubes arrived, more workmanlike affairs, which Mr. Griffith recommended as much better than his own hand-made article. I took the same bad record and tried it on the Peridulce again. The improvement was astonishing. I tried the H.M.V. horizontal grand, but the tube did not fit the gooseneck tone-arm well and, though there was a distinct improvement, it was nothing really remarkable. Then I tried the Balmain with the No. 2 sound-box, and it was a clear case of "Eureka!" I had no longer the least hesitation about using my best records, and I opened with the H.M.V. *Entry of the Gods*. This was really marvellous. Never before had the cymbals clashed or the timpani rolled so realistically. I went on through record after record, orchestras, bands, sopranos, violins, pianos, chamber music, and in no case was the experiment anything but remarkable. So far as I could make out, the flexibility gave a genuine mellowness, not the meretricious mellowness of a composition diaphragm; it did not diminish, but it certainly sweetened the scratch; it helped definition; and it produced *increased* resonance. I could not believe the last for a long time, but I satisfied myself by experiments of listening in remote rooms through closed doors that there was increased resonance. With a Columbia No. 7 on the Peridulce I had splendid results; but the H.M.V. horizontal was obstinate, and I failed to effect the same improvement there. With regard to records, those that benefited most were Columbias, both old and new. In fact at this moment I am positive that the finest performances of Columbia records can be heard at Jethou. The records which benefited next were Vocallions, Parlophones, and the older H.M.V.'s. The newer H.M.V.'s (I don't mean the very newest recordings; I shall come to them presently) were much improved, but not to the same extent.

What to do next? In my excitement I could not resist hinting at my happy combination, and I was rather taken aback (as well as considerably moved for more personal reasons) to find that half the readers of my paper were prepared to go nap on the announcement. The sale of records fell off through fear of a new process, the sale of instruments was more static than it should have been, and altogether it was essential to quieten people down, because, after all, it was only a rubber tube, and I was not yet convinced of its general applicability. Moreover there was the question of the patent, and then—horrid thought!—had I been hypnotising myself in Jethou? I determined to call to my aid a case-hardened disbeliever in new inventions, an enthusiastic cynic. Need I say to readers of this paper that I chose Mr. P. Wilson? I knew that he would come down to Jethou with a firm determination not to believe in what I had by now come

to call the Lifebelt. Moreover, as likely as not, he would arrive feeling very squeamish after the night voyage (he did!), and if a partially sea-sick man with the sceptical mind of a mathematician could come straight from the Board of Education and be converted at 11 o'clock in the morning, I felt that I should not need to worry any more about auto-hypnotism.

The first thing Mr. Wilson did on arrival was to argue with me that the Balmain machine was not better than his own horned H.M.V.

"Wait a bit. You've only heard the office Balmain, which is badly placed and the horn of which is not nearly so well designed as mine."

"Are you going to use an H.M.V. No. 2?"

This question put contemptuously.

"My H.M.V. No. 2 gives on my Balmain the best reproduction I've heard."

"I've brought a Virtz sound-box with me, and I'm perfectly sure that your No. 2 can't possibly give what my Virtz gives me."

"Well, what record shall I put on first?"

"Try the beginning of the Columbia *Seventh*."

I demurred.

"Why choose a record that can never be a really good one?"

However, I put it on.

"Yes, it is very good," Wilson allowed. "But it's no better than my Virtz, etc., etc. Try the Columbia *Third*. There's some soft timpani work there which I've never heard except on my Virtz, etc., etc., etc."

We heard those shy timpani on my Balmain-cum-Lifebelt all right. Then he wanted to hear an oboe that couldn't be heard unless you got up on a May morning and bathed your face with dew, unless, of course, you had Wilson's Virtz sound-box, etc., etc., etc.

Well, he heard that oboe so clearly that he didn't recognise at first that it *was* the elusive oboe, and went on looking for it until I got the score and proved that it must be the same.

That finished Wilson, and for two days and two nights we played through record after record, going to bed tired but triumphant in the not so wee sma' hours.

To give a detailed account of the different experiments we made with various degrees of flexibility, with various angles of the needle, and with the various weights of sound-boxes and tone-arms would be wearisome, but we managed to establish the following facts:—

1. That a light weight on the record gave a better tone.
2. That the greater the flexibility, provided there was no accompanying flabbiness, the better the reproduction.
3. That the wear on records was reduced to a minimum.

4. That the second half of a record showed no loss of power and no lowering of pitch. This was already a distinguishing mark of the Balmain reproduction, but the use of the Lifebelt added this quality to other instruments.
5. That all the quality of the romantic sound-box was added to the brilliant sound-box without any loss of the brilliancy.
6. That my early Parlophone records with an unpleasant rattle lost it when played with the Lifebelt.
7. That early Columbia and Vocalion records which were formerly drowned by their scratch gained such an extra amount of tone that the scratch was much less noticeable.
8. That blasting was entirely done away with unless, of course, it was due to a fault in the record, in which case it would be much worse.
9. That all the ringing vibrations formerly communicated by the tone-arm to the ears of the listener were absorbed by the rubber, but that there was in no single instance the slightest loss of resonance in consequence. I should qualify this in the case of fibre needles, and confirmed fibre users may not find that the Lifebelt helps them as much as it will help steel users.
10. That the only danger was that the needle might jump the groove. This, I may add, has only happened on one or two Parlophone and Polydor records, but never on any other of the two thousand or more that I have played with the Lifebelt. This jumping can now be guarded against by a simple device which Mr. Griffith has just added to his Lifebelt.
11. That the very loudest needles, like Trumpeters, could be used without the least harshness and with an enormous increase in realism for orchestral records.

As soon as I found that Mr. Wilson was as perfectly satisfied as I was that on all "forward" instruments, or shall I say on all instruments with an internal or external horn, and not a rectangular amplifier, the improvement was incontestable, I told him that I intended to give the public the benefit of Mr. Griffith's discovery immediately the patent was through. Mr. Wilson, however, felt convinced that he would never be able to patent his device. He pointed out that anybody could acquire a piece of rubber tubing and that anybody could sell a piece of rubber tubing. I agreed with this, but I argued that our experience had proved conclusively that *any* piece of rubber tubing was *not* enough. It required to be of exactly the right resiliency to do its work, and I considered that any sensible gramophone would not, for the sake of a paltry 5s., deny himself the advantage of our experience. My plan was to get a variety of types of the Lifebelt and when we had definitely decided which was the best

to issue them to the public at that price. I added that I did not much mind if the patent failed to go through. I was anxious that Mr. Griffith should have some material benefit from his discovery and I said that I was sure that, if I backed his Lifebelt, I could count on our readers not bothering about anybody else's. The only thing that really did worry me was the comparative lack of improvement with the H.M.V. instrument. Would Mr. Wilson make a few experiments on his own account at home, and see if it could not be brought into line with the rest? I gave him *carte blanche* to get any moulds made that he considered necessary, and I also asked him to obtain the opinions of one or two people whose opinions would be worth while. I particularly wanted to know what Mr. Balmain thought about it.

Mr. Wilson went home, and a day or two later I had a letter from Mr. Balmain to say that he had been using a piece of rubber-tubing himself for years and that many other gramophonists did the same. With the letter he sent from his museum an old Pathé sound-box with a piece of rubber tubing attached. He sent at the same time an article on the principle of flexibility which is printed in this number. This did not look much like any patent going through. By the same post Mr. Wilson wrote me an account of his talk with Mr. Balmain and enclosed a piece of rubber tubing that Mr. Balmain used—a beer-connector. But when I tried this, which was very flabby, I found that it merely gave a kind of mellowness to the music while taking out of it all the "bite." In other words the Balmain beer-connector was merely another method of romanticising the record.

This encouraged me, because it too seemed to prove that any piece of rubber tubing was not good enough. That rubber tubing had to possess exactly the right amount of resiliency to make it a genuine Lifebelt. The next item of news was that another patent method of achieving flexibility had been filed at the Patent Office. This was encouraging, because it seemed to indicate that other people were on the track of this desirable quality. Then Mr. Vartz sent me one of his sound-boxes, and I found that he had achieved a measure of flexibility by the free use of rubber. On top of this Mr. Griffith wrote to say that his patent had been accepted, and that I could make the announcement when I chose. Exasperating delays with the moulds have held things up for a while, and even as I write these words I do not know if we shall be able to offer the public our Lifebelt as an obtainable commodity on the first of November as I had hoped.

I feel confident that it will be worth everybody's while to spend 5s. on this simple device. If it does not improve an instrument the owner must be content to have wasted 5s. on a good cause, because if in addition to 5s. he will spend three-half pence on a

letter telling me about this failure he will enormously help our observations. On some instruments the use of the Lifebelt will effect what will seem a *miraculous* improvement. The owner of a small Cellophone on which I tried the Lifebelt looked at me as if I was a sorcerer. An instrument whose value I doubled with the Lifebelt was the Apollo, one of which I had down here to try for a while. I did not use its own sound-box, which I find very bad, but with a Vitz and the Lifebelt I got from the Apollo a performance that would have made Messrs. Craies and Stavridi wonder if they ought not to have called the original instrument the Marsyas. It's only the sound-box that's wrong with the Apollo at present. With a good sound-box it would be a splendid instrument. With the Lifebelt added it would be a real top-notch.

No sooner had the excitement of the Lifebelt been somewhat allayed by the business of trying to discover a way of offering it to the public in the most suitable form than a fresh excitement was provided by His Master's Voice in the shape of a new instrument, which by the time these words are published will have made its bow. And a most remarkable production it is, how remarkable all readers of this paper will understand when I say that *for the first time since I became an inveterate user of the Balmain I have genuinely doubted which performance I preferred.* What the effect is going to be on the vast public that has never heard the Balmain I almost tremble to think. Even the most cynical who will have read that Sir Edward Elgar, Sir Landon Ronald, Mr. Albert Coates and Mr. Eugene Goossens for the second time in twelve months have pronounced a new instrument to be a revolution in gramophones will forbear to smile. To be sure, they will expect that presently Sir Henry Wood, Sir Hamilton Harty, Herr Felix Weingartner and Herr Bruno Walter will proclaim an even more startling revolution to be capped, of course, by Sir Edward Elgar and Co. a few months later, and so on and so on. I must confess that these outbursts of approval would ring a little more true if Sir Edward Elgar and his colleagues discovered that a Columbia instrument was a real knock-out, or if Sir Henry Wood and his colleagues prostrated themselves before a product of His Master's Voice. For the next revolutionary instrument I suggest the following testimonials:—

Sir Phœbus Apollo says:

"I consider your new instrument as much an advance on ordinary gramophones as my lyre was upon earlier stringed instruments."

Mr. Orpheus says:

"I could charm even a motor-omnibus with your new instrument."

Saint Cecilia says:

"There is nothing in Paradise to touch your new instrument."

However, in the case of the No. 4, as I shall call the new H.M.V. instrument for convenience, a good deal of genuine enthusiasm is justifiable. The No. 4 is a definite advance on every instrument now on the market, and if, as we must in charity suppose, Sir Edward Elgar, Sir Landon Ronald, Mr. Coates, and Mr. Goossens have never heard any gramophones except the other H.M.V. productions, they may be forgiven for talking this nonsense about revolution, for judged by their earlier products it is a revolution. But I should be talking equal nonsense if I were to suggest that this new gramophone takes us more than a few yards on the way to that apparently so remote goal—the perfect reproduction of recorded sound. I should be talking nonsense too if I were to suggest that recent advances in recording itself had gained more than a few yards in that great unconquered world of sound. At the same time, I do not want to appear unduly pessimistic, and I have some confidence that in a year or two we really shall get very much better recording. I gather from our correspondence recently that there is an inclination among our readers to suppose that all older recordings belong to a palæolithic past. Not at all! New methods of recording have scored heavily in the reproduction of the chorus, but so far with one notable exception from the Columbia Company last month the reproduction of the solo-voice has in every case been less pleasing than formerly. The exaggeration of sibilants by the new method is abominable, and there is often a harshness which recalls some of the worst excesses of the past. The recording of massed strings is atrocious from an impressionistic standpoint. I don't want to hear symphonies with an American accent. I don't want blue-nose violins and Yankee clarinets. I don't want the piano to sound like a free-lunch counter. And if the only merit of the new H.M.V. instrument were its mitigation of the whining infancy of the new recording I should not be much impressed by it. Fortunately it has many other claims on our admiration.

In the first place, the No. 4 succeeds in bringing out the bass *without* sacrificing the treble. That will probably be the first thing that strikes the listener. Of course, I have not had time yet to be perfectly convinced that there is absolutely no sacrifice of the treble; but I feel as nearly positive as one can feel about anything in the gramophonic world that my ear is not going to tire gradually of the No. 4. I cannot detect the least tendency toward deadness, and I can honestly affirm that so far I have not once suspected any novelty of reproduction as the cause of my pleasure. I feel that the No. 4 offers a common ground on which

the devotees of Mr. Vartz and Captain Barnett—to choose the extremes of two schools—may meet. At the same time it would be most unfair to suggest that the No. 4 is a compromise. A compromise implies that both sides have sacrificed something to attain it. In this case nothing has been sacrificed.

The second important merit of the No. 4 is its open and forward tone. After corking up so much loveliness of sound all these years His Master's Voice owed us a good deal in this respect, and with the No. 4 it has wiped out a heavy debt. No machine on the market places the sound better, and very few indeed have contrived to place it as well.

In volume and resonance the No. 4 is unsurpassed, and I am inclined to hazard that it is unequalled. At the same time, the scratch is notably less. This achievement must be hailed as a triumph. Finally, the alignment is as good as possible.

Where then does the new instrument fall short of perfection? Unquestionably it is least successful with the human voice. This is not to say that an immense majority of the gramophone public will not enjoy its reproduction of singing. But I venture to suggest that every connoisseur of singing will criticise its tendency to falsify the voice. It helps a moderate singer, but it hurts the best singers by depriving them of some of their individuality. And this is equally true of basses and sopranos, so that it is not a matter of favouring one kind of voice at the expense of another. At first I was inclined to blame the amplifier, but after a long and exhausting series of trials I have come to the conclusion that the sound-box is the culprit. Moreover, it is not a matter of newer recording. The latest vocal records are without exception better with a Vartz sound-box, whether played on the Balmain or on the No. 4 instrument. I have taken the trouble to test this assertion with the records of singers whose voices I know well apart from the records of them. With the No. 4 sound-box they all acquire a fruity resonance which is unnatural. My final tests were made with records of the speaking voice, and I am completely satisfied that the little more is a very great deal too much in this case. We do not want Sir H. Walford Davies to sound like a town-crier. So I suggest that anybody who gets rid of his old H.M.V. machine and invests in this new one should keep his old sound-box, whether it be an Exhibition or a No. 2. He is going to find that sound-box very useful on the new machine. He will want the old sound-box sometimes even for orchestral records published so late as last month. I am referring to a charming record of Järnefelt's *Praeludium* conducted by Sir Henry Wood and issued by Columbia. So, I repeat, when he scraps his old H.M.V., let him keep his old sound-box. By the way, what does happen to old gramophones

when they have been supplanted? Of course many of them are palmed off on novices, but when one thinks of the thousands that go out of date and are no longer used even by novices, one does wonder where they go. I never remember seeing one used as a birdcage, or as a rabbit-hutch, or as a portable larder. I never hear of one being turned into a camera or a workbox, nor do I know of any room that is panelled with old gramophone cabinets. I cannot believe that people would light their fires with mahogany and waxed oak, and altogether their ultimate end is a profound mystery. Perhaps the arrival of the new H.M.V. machine will help to solve this problem, for it seems inevitable that during the next three months thousands of discredited old H.M.V.'s will have to learn some new profession. I don't see any prospect of adapting the old machines, for the insides of the new ones are quite different. However, I may be wrong about this, and I hope no reader will jump to a conclusion in either direction.

The first thing that strikes the observer when he examines the new instrument is the small circumference of the tone-arm compared with any he has hitherto encountered. My own experiments with the Balmain-cum-Lifebelt had already led me to ask myself if it was not essential to have a long narrow channel between the sound-box and the beginning of the horn in order to secure forward reproduction. Just as you have to have a certain amount of resistance to expel a pea from a pea-shooter, so it looks as if you must have a certain amount of resistance to expel the sound from a gramophone. I may be talking nonsense acoustically, but it is certainly a coincidence that I should have put forward this theory to Mr. Wilson and also to Mr. Balmain when criticising a new horn he had designed, and that the new H.M.V. tone-arm should apparently bear out my theory. The No. 4 sound-box is a large one and without springs; the diaphragm is mica. The Quidnuncs, Hownows, and Whatnots of the gramophone world opine that this new sound-box will require tuning every six months like a piano, in which case it will have to be sent back to Hayes. I fancy that some of their pessimism is due to the fact that they won't be able to take a pair of pincers and tune the sound-box themselves. However, in another six months we shall be able to say more about this than now. Anyway it is a matter of small importance in my opinion. The amplifier seems to me to be on the same lines as that of the Apollo, and to judge from its outward appearance of more interest to a plumber than anybody else. The great thing about it is that it does its job. With regard to the rest of the mechanism and the general appearance of the new instrument, the fact that it comes from His Master's Voice is equivalent to saying that it is as good as it is possible to be.

After I had had ten days with the new instrument I came up to town for another ten days, where I had neither leisure nor desire to listen to the gramophone. Back at Jethou I find the No. 4 even better than I had supposed it to be. The Balmain helped by the life-belt and using the No. 4 sound-box of its rival can still beat it on orchestral records; but it can only just beat it, and when I think of the smashing victories gained hitherto by the Balmain against all comers, I regard the newcomer with something like awe. I shall leave to the fibre enthusiasts the task of criticising the No. 4 from their standpoint, because I've really not had the time to worry with the nervous strain of wondering whether the fibre will last out a record. It's a big responsibility to criticise a new instrument like this, and I avoid anything that tends to increase the nervous strain. This evening I have been listening to old Columbia records on the No. 4, and very well both instrument and records have stood the test. Yes, it's a wonderful machine. I've not had time to experiment on it with the Lifebelt. The shape we have adopted for the latter will have to be narrowed to suit the No. 4 tone-arm. At the same time the unsatisfactory trial I made of a few vocal records led me to suppose that the comparative unsuccess of the new machine with the human voice might be remedied with the aid of the Lifebelt. Galli-Curci came out much more like herself with that and a Virtz sound-box than with the No. 4 which made her sound very flat. McCormack, too, came out more like himself; on some of the latest records the No. 4 turns him into a Tamagno.

When I was in London I paid a visit to Hayes and had an enthralling talk about the gramophonic future with Mr. Alfred Clarke and Mr. Buckle. That future is brighter than it has ever been. That was the opinion both at Hayes and at the Columbia headquarters. It was a relief to find such an atmosphere in these days of depression. Nor was this atmosphere being pumped into me like artificial ozone. It was as genuine as the sea-wind round Jethou. I had an opportunity at Hayes of hearing the smaller models of the new instrument. The portable is really a little marvel. It's not quite the thing for the editor of THE GRAMOPHONE to say, but I really do feel rather sorry for other portables.

In addition to my visit to London I went up to Glasgow and had the pleasure of addressing a large audience of enthusiasts. Whether it was due to Miss Peggy O'Neil's open letter to me or to my ungallant remarks in these columns about women I do not know, but certainly there were more women than men at that Glasgow meeting, and I do not expect to see so many pretty girls at close range until I go to Scotland again. I must confess that a few pretty young women in

full view do help me to talk with a fluency that I cannot achieve when confronted by a line of middle-aged male enthusiasts. I found the committee of the Glasgow Gramophone Society most anxious to do everything to promote another Congress, and I feel confident that next March we shall eclipse our success in London this summer.

Now, I must return for a moment to the subject of the Lifebelt. I find that we shall perhaps be able to supply a certain number by November 1st, but we shall have to take orders in rotation, and we shall have to ask our readers to use the Lifebelt coupon which they will find on another page. I am going to regard these original purchasers as pioneers and make use of their criticisms if they will allow me. It must be clearly understood that I *guarantee nothing*. In my opinion it is worth five shillings to obtain something that may treble the efficiency of a gramophone, but I am not a charlatan, and with the inadequate means at my disposal for experiment I refuse to claim for this particular Lifebelt a universal success. We have aimed at producing something that will suit the greatest variety of instruments, and if any reader can get better results from any other shape we shall only be too happy to take advantage of his discovery! Furthermore, it *must* be remembered that rubber is perishable stuff and behaves in a most unreasonable way. Mr. Wilson advises everybody to secure a couple of Lifebelts and keep the one not in use in cold water so that after a rest it can return refreshed while its companion enjoys a turn in the aquarium. We shall not make very many until we get assurances that our Lifebelts are doing something of what we believe they can do. I can assure my readers that for six months the Lifebelt has given my enthusiasm for the gramophone a vigour that had not begun to wane when the new H.M.V. instrument supplied me with another burst, and I think that by making my announcement at a moment when the interest of the gramophone world is likely to be diverted from anything else except that new instrument, I have shown my faith in the ability of the Lifebelt to do for many people at a nominal cost what the new instrument will do better for those people who can afford the larger outlay. It would have been easy to make hay (or shall I say Hayes) while the sun shone, but I preferred to wait and be absolutely sure that we were offering our readers something that was worth their while to try. But once more, do please remember that I refuse to claim too much for the Lifebelt. If it works, it will seem *marvellous*. If it doesn't, the disappointed purchaser will have to reckon himself among the many other martyrs to the cause of reproducing recorded sound.

By the way, I was talking to the Secretary of the N.G.S. last week, and I find that we have hardly

any left of the earlier issues, and precious few of any issues. I recommend members not to part with their discs too easily. In another year or two they are likely to be valuable, and in a very short time we shall be offering to buy them back at not less than the original subscribers paid for them. Gramophonists have not yet learned that rarities in records are as likely to occur as rarities in books, but as soon as I perceive that passion beginning I shall do my best to provide rarities for the discerning, and I hope to see the day when Mr. Russell of the Gramophone Exchange sends round to his customers a catalogue of choice items that will appeal to the collector. Of course, rarities exist already, but the generous and friendly spirit created by the gramophone prevents our hoarding treasures and I am already indebted to the kindness of several readers for presents of rare records which they really ought not to have given away.

We are proposing once or twice a year to issue a number in commemoration of some great composer. Our first attempt in this direction will be next month when Mozart will be celebrated not only in a series of special articles, but also with a coloured plate of the great man.

The victory of two of the "unmusical women" in our twenty-five record competition affords me peculiar gratification as an editor, because it is a proof of my ability to get the best out of our readers, and in some ways that is a more important art for an editor than getting the best out of his contributors. Henceforth I expect to see our feminine supporters dealing ruthlessly with the gramphonic male. *Morituri vos salutant.*

I have not left myself much space for the description of last month's records. Perhaps this is just as well, for to tell the truth this October vintage was on the whole a poor one. I haven't heard the Vocalions yet, for somehow they have miscarried *en route*; but there was nothing in the other lists over which I can be very enthusiastic.

The *Surprise* Symphony from Columbia was a dull production; but the Bruno Walter record of the *Midsummer Night's Dream Nocturne* and the Act 3 prelude of the *Mastersingers* was first class. None of the Columbia vocal records calls for special mention except an excellent contralto, Miss Carrie Herwin in the popular *Melisande in the Wood*. A good violin record by Bratza should be noted. I can do with all the Smetana I can get, and *Aus der Heimat* is new to the gramophone. There is a fairly funny Robey, and there is an amazing piece of realistic reproduction by a lady with an absurd name, Vaughn (*sic*) De Leath. 3720 is the number, and it is something quite remarkable. *Ukelele Lady* is one of the songs. I had a good laugh over Stanley Lupino in *Could Lloyd George Do It?* The other side is piffle.

In the H.M.V. list the new Galli-Curci is not one

of her best, but the Chaliapine is magnificent. The Heifetz is dull and skimpy. The new recording of *La Boutique Fantasque* is not so good as the old one in my opinion. Not even the new instrument can deal with this. It's really nothing but a d—d row, if I may be forgiven for swearing. Derek Oldham's record of *Who is Sylvia?* and *The Cruiskeen Lawn* is the best he has yet given us. The Schubert song is the less successful, but I've come to the conclusion that lovely though the melody is it does not suit Shakespeare's words and is impossible to sing really well. Don't forget the Backhaus and the Menges records, which are very good.

In the Parlophone list there was another of those exquisite madrigal records. I don't think the Irmeler Ladies' Choir needs much recommendation to our readers, but it is always as well to go on rubbing in a really good thing. There were some interesting orchestral records, but nothing to rouse tremendous enthusiasm.

This month the Parlophone Company is publishing three 2s. 6d. records of great interest to Catholics. Members of the Westminster Cathedral Choir, accompanied by the Rev. Vernon Russell on the organ, sing the plain chant melodies of the *Te Deum* as given in the Catholic Schools Hymn Book, Palestrina's *O Salutaris*, the plain chant of the *Tantum Ergo*, and the *Asperges*, and from the *Missa de Angelis* the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*. I feel a personal interest in these records, because in conjunction with the editor of the *Universe* I was instrumental in persuading the Parlophone Company to issue them. Catholic readers will, I am sure, do all they can to make widely known these magnificent examples of sacred music, and I am equally sure that non-Catholic readers will forgive me if I suggest that they are more than worthy of their attention. Such music speaks far more intimately to the mind and heart of man than any articles on "My Religion" by popular novelists.

COMPTON MACKENZIE.

(For Lifebelt Coupon see p. xl.)

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