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LONDON GOSSIP.

PRINCE OF WALES AS PLAYGOER.

LONDON, Nov. 15th, 1920. The light musical stage is mostly favoured by the Prince of Wales, and he prefers the stalls to the usual Royal box. At the Alhambra the other night he retired to the manager's room during the interval. Later the Prince asked Mr. Reynolds, the manager, to show him the way to George Robey's dressing room, and His Royal Highness remained there for quite twenty minutes. During the performance the Prince was much amused by Robey's impersonation of an old woman, a new item in "Johnny Jones."

THE NEXT CENSUS.

The next census day is April 24, 1921. Already the Census Office is busy preparing its elaborate organisation. The order in Council setting out the questions that will be asked shows that we shall all be expected to give particulars no one ever thought of in the old days. Each new census is taken advantage of to obtain facts about the population relating to health, housing, and so on, which will be of great value to the future historian. Not merely precise details of occupation are wanted, with "the kind of work done" and "the material worked in," and whether in or out of work; such things as the number of rooms occupied and an exact tabulation of the number and ages of children and (in the case of children) particulars of parents. The last two sets of questions will need Parliamentary sanction before they can be included in a census paper. In Wales information will be collected of how many people speak Welsh, and in Scotland of how many still speak the Gaelic. Mechanical aids in taking the census will be used more than ever before. Two types of automatic machines are now being installed in the old Lambeth Workhouse, where the statistics are prepared. One is the sorting machine, and the other—the tabulating machine—is capable of extracting from the census cards various groups of figures. There is a card for every person in the community making a return. The cards are first punched with holes on a code system by girls working punching machines and then sorted and tabulated by the other machines. Rough population figures will be ready about two months after the census is taken, but the complete report will take from one to two years to get ready.

A FILLIP TO STAMP COLLECTING.

I have had the opportunity of glance

ing through the catalogue issued by one of the biggest firms of dealers in foreign stamps. It is more than twice the size of former issues, and contains abundant testimony to the influence which the war exerted upon philately. Military captures and occupations all involved changes in stamps, and the many new States that were formed immediately set about the manufacture of stamps of their own. Many of these are already very valuable, and of course all are most interesting to the collector. Poland, one observes, has had her stamps "overprinted" twice. The German rush saw the introduction of German stamps appropriately overprinted. When the Poles recovered their land they "overprinted," and now have a fresh set of their own—one bearing a Paderewski portrait. Elsewhere in the Near East the rapid changes in the military situation affected philately. The town of Volmar, in Letland, issued a series in December, 1918, which became obsolete a few days later when the Bolsheviks gained possession. The three Russian Loyalist Armies, the Southern, North-Western, and Western, each issued its own stamps. In this connection it is interesting to recall that 1913 saw the first issue of Russian stamps bearing portraits of the Czar, and the sudden growth of a superstitious objection to deface the "holy" picture by a postmark.

WILL INDIA'S SPEAKER WEAR A WIG?

When the mace of the Canadian House of Commons was burnt in the great fire at Ottawa, Members of Parliament here at Westminster presented Canada with another. There is an idea that the friends of India in the House of Commons should similarly present insignia to the new Indian Legislature which the Duke of Connaught opens in the spring. However, the Viceroy and his advisers have still to decide whether the Assembly is to have a mace, which, according to some Constitutional authorities, is a symbol of a sovereign power, and Fred Whyte, the young Scottish publicist who is nominated for first Speaker at Delhi, does not yet know whether he is to wear a wig and gown. The Legislative Assembly, practically India's first House of Commons, is to sit eventually in the new Delhi, where a Parliament House is being built. That, however, will not be ready for two or three years, and meanwhile it is to sit in Old Delhi during the winter, and to have a short session at Simla in the Summer. English will be the of-

ficial language of debate, but interpreters will be on the permanent staff of the Assembly, in case any Member prefers to speak his vernacular. Mr. Whyte will sit as Speaker—they call it President—for four years, and then the Assembly will choose his successor from among its numbers.

THE CHRISTMAS BOX OF CIGARS.

Tobacconists who specially cater for Christmas boxes of cigars are not hopeful of trade this year. Prices are very high for Havana cigars, which since the Budget have had to bear a heavy super-tax. People are shy about presenting their friends with British-made cigars. Even the toughest Tariff Reformer of the Carlton Club will quail before such an idea. British-made cigars, however, are free from this heavy new tax, and home manufacturers are now hoping to derive a good deal of benefit. They are striving to produce high-grade cigars made chiefly from Havana leaf. In some cases very creditable results have followed, and Christmas buyers who can overcome prejudice against British-made cigars might do worse than give them a trial. A considerable number of soldiers and sailors who by reason of wounds cannot get about freely have been trained as cigar makers, and their work is giving satisfaction. Cigar making is highly skilled and well paid.

HUGE LINER AS HOTEL.

A prominent member of the Baltic Exchange tells me that there is talk of the giant liner Imperator being purchased by a hotel syndicate and being converted into a wharf-side hotel. She is equipped in every sense as luxuriously as any fashionable New York hotel, and quite possibly her use as a hulk would pay better than running her as a liner. The big Dutch vessel, Brabantia, has been a dismal failure on her first trip to South America, and taking the two things together some shipping experts say that the day of the giant liner is over. Business men would not pay the high fares asked for first class accommodation on the Brabantia, and her owners lost heavily on the trip.

CHEMICAL WARFARE AND THE SCIENTISTS.

I have been shown a circular which has been sent by the War Office to some sixty of the leading chemists in the United Kingdom asking them "to become associate members of a committee now being constituted as part of the new peace organisation for chemical warfare research and experiment." The functions of the committee, it is further explained, will be "the development of the utmost extent of both the offensive and defensive aspects of chemical warfare." All the proceedings of this committee, it is added, will "as regards disclosures" be conducted under the Official Secrets Act. I learn that several eminent scientists have declined to accept the War Office invitation, their objection being that to be called upon to take part in developing in secret a mode of warfare proscribed by civilised nations is a question upon which the properly constituted organisations of scientific workers should be asked to express an opinion. There is also to be considered the attitude of the League of Nations who propose to place an absolute ban on the use of poison gas in future warfare.

JAPANESE CROWN PRINCE'S VISIT.

An official of the Japanese Embassy states that there is every chance of a visit of the Japanese Crown Prince to England next year as part of a world tour. This will be the first time that a direct heir to the Japanese throne has gone abroad for such a purpose. The Japanese expect that their Crown Prince will marry before he leaves on this journey, and that he will take his Princess with him to Europe. Visits to Europe are becoming the vogue among the Japanese Royal Family. One Prince of the Royal blood is in Paris at present incognito as Count Azuma.

African Teak is Strongest Wood.

The heaviest timbers are oak, teak, jarrah (an Australian wood) and greenheart; the lightest are willow, poplar, and spruce. The difference is enormous. A cubic foot of teak will weigh over 80 pounds, while a cubic foot of willow does not exceed 13 pounds. All timber is stronger at maturity than at any other time. After maturity is past the heart wood begins to go. Seasoning will actually double the strength of green wood. To test the strength of different timbers without the elaborate machinery used for demonstration purposes, a simple plan is to take a piece a foot long and an inch square, place it between two supports and hang to its centre a tank capable of holding about 1,000 pounds weight of water. This tank is slowly filled, and the bending and breaking strains carefully noted. The results of such tests go to prove that oak, usually considered the stoutest of timbers, is wrongly placed, and that ash really comes first. A piece of ash of the dimensions mentioned took a weight of 690 pounds before it broke; while oak broke at 501 pounds. Even beech proved stronger than oak, for beech took a weight of 625 pounds before cracking. Larch, useful timber as it is, comes a long way behind it, for it

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| \$ 9.50. | Now | \$ 6.33 |
| \$10.00. | Now | \$ 6.67 |
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