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LONDON GOSSIP.

LONDON, March 6th, 1920.
STUDENTS "RAGS."

The medical and other students of London are resolved, apparently to put the Metropolis on the map as a University town. It always has been, of course, but only now are we being reminded of it with vigour and pertinacity. The extraordinary scenes that took place outside Mr. Asquith's private house prior to his motoring to the House of Commons last Monday were typical of the new movement and reproduced most of the outstanding features of an Oxford or Cambridge "rag." At one time London only saw its students "out" upon the occasion of a big football match or something of that sort, but nowadays, apparently, these young men have taken to reading the newspapers assiduously with a view to not missing any chance of giving vent to their boisterous feelings. The last great event of this kind was the Pussfoot rag, which started the West End a few months ago and which had an accidental and unfortunate finish for the central figure. Both the Asquith and the Pussfoot rags were friendly but rough, and the Metropolitan police authorities are now looking with a more serious eye upon these increasingly frequent demonstrations of thousands of exuberant young Britons. Similar affairs occur almost every week. The next big one is believed to be preparing quietly for Lady Astor, but this would be worked on gentler lines. Our only lady Member of parliament can, however, be relied upon to take whatever happens in a sporting spirit and to give back as good as she gets.

HOW NORTHCLEFFE BOUGHT "THE TIMES."

One of the most interesting stories

In Mr. Kennedy Jones's new book, "Fleet Street and Downing Street," tells of the absorption of "The Times" by the Northcliffe press. We learn that ever since the famous days of those anti-Parnell letters written by the late unlamented Piggott, "The Times" had suffered considerably in prosperity and somewhat in prestige. We read how the last of the old principal proprietors preferred the country to Printing House Square, and had such a peculiar knowledge of figures that when an up-to-date balance sheet was at last prepared to find out how the position stood, he remarked curiously upon the fact that the incomes exactly corresponded with the outgoings. After negotiations with other possible buyers, including Sir Arthur Pearson, Lord Northcliffe came right in and bought out the large and small owners for £365,000. Later things than the Piggott letters which harmed the old "Times" were its association with the speculation in the "Encyclopedia Britannica" and the warfare on book-sellers inaugurated in connection with the Times Book Club.

AEROPLANES FOR ALL.

The great war-time development in flying gave many people in this country an exaggerated idea of the after-war prospects of aviation. As a matter of fact, the great impetus during the war was based upon production without thought of cost. After the Armistice, when commercial aviation began to be talked about really, it was rapidly discovered that imagination had gone beyond the bounds of practicability for the time being and something like gloom descended upon many of the great makers. Some turned over their plant to the production of motor cars and other things and generally aviation had a nasty slump. Now, however, I have been

hearing F. Handley Page talking in a most encouraging and optimistic vein. His recent experiments have been conducted with a view to finding out whether it is possible to fly with smaller planes. In that direction his business has made valuable discoveries. These indicate that it would be possible to use planes of an area 50 per cent. less than those at present in commission. Furthermore, with 25 h.p. instead of 100 h.p. it would be possible to fly with passengers, petrol and oil for five hours at 100 miles per hour in machines which should not eventually cost more than £150 to £200. These cheap aeroplanes, which can be garaged as conveniently almost as a motor bicycle, are, however, out of the question yet, says Mr. Page. Still, business men and sportsmen here look forward to flying about the country conveniently and at a moderate expense, I am told, somewhere in the not far distant future.

MEDALS AND HONORS.

If all that I hear talked about comes true it begins to look as though every man and woman who was connected directly or indirectly with the fighting forces will have several medals to wear, whilst every other person will have a civil decoration. It is rumoured that when the new and final war Honors' List comes to be published about next Easter it will contain from 25,000 to 45,000 names. This will easily break all the records already set up by the Order of the British Empire and similar far-flung awards of merit or almost-merit. This list, however, will cover the whole Empire and will be made up very largely of O.B.E.'s and M.B.E.'s with a fair smattering of C.B.E.'s. Without being unduly critical, it can be admitted that there are both in this country and in the Overseas Dominions a very large number of men whose work for their homelands during the war does deserve some particular mark of commendation. I have already met in London many men who have been notified that they are about to receive a decoration, and in every case within this experience of my own they are well chosen.

A SCRAP OF PAPER.

Philatelists, as stamp collectors love to call themselves, are being moved the world over, apparently, to their uttermost depths in connection with the forthcoming sale in Paris of the unequalled Ferrari collection of postage stamps. Talk with the leading Strand stamp dealers shows that this is an event which is looked to provide a new, up-to-date valuation for practically every valuable postage stamp in the world. The entire collection is, according to present catalogue values, worth about £500,000 and it is quite likely that it will realise far more than this. Its owner, an Austrian nobleman who died in Paris during the war in 1917, left his collection to the Berlin Postal Museum, but the

French Government sequestered it under the enemy property law. Its choice and unique specimen is the one cent British Guiana 1855 stamp. Only this one copy is known to exist and it was not discovered until seventeen years after issue. No other copy has ever since been found. It is part of a small temporary issue printed in Georgetown, Demarara, whilst a fresh consignment of the regular stamps from England was awaited. The first buyer sold it for six shillings and later it changed hands in London at twenty-five pounds. Then it disappeared into the Ferrari collection. Its value is now estimated by my Strand informants as anything up to £5,000.

SINGING GERMAN WORDS.

The question of the readmission of the German language into our concert rooms has more or less convulsed the musical world of London during the past few weeks. Everybody now accepts German music, but the actual singing of songs in a language the sound of which was, anyhow until recently, detested here broke new ground. In view of the fact that feeling dies hard it would perhaps have been better had the matter of this reintroduction been left to a British singer, for Mischa-Leon, who has secured a magnificent advertisement over the business, is a Dane. He announced in the newspapers his intention of singing a selection of German songs in the original language at the end of his next programme, so that

those who did not care to hear them could leave. In the meantime someone else wrote to the Danish Ambassador and Mischa-Leon was advised not to make the attempt. At his concert, therefore, he told us that he had dropped the idea. Such a large section of the audience at once unmistakably told him to go on with it, that there and then he sang his selection most successfully.

PRECEDENCE AND PENSIONS.

Now that members have had time to study the new disability scales for service men adopted by the Government as a fruit of the second special report of the Select Committee on Pensions, some of them are frankly staggered by the disparities in the proposed grants, which are "side-heavy" towards officers of the highest grades, while distinctly meagre for those who did the most strenuous work in the fighting. In the case, for example, of regular Army officers who have suffered 100 per cent. disablement, the pension to a second-Lieutenant is to be raised £10—from £210 to £220; to a Captain £7—from £365 to £270; but to a Lieutenant-Colonel it goes up with a leap £250—from £850 to £1,100. The proportion is so startling that it involves an official acknowledgment that either the previous scale for Lieutenant-Colonel was greatly too low, or the projected one as much too high; and a far from pleasant feeling will be created in either case

among the very brave young fellows who certainly sacrificed their health in the struggle. The question of dependents' allowances likewise promises to arouse much discussion; and the Government will be pressed to give an early opportunity for the discussion of proposals which, unless and until explained, strike many as extremely inequitable.

Why It Is III.

Instead of IV.

There is an interesting story told of the hour of four as represented on the face of all clocks. Perhaps you have noticed many a time that instead of its being IV., as would be most natural, it is usually—at least in all old clocks and watches—III. The reason for it is said to be that in the time of Charles V. of France, who reigned in the latter half of the fourteenth century, when the first clock was made, its maker, Henry Vick, was commanded to bring it before the king. He did so and the king was well pleased with it, watching the works with much interest. But he said, finally, "You have got the figures on the dial wrong." "I think not your Majesty," replied the clockmaker. "Yes; that four should be four ones." "Surely not, your Majesty," the man urged, again. "Yes, it should be four ones," insisted the king. "You are wrong," once

more said Vick, which made the king very angry. "I am never wrong," he cried. "Take it away and correct the mistake." The poor clockmaker could only obey, and the blunder of the king has come all the way down to us.

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