

WHAT THEY TALK ABOUT IN LONDON

Earl Cavan Chief of Imperial General Staff.

Christmas in Clubland of Empire Metropolis—Gossip in Political Circles—Cabinet Minister Predicts Better Times.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)
London, Dec. 28.—Earl Cavan's appointment as chief of the imperial general staff in place of Sir Henry Wilson, retired, marks the return of the war office to the traditions of the pre-war regime. Everybody respects the gallant earl, and recognizes his good service in many arenas of the war, but it can scarcely be pretended that as a scientific soldier, apart from his high social degree, the new chief of staff quite ranks with some other distinguished commanders who won their spurs on the western front. He is a pleasant, capable and zealous soldier, popular with his military subordinates, and imbued with old army traditions. He is, moreover, admirably with the French and Italian commanders with whom his campaigning experience brought him into touch, but rather by virtue of a thoroughly nice way with strangers than because of any acquaintance with their languages. A soldier more unlike Sir Henry Wilson than the Earl of Cavan it would be impossible to imagine. But political influences may have less weight with him than with his distinguished predecessor, and, if social influences are less remote under the new chief, it is merely according to the old W. O. tradition.

Christmas in Clubland.

Apart from matters of such perennial interest as the doings of royalty, clubland is mainly occupied at the moment in discussing Christmas and Christmas fare, for some of the clubs still keep up old customs and annually inflict on their members whole barons of beef and gargantuan plum puddings. So far as the barons of beef are concerned, considerable difficulty is always experienced in disposing of the residue. I know of one very exclusive and somewhat expensive institution, where, for the two or three days which have elapsed since Christmas, you have been able to obtain a plate of the most excellent cold roast beef for the modest sum of 10d. Apart from these festivities there are the services of the church, which to an ever-increasing extent are patronized by members who seek in this way to show their appreciation of the work of the staff. It is rather delightful to see monodoid gentlemen with titles going back to Plantagenet days tripping it gaily with one of the maids from the kitchen. But though the spirit of goodwill towards men is abroad in club and everywhere else it must not be imagined that Clubland is entirely happy. Some of the older political clubs, which used, in the old days, to regard themselves as really exclusive, are now growing rather heavily at the rate which compels them to throw open their doors to any man of the right party color who is able to

write M. P. after his name. In old times, when this rule was made, it worked out fairly satisfactorily.

It was Lord Robert Cecil, I think, who declared some time ago that the lower house, as at present constituted, consisted in respect of three-fourths of its membership of hard-faced gentlemen who had done well out of the war. These same gentlemen were in the happy position of being able to make their pick of the cream of the clubs of Pall Mall, and, being blessed with any amount of money, they scarcely troubled to pick or choose at all, but "joined the whole blonnie" lot. Their accession to the smoking-room may have swelled the demand for big cigars, but has scarcely contributed to the social amenities of the club lounge, and the trouble is that it is quite impossible to get rid of them.

Troubled Waters.

In these same political clubs there is much getting into corners and whisperings in progress. The impression is that the Gleaner report is going to be published very soon and that very quickly thereafter Lloyd George will go to the country upon it, hoping to sweep everything before him by exploiting the anti-war cry. Labor, on its part, would make a great effort to put unemployment in the forefront of the campaign; but the prime minister thinks that the economy ticket will frank him back to power. Whatever happens in regard to Labor, the Unionist die-hards think, not without reason, that they are in danger of being swamped unless in the interval they can find a leader who will command votes in the country. The names talked about are still Lord Birkenhead and Winston Churchill. Lord Birkenhead is cribbed, cabined and confined by membership of the House of Lords. Nor is there any immediate prospect of his release from duress.

Great efforts are being made to hurry forward a reform of the upper house which would enable its individual members to sit or vote in the Commons after the preliminary of obtaining the suffrages of the intelligent electors of Puddington-on-Med. But these efforts are not likely to be crowned with success this side of the general election. There remains Mr. Churchill.

From all accounts he is not very happy about the Irish settlement. But I happen to know that Mr. Churchill was sounded on this very subject of leadership at the height of the Irish crisis. He shook his head. The reasons he urged against it were personal and entirely to his credit. He recalled that when the sheer boredom of performing humdrum military duties at the front, with no apparent prospect of military advancement commensurate with his gifts, was driving him to distraction, Lloyd George had lifted him out of the Slough of Despond and taken him into the cabinet. The man who told me this commented that Lloyd George probably knew his job and his man. He thought that Winston would be much safer inside the House than throwing stones at the windows from the outside. That is not Winston's view. He still looks upon the prime minister's action with feelings of genuine gratitude.

A Bit Piquant.

Curiously enough the Lord Chancellor, just when his stock stands higher than ever in the big public regard, is a little under a cloud in the world of Boleemia. At the O. P. Club dinner to the Savoy, when it was Lord Birkenhead who presided. But there was a very awkward and quite unusual little controversy the end, marring the character of the festive lightness and good humor occasion, when His Lordship rose to respond to the toast of his health, proposed in what everybody accepted as a delightfully witty and bantering after-

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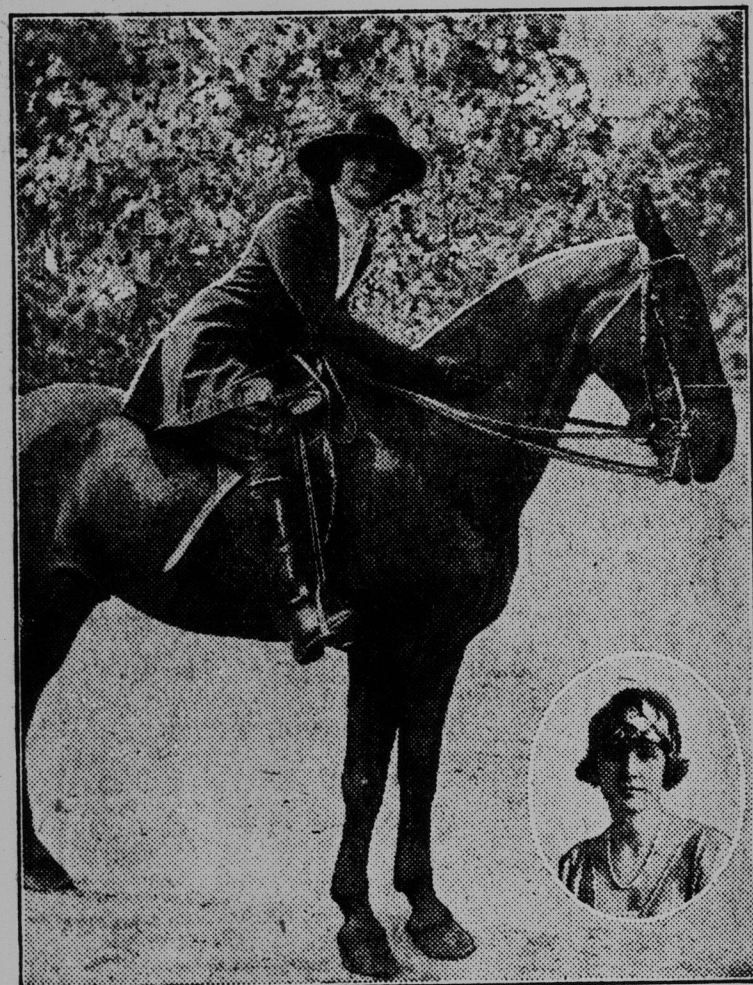
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little to the festive occasion by taking a sincerely and convincingly cheerful view of the outlook for the new year generally. In his opinion the worst of the catastrophic effects of the war which at one time threatened our western civilization far more critically than most people were aware have now been weathered. We have survived the most serious perils that followed in the trail of the great world upheaval, and may now look forward more hopefully to steeper, more prosperous, and happier times. Just as we are all disposed to be unduly optimistic directly after the war, so now we are rather prone to be unduly gloomy. In the deliberate view of the distinguished authority whom I am quoting, we have now reached comparatively smooth waters politically and have every prospect of soon doing the same thing economically. This is distinctly good news, coming from so eminent and intelligent a source.

Better Times Ahead.

Part of my Christmas was spent in the vivacious company of a cabinet minister off duty, who added not a

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the world's speed record by the English Buntel aeroplane, certain French sportsmen are trying to cast doubts on the genuineness of the tests. For the last two years at least everyone knew that we possessed the fastest aeroplane in the world, first the Martinsyde "Scimitar" and then the Gloucestershire "Buntel", but sheer bad luck has prevented vindicating the claim against the French record-holders. So the builders and pilot of the "Buntel" determined to submit the machine to the rigorous and impartial government test at Marlborough Heath, from which she emerged indubitably the fastest thing in the air.

An Awkward Double.

An interesting fact the London Journalists seem not to have discovered is that Mr. De Valera has a "double" in London who is, though more thoroughly Irish than the famous Sinn Fein chieftain, not even distantly related to him. This gentleman, who holds a secular appointment connected with the Westminster diocese, is tall, thin, sallow,

wears the same distinctive horn-rim spectacles, possesses a pronounced Irish brogue, and in fact figure and gait more exactly resembles De Valera than can easily be imagined. Mr. De Valera and his "double" are, I understand, not personally acquainted, but Irishmen who happen to know them both find it very hard to tell one from the other. When the Sinn Fein president was over in London making those long impassioned speeches to Lloyd George across the tea table at 10 Downing Street, his Westminster "double" had a most embarrassing time. He could not show his nose out of doors without being instantly identified on all sides as "De Valera" and encountering disconcerting attentions as well as difficult predicaments. The famous Dolly Sisters are more easily told apart. It may have been this Westminster "double" who unwittingly gave rise to the prevalent rumor in London at the time of the negotiations proper that Mr. De Valera had come over to consult with his plenipotentiaries.

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