

# Christmas and the New Year

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**W**e have been wont to look upon the age in which we are living as rather prosaic and undramatic and not in the least heroic. And yet when the flame of war has enabled us to view the depths of the hearts of our prosaic and undramatic-looking brothers on both sides of the battle line in Europe, we see there on every side as magnificent a heroism as the world has ever beheld.

There never has been a finer courage than has been shown, not by isolated bodies of troops here and there in the field of conflict, but by the armies of all the belligerents in the whole theatre of the war. And this has been shown in the slow, plodding work in the trenches no less than in the more dashing and spectacular phases of the war. Courage is not simply the doing of some brilliant and hazardous feat, it is the quality of mind which makes such an act possible, but it shows itself no less in the steadfast doing of the little duties, the disagreeable commonplaces of war which receive so little mention in the dispatches from the front.

In the practice of medicine we are in a constant state of war against the forces of disease and destruction. And this war is real and earnest, not a mere Fourth of July parade, although the enemy may seem as intangible and elusive as a dream.

About our work there is very little of the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," most of it is very like that of the soldier in the trenches—plenty of cold and fatigue and watchful nights, with very little gold braid and epaulets.

The practice of medicine can be made as prosaic and common-

place as the raising of turnips, or it can be made the noblest of callings. Its whole character depends on the quality of mind with which we approach it.

It is well for us, therefore, that once a year there comes a season of at least partial detachment from our work, when we can do with advantage as the Irish drill-sergeant said to his raw recruits: "Step out here and look at yerselves."

At this season we can take stock of ourselves and see in what direction we are traveling. We may well stop to consider whether we are beginning to feel that our patients exist and have illnesses for our benefit, or if we still realize that we exist for their good. We may well review our progress in our work during the year that is closing to see whether or not we are keeping up with the stream of progress. And above all we may well study ourselves to see what is the quality of mind with which we approach our work. Are we trying to see how well we can do our work with the accumulated store of experience which has been handed down to us through the centuries, or are we merely trying to see how much money we can make out of it?

On our answer to this first question depends the decision as to whether we belong on the firing-line or in the sutler's tent.

But if we will open our minds to the spirit of the season there will be no doubt in which group we shall be found, for in spite of the sadness of this Christmas it still brings its message of Peace and Good Will and the New Year still speaks of hope and high resolve.

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