

NOW THE NEW YEAR



"Now the new year reviving old desires"

By ESTELLE M. KERR

THOUGH we quote from Omar Khayyam, it is not his gospel that we preach. Patriotism or prohibition, or both, have put an end to the pleasures of the fruitful vine, and the war has made our favourite pastime of reclining with "a book of verses underneath a bough, a flask of wine, a loaf of bread—and Thou"—impossible. Nearly all the Thous (from a feminine point of view) are in England, France or Flanders, or they can snatch but an occasional hour from their military duties. Others who have gone will never return—not even when the New Year's bells ring Peace on earth. . . . Anniversaries should be suppressed in war-time!

"Now the New Year reviving old desires,
The thoughtful soul to solitude retires."

There are more thoughtful souls this year than formerly—more solitary ones. I have become thoughtful myself, and retrospective, though that is contrary to my best convictions which tell me that only people whose life work is over brood on the past.

NEW YEAR'S day is the supreme holiday in many lands, but with us it is so overshadowed by Christmas that my recollections of that anniversary are few and fragmentary. The day is associated in my childhood's memories largely with callers, a wonderful array of frock-coated men who came to call on my mother, while my sister and I in wide blue and pink sashes peeked at them from behind a door. Hardly were they out of sight when we pounced on their calling cards, examining them critically, comparing them. Staid old married men had simply written "Compliments of the Season" on their usual visiting cards, but the more fashionable had gilt-edged cards with "A Happy New Year" embossed in gold and their name engraved below. Other cards were decorated with a spray of holly, a bird on a bough, or a little frosting, and one, which particularly pleased me, had a piece of striped ribbon pasted across the corner. A gentleman whom we called a "dude," because he came in a cab and wore very pointed shoes and a large white flower in his buttonhole, had his name neatly printed on a tastefully-cut section of orange peel. Could artistic ingenuity go farther?

Bachelors usually came in couples, sharing a cab which they engaged by the day and stayed only a few minutes, sometimes just long enough to murmur "Compliments of the Season." They refused the invitation to go to the dining-room, where a cold collation was laid out on the sideboard—salads and jellies and creams. Our house was known to be strictly temperance and the same menu, with wines as well, was served by other hostesses, but it was customary to say: "At least you will taste my Christmas cake. Each cake you sample means a lucky month, so be sure you get twelve!" The young men loudly bemoaned the fact that they had so many places to go and yet seemed proud of it, but the married men were apt to come with a frankly bored expression—obviously their wives had sent them—but my mother proved so sympathetic that they seemed loath to leave. After saying good-bye to them she would sometimes open the door of the library where my father was in hiding and say:

"Now, John, you really must call on Mrs. P—, she has sent her husband to see me," then hurriedly return to her guests in the drawing-room.

Calling began in the morning. A neighbour with handsome black whiskers came first:

"My wife says it is lucky to have a dark man for your first caller," he said. "So she sends me out

early. I trust I am the first."

I always remembered that remark and when, at the age of seventeen, I received on New Year's day, I was quite upset because a fair youth was my first caller. I was barely civil to him.

My mother apparently grew tired of receiving on New Year's day, and on several occasions a dainty little basket ornamented with a blue bow hung from the door-knob so the callers might leave their cards without ringing. Each year the cards were simpler and fewer, and the men more addicted to "neglecting their social duties" (as their wives put it) for curling and other frivolous pursuits. But when I was old enough to receive, I wouldn't hear of such a thing as a basket—besides, it was not "done" any more. Perhaps New Year's calling had gone out of fashion, perhaps I was less popular than my mother, for the young men never arrived before three o'clock, and though they were apt to stay longer, the strips of white pasteboard on the card receiver was pitifully meagre compared to the ornate masses that

more uniformly garbed in black, but there will still be gaiety in the boulevards, for the soldiers on leave must be fêted and the recent victories celebrated, for, in spite of the cruel war on her soil, France still lives, and "Everything might be worse than it is," says the philosophical French soldier.

It is the poilu's gospel, set forth in his litany, that we would like to adopt for the New Year, and though the French soldier is all for action, he has something in common with lazy old Omar, who said:

" . . . What boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our feet;
Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!"

AND why should not To-day be sweet? If the French, with their land invaded and every available man under arms, can say, "There is no need to worry," surely we in Canada, with our homes intact and our food supply still bountiful, should be still more cheerful. Through years of war or peace we must each continue to do our little individual task, and do it well and find pleasure in it if possible.

In war-time we should put ourselves under military rule in as much as we should make our lives as efficient and useful as possible. Those employed in regular war work, such as munitions or nursing, are less subject to fits of depression than people who have more leisure, for, like the soldiers, their lives are ordered for them. A student who had recently enlisted said in writing home:

"All the bother about what one has to do with oneself is over. One has disposed of oneself. That has the effect of a great relief. Instead of telling oneself that one ought to get up in the morning, a bugle tells you that. . . . And there's no nonsense about it, no chance of lying and arguing about it with oneself. . . . I begin to see the sense of men going into monasteries and putting themselves under rules. One is carried along in a sort of moral automobile instead of trudging the road. . . ."

MAY I become retrospective once more? When in my teens I was spending the Christmas holidays with a school friend. Three of us were gathered in a bed-room brushing

our hair and talking of New Year's resolutions.

"Why bother about so many?" said the gayest and brightest girl present. "I made one years ago and it still holds good for everything. I try to live each day as though it were my last."

"Clare!" cried her cousin. "How can you be so sacrilegious!"

"But I'm in earnest! If you only had one day to live would you spend it praying? I wouldn't. If you want to die happy, you must live happily. I'd hate to die feeling that I had been angry or unkind—so in case I do lose my temper or get annoyed at fancied insults, I never leave it till to-morrow to make it right again. I'd hate to die feeling that I'd neglected my work. . . . I'd hate to die and have people find my room untidy and all my clothes in need of mending. . . . Some girls study hard all week long and plan for a wonderful spree on Saturday, some men work hard all the best years of their lives and hope to retire and enjoy themselves when they are old. . . . That's all wrong. Each day should be a sample package of your life. I wouldn't spend my last year on earth calling on people I don't want to see, entertaining people just because they have entertained me, so I'm not going to spend to-morrow the way you have planned. Call

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THE POILU'S LITANY

"Everything might be worse than it is," says the French soldier, and so he has composed this litany. Every regiment has a different version, but always with the same basis:

OF two things one is certain,

Either you're mobilized or you're not mobilized.

If you're not mobilized, why there is no need to worry,

If you are mobilized, of one thing you are certain,

Either you're behind the lines or on the front.

If you're behind the lines there is no need to worry;

If you're on the front, of two things one is certain,

Either you're resting in a safe place or you're on the firing line.

If you're behind the lines why worry?

If you're exposed to danger, of two things one is certain,

Either you're wounded seriously or you're wounded slightly.

If you're wounded slightly there is no need to worry.

And if you're wounded seriously, of two things one is certain,

Either you recover or you die.

If you recover there is no need to worry.

If you die you can't worry.



used to cover it in my childhood's days, and after one dull day of being formally polite, I decided that it was far more fun to go skating instead.

NEW YEAR'S eve has memories quite apart from the day that followed. A night of prayer was often followed by a day of feasting, and on one memorable occasion my pious parents took me to a Watch Night Service. I was thrilled with the idea of being allowed to stay awake so late, but later found it impossible to do so and slept very soundly through the solemn moment when all the big bells rang out and ushered in the New Year. Then there were New Year's eves when I sat at my desk filling large sheets of ruled paper with good resolutions, to be mislaid and forgotten at the end of a week. In later years there was often a party on that night, and as the bells began to ring we toasted the New Year, then all joined hands and sang "Auld Lang Syne."

One happy New Year's eve I was a student in Paris and in true French fashion we combined solemnity with frivolity, going first to a midnight service in a vast, dimly-lit cathedral, and later joining the gay crowds in a cafe on the Boulevards. This year the midnight mass in Notre Dame will be more solemn than ever, and the people who attend it