

THE NEW YORK HERALD

Letters to the Editor
Subjects from

What Is the Duty of a Physician?
To Improve War or Advance
Peace?

11 avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

Paris, July 20, 1920.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

The Masters of Medicine are in Congress in our midst and your readers are grateful to you for your reports of the words of wisdom which fall from their lips.

Dr. Charles Mayo, in his eloquent address, reported in your columns to-day, pictures medicine—the handmaid of war when he said: "The last war depended on sciences and among them medicine was supreme. The whole French Army was sent back three times into the line after suffering casualties. That is, medicine tripled the strength of France. It was due entirely to medical reasons that such a war could be carried on for five years—due to the benefits of surgery." Well, we must not forget the other side of the picture, that German science sent her forces over and over again into the line—tripled the strength of Germany—so that medicine prolonged rather than lessened the horrors of the war.

Sir William Osler, in his last published address, "The Old Humanities and the New Science," points out that: "Once in war a nation mobilises every energy... Slaughter, wholesale and unrestricted, is what is sought, and to accomplish this the discoveries of the sainted Faraday and of the gentle Dalton are utilised to the full, and to their several nations scientific men render their science freely, if not gladly... Into such hells of inconsistency does war drive the best of us."

But, Mr. Editor, the duty of our profession is above all to prevent disease, to lessen suffering, to relieve humanity, and when Dr. Mayo says that "The past war was a medical war, the war of the future will be a war of bacteria, and the nation which gives its doctors military authority commensurate with their responsibility will have the advantage." I cannot but wonder if that is the supreme message of hope to the youth that may be called on for the next war or of tribute to those millions who gladly died that this might be the last war.

After all we are "citizens" before we are physicians, and the physician, of all men, should take such a living and forceful interest in the things of the "city" that the possible agony of men and of nations should appeal to him as a failure of statesmanship, a tragedy to be averted, rather than an opportunity for the use and progress of his science.

I think Sir William Osler was nearer the truth in an address long ago on "Chauvinism," when he said: "Nationalism has been the curse of humanity. In no other shape has the demon of ignorance assumed more hideous proportions." And I feel strongly that the foremost duty of the medical profession is not so much to prepare for the "war of bacteria" that Dr. Mayo foresees, as to realise that war is a disease of civilisation and that no effort should be spared to search out its causes and prevent it.

An intelligent anti-war world-union of doctors might do more than a government-made so-called "League of Nations!"

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Jay or Franklin?