

BY STEPHEN LEACOCK



I SEE from the current columns of the daily press that "Professor Plumb, of the University of Chicago, has just invented a highly concentrated form of food. All the essential nutritive elements are put together in the form of pellets, each of which contains from one to two hundred times as much nourishment as an ounce of an ordinary article of diet. These pellets, diluted with water, will form all that is necessary to support life. The professor looks forward confidently to revolutionising the present food system."

Now this kind of thing may be all very well in its way, but it is going to have its drawbacks as well. In the bright future anticipated by Professor Plumb, we can easily imagine such incidents as the following:

The smiling family were gathered round the hospitable board. The table was plenteously laid with a soup-plate in front of each beaming child, a bucket of hot water before the radiant mother, and at the head of the board the

Christmas dinner of the happy home, warmly covered by a thimble and resting on a poker chip. The expectant whispers of the little ones were hushed as the father, rising from his chair, lifted the thimble and disclosed a small pill of concentrated nourishment on the chip before him. Christmas turkey, cranberry sauce, plum pudding, mince pie—it was all there, all jammed into that little pill and only waiting to expand. Then the father with deep reverence, and a devout eye alternating between the pill and heaven, lifted his voice in a benediction.

At this moment there was an agonised cry from the mother.

“Oh, Henry, quick! Baby has snatched the pill!” It was too true. Dear little Gustavus Adolphus, the golden-haired baby boy, had grabbed the whole Christmas dinner off the poker chip and bolted it. Three hundred and fifty pounds of concentrated nourishment passed down the œsophagus of the unthinking child.

“Clap him on the back!” cried the distracted mother. “Give him water!”

The idea was fatal. The water striking the pill caused it to expand. There was a dull rumbling sound and then, with an awful bang, Gustavus Adolphus exploded into fragments!

And when they gathered the little corpse together, the baby lips were parted in a lingering smile that could only be worn by a child who had eaten thirteen Christmas dinners.