

CHRISTMAS FEASTING

By Dr. JOSIAH OLDFIELD.

REMEMBER in my early days learning a valuable lesson. I was spending the winter on the Riviera, and at Christmas time there were to be great revellings and junketings. The French hotel proprietor wanted the English visitors to have a "Merry English Christmas," and so he arranged for a very elaborate dinner on Christmas night. All sorts of meat dishes, but chiefest of all was the baron of beef and a large pig's head brought in roasted entire.

This sort of feasting was not attractive to me so I took a picnic mid-day Christmas dinner on the mountains overlooking the blue Mediterranean, and thoroughly enjoyed my crusty *pain ordinaire*, and my roll of butter, and my goat's milk, Gorgonzola cheese, and my little basket of figs, a cluster of muscatels, and a bottle of milk. Instead of joining the great feast of flesh meats in the evening I read and wrote and went to bed. Next day the doctor was called in to five of the revellers and one of them was abdominally ill for some weeks. Most of the guests were cross and irritable, and for them, looking back, all the sparkle had gone out of the ginger beer. Pills, bad appetites, headaches, bad tempers and a sense of anti-climax, followed the great "merry Christmas" English dinner. My happiness was envied when I told my story, and it was generally agreed that in my way of spending Christmas I had had the best of it.

Many years after I was called in consultation by the insistence of a lady in Devonshire, who travelled up all Sunday night to be in time to give or to withhold her consent to an urgent operation on her son for appendicitis. She, poor soul, was torn with agonised fears because the scene was set, the surgeon was waiting, the theatre had been prepared, and she was told with brutal directness that if she refused to allow the operation the almost certain death of her son would be at her door. This was a few days after the youth had engaged in a round of meaty Christmas dinners and feastings and excitement, and many drinks and little sleep. As a consultant I gave my opinion that the appendicitis was a temporary inflammation caused by the contents of the alimentary canal, and that after emptying this canal and replacing the irritants by small quantities of emollients, and enjoining rest and sleep, all would be well. And the result justified the advice and no operation was performed.

Christmastime is not a time for killing and eating cattle. It is a great and joyous festival of gratitude to the memory of those hospitable cattle of the cowhouse of Bethlehem where a homeless baby shared their warmth and fed of their milk. We do not celebrate memories of gratitude by killing and eating the kin of those

whose memories we revere. It might have been a pagan way carried out by men who celebrated victories over their foes by drinking wine out of the skulls of their dead enemies, and who believed that by cutting out and eating the heart of their brave but defeated captive chief, they too could acquire some of his talent and dauntless courage.

The festival of Christmas is not a Pagan Festival but a Christian Feast, and it must be celebrated by obedience to the great command of the first chapter of Genesis and by participating in what Oliver Goldsmith calls "The Bloodless Feast." No wonder that Christmas is regularly followed by illness, by increased use of medicines, by visits to druggists, and by increased mortality.

This time of war should remind us that Christian feasting should be in harmony with the needs of the body and the ideals of the soul.