

Library Signpost

Little Girl Of Mexico

By Rev. Benedict Diamant

The Days of Ofelia. By Gertrude Diamant. (Houghton, Mifflin Co.)

Ofelia was one of six little sisters who all had little musical names like her own—Ransona, Lupina, Cristina, Estela, Lolita. They lived with their father and mother and bigger brother, Daniel, in Mexico City, at Atoyac #2. We would surely never know about them, if it had not been for Gertrude Diamant who went down to Mexico, touring with a guide-book to see the cathedrals and the fiestas, and hoping to get in a bit of research on the IQ of the Otomi Indians. She found the little family through a notice in one of the papers about an apartment "comfortable, cheap, decent, ideal for an American." Lucky for us, this coincidence! For it finally gave us this little book of sheer delight and loveliness, which has very little about the IQ of the Otomi Indians, but a precious lot about one of the most winsome ten-year-olds that ever smiled at you through the lattices of a printed page.

A wise old Roman once said, "Ab uno disce omnes." "From one, learn all." All of humble Mexico laughs and weeps, prays and plays, and goes about its chores, in this one family at Atoyac #2, Mexico City. If we are interested to know our Mexican neighbors better, the rank and file of us would do well to pass over the ponderous histories and the partisan politics, and spend our reading time with such a Mexican family as this. For of such is the very core of Mexico, unconsciously radiating its monuments: past and its hope of the future. And you see it in this book, not under glass, like a museum piece, but breathing the air and pulsing with the life of that fascinating country.

Yes, there is another side to the picture—the side Graham Greene etched with an acid stylus in his Another Mexico, which is the travelogue of quite another kind of visit. Here are the "lawless roads, the pistol in the holster, the firing squad, the hunted priests, the bullet-pocked church walls, the atheist posters, the arab and churchless Sundays, the brittle talk in the savage sunshine, and the Faith smoldering underground.

That was four or five years before Miss Diamant's visit, and a lot of it was farther south in fiercer country, especially in Tabasco province where persecution was most deadly. Things may still be somewhat the same there, although we have been getting reports of a milder policy. But Gra-

ham Greene was looking for a different thing: Satan's chosen footprints on the land, and the mark of anti-Christ on the soul of Mexico. But he was quick to notice, too, the sturdy piety, when his guide brought him to it, and the wilderness of "the power and the glory" surrounding the mark.

But in The Days of Ofelia one can come very close to the secret of that "common heart" of Mexico (for which both sides of the Revolution have been fighting. And this is important for us, too. Doesn't it seem strange that science should give us the means of quick communication with one another, while at the same time we do nothing to lift the barriers of communion with one another? Who are these people "south of the Rio Grande" whom Pope Pius XI so fondly addressed as "Our beloved sons of the Mexican nation"? Shouldn't we care to know? They are our brothers, Catholic in tradition and cast of thought, if not always in faithful practice. Why do we let Protestants hoard us in friendly relations and contacts with them?

Yes, I shouldn't spoil this introduction to a lovely book by such odious comparisons. Read it for sheer enjoyment. Don't say to yourself solemnly, "I want to learn about the Mexican people." Just let the charming author introduce you to some of her dear Mexican friends, and show you the little things that living among them for several weeks showed her, and you will be beguiled into perceiving, perhaps for the first time in your life, what the word MEXICO really means.

Not a name on a map for that tugged biceps of land between the Gulf and the Pacific; but people, like the Escotes, little girls like Ofelia and her sisters; the gracious greetings ("Ave Maria," when someone knocks; and his answer "... de gracia"); the humble dignity; the smiling hospitality; the special foods... tortillas, atol, corn soup with meat and sharp green chiles; the colorful fiestas and dances, the acrobats and concertinas; the quaint little ways of speech... "yes, there isn't any"... "no one knows" instead of "I don't know"... and the demure of diminutives ending in "-ito" or "-ita"... "my little mother, my little sheep, a little-right-away (which might really be an hour).

The Days of Ofelia is written with a deft skill of word and phrase—never too many, and all sharp and bright as a blade. But economical and pared at the style is, the book gives you a sense of abundant communication in its 14 light chapters, because the author's word-love helps you to divide more than what the words directly say.

Thanks to you, Gertrude Diamant, for telling us of Ofelia, and helping us to make Mexico real! Only love for Mexico could have brought you to write so "many simpatico" of its people, and make them so gracious in your pages, so that we, too, love them with you, and want to be better neighbors to them in the new alliance our country is seeking to strengthen with all of Latin-America.

Sermon Cards

Anatomy And Atheism

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

History repeats itself. Yes, and anecdotes which are a part of history, repeat themselves. Almost as far back as I can remember there was a story current in and around Harvard University to the effect that Dr. Thomas Dwight, dean of the medical faculty and professor of anatomy, happening along while some irreverent medics were having a little ghouliah fun with a cadaver, rebuked them and took the occasion to speak of the sanctity of the human body as the temple of the soul. And from that point he went on to demonstrate that the marvellously intricate and ingenious structure of the skeleton, to say nothing of the living organism, gives evidence of the handwork of God.

And now after all these years, there appears in the Reader's Digest for November the condensation of an article from the Christmas Herald with virtually the same anecdote, but in this instance attributed to "Dr. David Grant, a noted anatomist." The article is entitled "I was an Atheist Until—" and is from the pen of a doctor who uses the pseudonym Orrin Keating, M.D. He recalls that his professor while dissecting a body suddenly paused, turned to the class and said: "Gentlemen, here in this human organism is a complete refutation of what is called atheism. No reasonable being can look upon the miraculous construction and arrangement of organs in this body without acknowledging that some Creative Power above and beyond human comprehension must have been responsible for them. No one can deny that every creation must have a creator. There must be some Power, First Cause, or whatever you wish to call God, because the mere mechanics of human procreation do not and cannot explain how a man's body comes into existence. It seems to me that doctors, above all others, should be truly religious, dealing constantly as they do with this inexplicable miracle. When I say that doctors should be religious I mean they should be humble, prayerful men who recognize that a Supreme Power operates in human affairs."

That was not all the professor of anatomy had to say. He went on to speak of the beauty and dignity of the human soul. He recommended prayer and the reading of the Gospel, particularly the Sermon on the Mount.

The incident, be it recorded in passing, changed the mind of at least one member of the class who, "up to that time regarded himself as an unshakable, unconvertible atheist."

With the value of the argument I am not here primarily concerned. Let us say merely that it always was and always will remain a good argument. You will find it in St. Thomas Aquinas as one of the classic props of the Existence of God. In fact you will find it back as far as anyone can go in the history of thought. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," said King David 3,000 years ago. As a matter of fact you don't need the majestic heavens. A grain of sand will do as proof of the Creator. Or a drop of water. Or an atom or an electron or a proton. And of course a human skeleton, or the heart, or the brain or the impulse that activates the heart and the brain. Begin anywhere, take anything, start reasoning on it and in a few minutes you will come to God the Creator. If you think straight.

But what has especially interested me is the recurrence of that anecdote about the professor, the

students and the brief off-the-record lecture. There is a school of literary critics—and I suppose they have their counterpart in the world of men who are critical without being literary—who maintain that if you find the same story repeated here and there, now and again, sometimes with one man's name attached to it, and at other times another man's name, the fact must be that it never happened.

Such a conclusion is one mere evidence that learned persons, or ultra-critical persons, often get far away from reality. The reality is that if a story or an anecdote is true, it will happen not once but a thousand times. Given the same set of circumstances the same event will happen. Not necessarily but logically. In the case cited the circumstances are the professor who has done some thinking, the flippant young fellows who have done no thinking, the presence of the skeleton, skeleton of a man, skeleton of a fish, skeleton of an insect (it doesn't matter). Put these things together, as it were A. B. C. D. Keep going and you will get E.

It works out with an anecdote, or a joke, or an epigram, or what you will. Sometimes people say "that's an old joke." You will find it in Dickens, you will find it in Shakespeare, you find it in Aristotle. The conclusion is not that the joke is bad, but that it is good. If it comes up again and again; if you can't keep it down, it must be true to life. If it's true to life it's good. So of the anecdote. I shouldn't be surprised if someone were to write in and tell me that it wasn't Professor David Grant, or Dean Thomas Dwight who stopped in the midst of a lesson in anatomy to refute atheism, but Dr. Ferguson of Edinburgh a hundred years ago, or Dr. Lombardo of Pisa three hundred years ago, or of some other doctor somewhere else all the way back to Galen or Hippocrates. In other words the story is good.

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FIVE and TEN Years Ago--

From Jan. 19, 1932, Edition Seeking to concentrate attention of the world upon the necessity for introspection and penitential exercises, that the world might find the peace that could come from Divine Assistance, His Holiness Pope Pius XI proclaimed an "extraordinary" Holy Year of prayer, penance and pilgrimage to Rome.

From Jan. 26, 1932, Edition From His Excellency, Bishop Kearney at the episcopal residence, three Catholic college students, Miss Norma Ransome, Nazareth College; Edward McAniff, St. Andrew's Seminary, and Robert Sbatzel, Niagara University at Rochester, received their awards for essays in a Knights of Columbus contest sponsored by the Bishop.

A call for prompt and wide appeal to assemblymen in the New York Legislature to vote against measures calling for ratification of the Youth Control Amendment was sounded by the Rev. Gerald C. Lambert, diocesan director, Catholic Charities.

Feast Days

- Monday, Jan. 24.—ST. TIMOTHY.
Monday, Jan. 25.—CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.
Tuesday, Jan. 26.—ST. POLYCARP.
Wednesday, Jan. 27.—ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM.
Thursday, Jan. 28.—ST. PETER NOLASCO.
Friday, Jan. 29.—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES.
Saturday, Jan. 30.—ST. MARTINA.

'Quiz' Corner

In a married couple bound to have all the children that they want?

There is nothing in the law of God or of the Church which prescribes the number of children the married couple must have. The moral law demands that if the marriage rights are exercised the ends for which they were instituted may not be frustrated by artificial means.

What is the difference between a monk and a priest?

A monk is a member of a monastic order, like the Benedictines. A priest is one who has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, conferring on him the power to say Mass and forgive sins. A man may be both a monk and a priest. He may be a priest without being a monk, and a monk without being a priest.

What is the sin of avarice? Is it mortal or venial?

Avarice is the inordinate love of wealth. It is in itself a venial sin, but a dangerous one, because it so soon takes possession of a man and leads him into other and graver sins. This is especially true at the present day when there are so many unjust ways of becoming rich and when the possession of wealth gives more power and worldly honor than at any other time in the world's history. St. Paul calls avarice, "the root of all evils."

My mother lives in the same house with me. My wife says that I pay too much attention to my mother and not enough to her. I contend that my first obligation of love is to my mother, despite the fact that I am married. Is this correct?

You are wrong. While every decent man and honorable woman will at all times show deep respect and great love for the parents when they give their life and their all, yet they must not forget that their first duty after marriage is to their partner and family. This is in accordance with Scripture: "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be two in one flesh." (Gen. 1:27)

I have a friend who is thinking of becoming a Catholic, but she doesn't know if she was ever christened. Would that make any difference?

When receiving a convert into the Church, if there is doubt about previous baptism, the priest will baptize the person conditionally, i. e., while baptizing the person he will say: "If you are not already baptized I baptize you, etc." The uncertainty of your friend should not deter her at all from receiving a priest, and you should induce her to see a priest, or bring her to one, if she feels that she should become a Catholic.

Can the Holy Scriptures of the Mass be celebrated in any other language than Latin?

Yes. In the Eastern (Orthodox) Churches the language of the people is used at the celebration of the Holy Sacrament of the Mass. Thus the Mass is celebrated in Greek, Albanian, Ukrainian, Syrian and other tongues.

The Eastern (Orthodox) Churches are united to Rome and recognize the supremacy of the Holy Father; they are Catholic in every sense of the word.

Would it be right to baptize a dying Protestant who is unable to recite the Creed?

If it be an adult and he has expressed the desire to be baptized, the Sacrament may be administered. If there is reason to believe that the Protestant objects to baptism it would be wrong to do so. In the case of an infant and one he is usually certain that the child will die, it would be proper to baptize it.

The Good Old Days

In his diary at London in war time, Anthony Westwood, writes: "What ordinary folk had to do without in the good old days. There was no sugar until the thirteenth century; no coal until the fourteenth century; no buttered bread until the fifteenth century; no potatoes and no tobacco until the sixteenth century; no tea or coffee until the seventeenth century; no telephones, no gas, and no matches until the eighteenth century.—The Cross.

There is no evading the law that the fruit which we gather in the harvest of our life shall correspond exactly with the seed sown in our spring.

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parenthood, St. Mary's Maternity Department will be ready with every convenience, every provision, for the safety and comfort of mother and child. Planned parenthood with children as the culmination of the plans, with more and better babies as the desideratum, with a promise unto the community and unto the nation of a new army of citizens raised up to enjoy in a free land the blessings of liberty. Planned parenthood with posterity as its outcome: not the planned parenthood that strives to plan out all posterity.

A REDEMPTORIST BISHOP

The diocese rejoices with the Redemptorist Congregation on the elevation of its Very Reverend Provincial, William T. McCarty, to the dignity of the episcopate. Father McCarty has been a frequent visitor to Rochester, has been especially active in promoting the institution of the Diocesan Retreat House at Geneva. His work as Provincial has meant much to the Redemptorists, and through them to the many dioceses they serve so faithfully and zealously. His new calling will enable him to give to the growing number of Catholics in the armed forces of our country that service that will conserve their faith and provide fully for their spiritual needs.

Our congratulations to Bishop McCarty, our congratulations to all the sons of St. Alphonsus, on the signal recognition given them by the Holy See in this appointment. May God bless Bishop McCarty as he takes his place with Bishop O'Hara and Archbishop Spellman in ministering to our soldiers and sailors.

ONLY SAY THE WORD

Little did the centurion of old know what use he believing world was to make of his expression of faith in the power of Our Lord: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but only say the word, and my servant will be healed."

Every Mass now repeats the words of the centurion, with no change in their reference to confidence in Jesus' power, with only the slight change that refers them now to the entrance of Christ into our soul. We should say these words with the priest when going to Holy Communion, when making a spiritual communion. We should say them with fervor, with confidence, with realization of all that they mean. "Only say the word." Sin with all its malice, sin with all its stain, sin with all its impeding and dragging influence, fades away when we turn to Jesus with perfect sorrow—"Only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

The faith of the centurion, of a pagan people and not of the race of Israel, pleased Jesus, merited grace for the centurion. Like faith will merit the grace of Our Fatherhood: Lord for us.