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ALL IN A WEEK:

Or One A Minute

Written for "The Listener"
by SIMPLE SIMON

I DON'T know who said first that "one is born every minute." It's an observation that must have come from the very early days of human history. But it was Carlyle who said that there were nearly 27 million of them in England. Well, Carlyle has been dead for 62 years, but the other day in an English weekly I came across the advertisement about Joanna Southcott's Box, which is reproduced on this page.

This is roughly the story of Joanna Southcott. She was a Devonshire farmer's daughter, born in 1750. Her father thought her "too religious" when she was a girl, and when she was 42 she joined the Methodists "by divine command." A statement that she had been providentially sent displeased the Methodists, and she shortly afterwards fell into a fever and went to stay with her sister. There, after 10 days' experience with "the powers of darkness," she began to pen prophecies in rambling prose and doggerel verse.

She soon adopted the practice of sealing prophecies up and demanding recognition for them when her predictions matured. She pestered the clergy, from curate to bishop, but it was 1800 before her following began to be appreciable. Her first publication, *The Strange Effects of Faith*, came out in 1801. The printer's bill contained an item: "For correcting the spelling and grammar of the prophecies, 2s 6d."

Joanna (her followers used the Christian name only), gathered a group of believers round her, including the famous engraver, William Sharp, and went to London to "seal" the faithful, who were to number 144,000, all certificated for the millennium on half sheets of paper signed "Joanna," and backed with a red seal. But after 1808 there were no more, because among those who had certificates was Mary Bateman, hanged for murder at York.

At this time Joanna was styling herself "the Lamb's wife," and in *The Third Book of Wonders* (1813), she announced that she was to be the mother of Shiloh. Shut off from society, she became ill, and of nine doctors called in, six admitted that in a younger woman (Joanna was then 63), the symptoms might indicate pregnancy. The excitement of her followers knew no bounds—there were about 100,000 by this time—and a crib costing £200 was made to order, and £100 was spent on "pap spoons."

An advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle* for a large house for a public accompaniment led to an offer by "a great personage" of the "Temple of Peace in the Green Park." Joanna retired in March, and by November the papers were flooded with letters on the medical aspect of the case. On November 19, she said she was dying, and



JOANNA SOUTHCOTT, from the engraving by William Sharp

instructed that her body should be kept warm for four days after death and then opened. The autopsy revealed ambiguous symptoms but suggested that "all the mischief lay in the brain." Her tombstone, on which the last line was "thou'lt appear in greater power," was shattered by the Regent's Park explosion in 1874, and hopes of her return revived, but her followers have dwindled now. *Chambers Encyclopedia* says that there are some in U.S.A., in Canada, in Australia and in New Zealand.

Her box, according to the same source of reference, is still unopened, though two rival boxes owned by followers, have been opened, and found to contain the usual kind of Southcottian writings.

The real "Joanna Southcott's Box" is supposed to be opened in the presence of the bishops of the Church of England, and they are to study its contents. Lack of unanimous assent to this condition has postponed the occasion, and the box remains strongly nailed and roped.

* * *

BUT why should Joanna and her box have astonished me? Here is an item that appeared the same week in a Wellington newspaper—with something like editorial support:

SOWING BY THE MOON: The digging for victory campaign and the compost heap-making craze have made many people so horticulturally-minded that they are delving into other mysteries of gardening. Among the many inquiries received have been some as to whether the phases of the moon have any influence on seed germination. All primitive agricultural people, including the Maori, used to and still do pay great heed to the moon in their agricultural operations, and seed-sowing by the moon is considered by some authorities an integral part of the biodynamic system of agriculture, originated by Dr. Rudolph Steiner and practised with conspicuous success in many parts of England, Europe, and the United States, and also in a few places in New Zealand. To go into full details would necessitate a lengthy article, but, stated briefly, the theory is that seeds sown during the period of the waxing moon (that is, between the time of new and full moon), germinate better and give better subsequent crops than those sown when the moon is waning. The very best time of all to sow is said to be two days before full moon, and if this sowing happens to be followed by some beneficial rain, the results will surpass expectations, although in any case, they should be good. The moon is waxing at the present time, and will be full on November 12: seed, therefore, should be sown between now and then, preferably on November 10. Between November 12 and 28, the moon will be waning. During this period, seed sowing should

(continued on next page)

ENGLAND'S DANGERS and DESTRUCTION will increase UNTIL THE BISHOPS OPEN JOANNA SOUTHCOTT'S BOX

A Petition with 28,757 signatures praying them to do so was sent to Lambeth Palace on St. George's Day, April 23rd, 1935

What the Bible says about the Box and the Bishops:

"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish (private opinion): for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man (woman) declare it unto you." (Acts xiii. 41)

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