

KNOCK - Vague Apparition like the moonlight?

On the night of the 21st of August 1879 the Virgin Mary flanked by St Joseph and a bishop thought to be St John the Evangelist and an altar with a lamb and cross on it allegedly appeared on the gable wall of the Parish Church of Knock for a few hours. Fifteen people witnessed the vision including a child of five (page 60, The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary). Witness statements were published in a highly altered and edited form that differed hugely from the real ones the witnesses made. That witnesses didn't do the slightest thing about the lies speaks strongly against them as honest people.

Patrick Beirne made the following declaration before a priestly board of investigators of the apparition in 1932.

"I saw three figures on the gable surrounded by wonderful light. They appeared to be something like shadows or reflections cast on a wall on a moon-lit night."

This contradicts the usual line that the vision was impressive. The more banal the sight the more likely a natural explanation is.

EVIDENCE THAT PATRICK BEIRNE TOLD THE TRUTH ABOUT THE VAGUE APPARITION

There is evidence that Patrick Beirne was telling the truth about the vision being like moonlight images. The best evidence comes from the "best" witness, Mary Beirne.

In 1935, Liam Na Cadhain interviewed Mary Beirne then Mary O Connell and she declared, "The light about the figures was not like any light I ever saw but more like the soft silvery light of the moon" (page 50, The Apparition at Knock). She said in her authentic July 1880 deposition, "I saw 3 figures on the west side of the gable." The on is of utmost importance.

The accounts agree in the biggest things but there is evidence that what they saw was not totally clear. There are some contradictions among some of the witnesses about the cross on the altar. It is best to take all that as evidence that the visionaries did not see a vision as clear as you see your friends in the coffee shop. The vagueness of the vision led to some misperceptions.

Judith Campbell said the lamb carried the cross. She had went up close to the vision. Patrick Hill also went up close and denied the lamb carried the cross.

The cross stood erect behind the lamb: "behind the Lamb a large cross was placed erect or perpendicular on the altar".

This forgery was put in Mary McLoughlin's testimony, "Behind the Lamb appeared the cross ; it was away a bit from the Lamb, while the latter stood in front from it, and not resting on the wood of the cross."

She protested when newspapers said she saw the cross. She claimed that was not true - see page 191, Knock: The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland.

Mary Beirne said, " I saw no cross nor crucifix". Her mother said, "I did not see the cross on the altar".

Mrs Flatley's testimony says she saw the three figures and thought they were statues the priest left outside. It is safe to assume she saw no altar. If she had, that would have got her attention for leaving an altar outside would have been a strange thing to do. And she would have remarked, "Strange the priest never said he was getting a new altar." The altar is the focus of the Church in Catholic churches. She mentions only thinking that the priest was ornamenting the Church. That is referring to statues for statues come and statues go. They are not as important as the altar. An altar is not an ornament, a statue is.

Mary Beirne's sister Margaret stated, " I saw there an altar. I did not see a lamb and a cross." I did not see a lamb and a cross was crossed out.

Dominic Beirne Senior, "I saw an altar there, and figures representing saints and angels traced or carved on the lower part of it" is contradicted by Mary Beirne's "I saw only a plain altar."

Some witnesses never mentioned the altar and the lamb at all never mind the cross.

Imagination had a role to play in the apparition too. For a time, there were a number of dubious tales about lights being seen at the gable. When an apparition story engrosses the people, such experiences are common.

PATRICK HILL'S LYING TESTIMONY

Patrick Hill expresses no doubt in his existing testimony that the vision was ultra-clear and distinct. Nobody knows how much altering his testimony got.

His testimony also says, "I saw St. Joseph to the Blessed Virgin's right hand; his head was bent, from the shoulders, forward ; he appeared to be paying his respects ; I noticed his whiskers ; they appeared slightly gray ; there was a line or dark mearing between the figure of the Blessed Virgin and that of St. Joseph, so that one could know St. Joseph, and the place where his figure appeared distinctly from that of the Blessed Virgin and the spot where she stood." So without the line you wouldn't tell Mary and Joseph apart. That does not sound like a super-clear vision. Mearing means boundary. Its an old Anglo-Saxon word and was used in the days of the apparition to refer to the permanent boundary that a landlord needed to know where his property started and finished. Please read up on mearing on page 70 of *The Apparition at Knock, The Ecumenical Dimension*. I think that the line must have been very big and dark in order to warrant being called a mearing. Why not just call it darkness or a line?

MARY MC LOUGHLIN AND NON-CLARITY

Testimony of Mary M'Loughlin " I saw a wonderful number of strange figures or appearances at the gable, one like the B. V. Mary, and one like St. Joseph, another a bishop". Her expressions suggest that it was hard to tell if what was there were images or just shapes or figures. She says they were like Mary and Joseph and a bishop - this suggests that the images were not as clear as the Church would like you to think.

The original testimony is lost. Sullivan transcribed her testimony and it seems his transcriptions were close to the originals. It is strange that her detailed account of what she saw has been eliminated from the accepted version. In Sullivan's version of her testimony we read that "the figures were, as appeared to me, nearly life-size" and "they were all radiant with a silvery whiteness, which appeared like silver, to reflect a bright light, which attracted my attention". If the figures were too small and looked like silver paintings that a light was shining on then we can understand why her stuff was excised. You can read Sullivan's transcription of her testimony on page 114, *The Apparition at Knock, The Ecumenical Dimension*. The same resource remarks that it is interesting how she could see all the details that the Sullivan version of her testimony says she saw for she stood at a distance of about 30 feet away from the vision (page 133, *ibid.*).

She worked for the parish priest and went to tell him about the vision at the gable and he told her he didn't believe it and would not go to the gable. The trouble is he had a clear view of the gable. The light, if really bright, should have shone in his back windows. Surely he would have been looking out of his windows at some point? There was no street lighting in those days. The strange light at the gable if it were really as bright as some said would have drawn his attention on that reportedly exceptionally dark night.

Mary Beirne testified in 1936, "Mary McLoughlin, housekeeper to Archdeacon Cavanagh, went to the parochial house to acquaint the parish priest, of the occurrence. He, however, did not visit the scene, believing, as he told his housekeeper, that it was a reflection from a stained-glass window erected some time before." She gave the same testimony during the 1880 interview with the *Weekly News*. Sounds like Mc Loughlin described a vague apparition to him that could pass for a reflection.

The next day he had to be informed about the apparition on the way to say Mass and said he had forgotten that he had heard about it from the housekeeper (page 9, *The Apparition at Knock*). Mary McLoughlin his housekeeper testified that this was so (page 23, *The Apparition at Knock*). He doesn't seem to have been impressed.

Canon Bourke took down McLoughlin's testimony and declared, "Mary M'Loughlin had gone away before Patrick Hill came. Their testimony relates to two distinct and separate times while the Apparition was present. She saw it, like one who did not care to see it, and in a transverse direction, not straight ; he saw it directly and fully, and like confiding child, went up calmly to where the Blessed Virgin stood." Bourke wanted this note kept with her testimony. Nothing in her existing testimony necessarily contradicts what Patrick Hill said in his existing testimony. It is clear that the two did not agree so the Church began to argue for a changing apparition to account for contradictions. The original, the authentic, testimonies would be interesting but are sadly lost.

The claim that Bourke wanted to diminish the importance of her testimony so that Hill's would be reckoned more important is pure speculation. It is nonsense. Bourke was merely stating that as she looked at the apparition ALL THE TIME from an angle and a distance, it might not be that dependable. She supposedly got a short look at the vision on the way to visit in Beirne's house. She looked at it for an hour on the way home. None of that was a close examination or a straight-on view

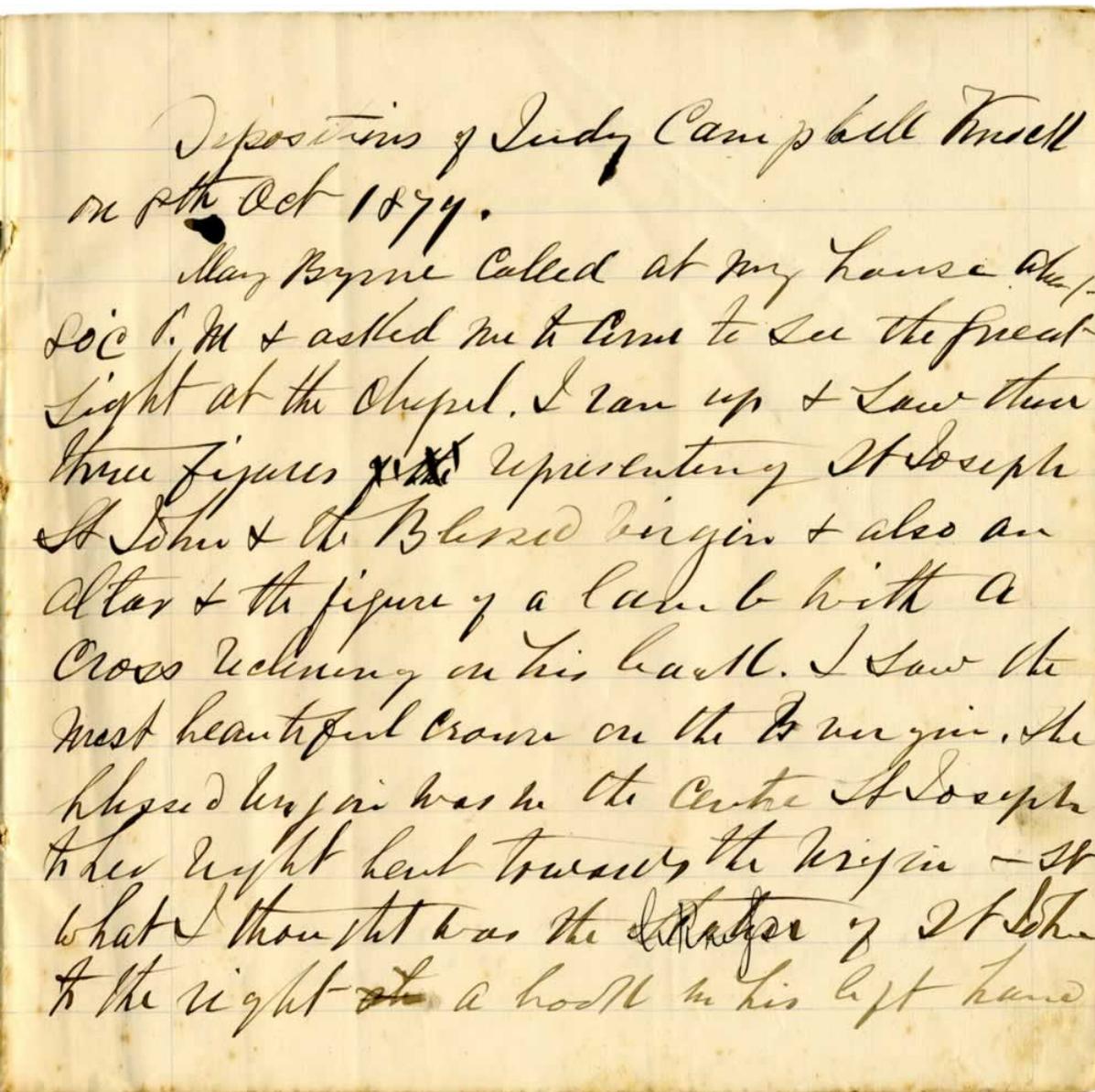
like Hill's That was all he intended to convey Bourke of being that petty and biased need to ask why they trust the testimonies he got from the witnesses and which he recorded for them?

CATHERINE MURRAY DID NOT FIND THE IMAGES VERY CLEAR

Testimony of Catherine Murray - a girl of about eight years and six months, grand-daughter of Mrs. Beirne. I am living at Knock ; I was staying at my grandmother's. I followed my aunt and uncle to the chapel ; I then saw the likeness of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that of St Joseph and St. John, as I learned from those that were around about where I was ; I saw them all for fully twenty minutes or thirty minutes.

A young Catholic girl would have known from pictures and statues which were everywhere what Mary and Joseph looked like. If she didn't figure out that one image was of Mary and another one was Joseph then the images must have been more than a bit hard to make out. "I saw the likeness of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that of St Joseph and St. John, as I learned from those that were around about where I was" implies that the images were so unclear that she needed to be told what they were. She should have known from religious statues what the images were - unless they were indistinct.

OTHER WITNESSES



Deposition of Judy Campbell Knell
on 8th Oct 1874.

Mary Byrne called at my house about
10 o'clock & asked me to come to see the great
light at the Chapel. I ran up & saw three
figures representing St Joseph
St John & the Blessed Virgin & also an
Altar & the figure of a Lamb with a
Cross reclining on his back. I saw the
most beautiful crown on the Virgin. The
Blessed Virgin was in the Centre St Joseph
to her right bent towards the Virgin - St
John to the right ~~of~~ a hood in his left hand

The above testimony of Judy Campbell says she ran up and saw three figures of Joseph and John and the Virgin. This had to be altered to three figures representing Joseph and John and the Virgin. Why the change or tampering? She was denying that what she saw should be considered images of those beings.

The testimony of Brigid Trench is a fabrication. This is her real testimony, "

LIVES IN THIS PLACE. ON THE EVE OF 21 AUGUST A PERSON SICK SENT FOR HER THAT SHE MIGHT SEE

HER. SHE CAME THAT EVENING TO THE CHURCH [SOMETHING ERASED]. SHE WAS IN THE HOUSE OF THE SICK WOMAN. SHE CAME BY THE ROAD AND SAW GREAT LIGHT. SHE ENTERED AT HER RIGHT HAND. SHE LEFT HER HAND ON THEM. SHE SAW ST JOSEPH AND THE BVM AND ST JOHN AND THE ALTAR AND THE LAMB. THEY WERE NOT STANDING ON THE GROUND BUT PROBABLY TWO FEET ABOVE THE GROUND.

The fabricated testimony speaks of an apparition which was detailed and clear. It says she reached to touch the Virgin's feet and despite the images being so lifelike and clear her hands passed through the feet.

The need to fake a testimony designed to refute the indistinctiveness of the apparition is telling.

Trench died a couple of years after the apparition which was advantageous to the Church and to those who said she tried to touch the image - if the Church and they were lying.

Mary Beirne's brother Dominic testified "the eyes of the images could be seen: they were like figures, inasmuch as they did not speak." This is an odd statement. You don't say things are like statues or figures just because they don't talk.

JOHN CURRY

John Curry was a young boy, about six years old. The record of the testimony of John Curry is as follows, "The child says he saw the images — beautiful images — the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph. He could state no more than that he saw the fine images and the light, and heard the people talk of them, and went upon the wall to see the nice things and the lights."

Even a child could notice the images were only things not people. What is astounding is that the lad said they were images several weeks after the event. He prefers the nice things and the lights to the images. That could be significant.

Despite everybody saying three people appeared at the gable or three statues he stated that they were images. He didn't let them pressure him to say what they said. He said what he saw was a picture! Worse for Catholics, the testimony tells us, "He could state no more than that he saw the fine images and the light". Thus the priest writing the testimony was making clear that Curry did not actually say he saw the "the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph". This was the priest's note. The priest was introducing his own interpretation. Curry was allegedly put on the wall to see the images by Patrick Hill. Curry's testimony does not fit the detailed and obviously exaggerated account given by Hill.

John Curry told the newspaper New York Tribunal in 1937, that Brigid Trench touched the picture. The images were then flat on the wall. He says the images appeared to be alive. But this contradicts his claim that Mary had a face like a statue. He said the Lamb may have been under Joseph's arm and not on the altar like the others said. All this indicates that the vision was not as clear as crystal.

FINALLY

The Church says heavenly beings miraculously appeared at Knock. But evidence for a miracle at Knock is weak. The vision was nothing to write home about. It was dull white images of statues. There is no need to bring the miracle hypothesis in at all. And we have to remember how human nature can see patterns and familiar shapes in strange lights that are not there or not clear. Do not forget that the vast majority of the Knock witnesses (11) were told what to expect to see before they went to the gable - this predetermined their perception (page 204, 207, The Cult of the Virgin Mary, Psychological Origins, Michael P Carroll, Princeton, New Jersey, 1986). They feared imminent eviction so they had a psychological need to believe that somebody in Heaven cared (page 211, *ibid*). Cynics might say they made the story up to lift the economy up and be able to afford the rent!

And its odd how nobody mentioned how they felt inspired by the vision to be better people and better Catholics and how they were gripped by the beauty of the Virgin. Nobody even cared to ask them. The so-called miracle is not about what the Bible calls real religion but about superstition and magic.