

STORY OF IRELAND

By A. M. Sullivan

CHAPTER XCII.

From the Atlas and Cyclopedia of Ireland (1900)

THE VISIONS AT KNOCK

THERE is a remarkable coincidence in the fact that a wild, desolate region of the remote, unflourishing county of Mayo, should, in the same year, become the scene of the inauguration of a mighty political movement that shook the social foundations to their center, namely the Land League, and also of a supernatural apparition the most wonderful. The visions at Knock have a celebrity as wide, and were of a character as mysterious, as those of the Grotto of Lourdes, or of any others on record.

Bare-faced lie - it took decades for Knock to become popular and even then it was not Lourdes

From a little book entitled, "The Apparition at Knock," published at Limerick in the year 1880, I subjoin a description of Knock Church and its surroundings:

"We at length reached our destination at Knock, and recognized the parish church from what we had previously heard of it though we were not prepared to see that it is really the handsome, well-proportioned building it is.

Viewing it as we approach, its cruciform shape, and handsome, square bell-tower, with corners crocketed and pinnacled, and a cross rising from the apex of the roof, displays much good taste in its architectural features, not, indeed, to be expected in these remote Mayo hills. The tower is sixty feet high, and is furnished with a full-toned, sonorous bell, which may be heard a great distance as it calls the people to mass. In the tower there is an aperture inside which opens into the church, and which forms a place for a vocal choir with which the services are supplied. The height of the church is thirty feet to the top of the gable, and about twenty-four feet wide. The gable is topped with a plain cross of large proportions. It was on the face of the gable-wall the apparition was seen on the 21st of August, 1879. The interior of the church is rather bare; small stations of the cross; no benches, except a few private pews; one confessional, and over the altar a not-very-well-done painting of the Crucifixion. The floor is of cement, but is now all cut up and pitted into holes, the people carrying away the cement, which renders it impossible to keep one's foot on it.

An apparition from God that leads to the Church being desecrated?!

The altar is a plain one—the facade supported by two plain pillars at either side; and a stained-glass window above, which is inserted in the gable. "Gloria in excelsis Deo," is the legend over the altar. A lamp always burns before the tabernacle, in which the Blessed Sacrament is constantly preserved for the adoration of the faithful. The writer proceeds to narrate the account of the apparition as related to him by Miss Mary Byrne, and others, who witnessed it on the evening of August 21, 1879: As my visit was for a twofold purpose, to investigate facts, and to make drawings, etc., I, in the first instance, made the acquaintance of Miss Mary Byrne, a highly intelligent and respectable young lady, the daughter of the widow Byrne, who, with her two brothers and a sister, lived together in a farmhouse about three hundred yards from Knock Church.

There is no mistaking the earnestness, truthfulness, and sincerity of Miss Mary Byrne; and it is evident to every one that she is one of the last persons who could be influenced by imagination, or invent a story. She at once readily entered into a full account of the apparition, when I informed her of the nature of my visit and presented my credentials. She stated that on the 21st of August, at about 8 p.m., there being perfect daylight at the time, before crossing the boundary wall or ditch which separates the church meadow from their grounds, she saw the apparition against the sacristy gable—about a foot distant from the gable, and about a foot in height from the ground, on a level, in fact, with the meadow grass. She saw three figures—the Blessed Virgin in the middle, St. Joseph to the left, St. John to the right. To the right of St. John was a Lamb, recumbent, with the cross laid over the shoulder. To the right of the Lamb was what she described to be an altar; this was in the center of the gable and extended up to the window circle from the ground, to the breadth of seven or eight feet. She was petrified, terrified, transfixed; but, taking courage, she ran to call her brother, Dominick Byrne, a young man of about twenty years of age, as fine a specimen of a Milesian as one could see in a day's walk; highly intelligent, and answering rapidly and clearly every question.

More lies - she had never claimed to be afraid. She never acted afraid. As for the good daylight that late on a day that allegedly poured rain?

Mary told Dominick to come and see the Blessed Virgin. "Nonsense, nonsense!" said he. "What are you dreaming of, girl?"—"Come, come," she replied. "Come and see and judge for yourself. Come and see what you may see, and believe my word." He at once proceeded to see, followed by his mother, sister and brother. They passed the schoolhouse wall, and stood in utter amazement at the vision which they no longer disbelieved in. They were soon joined by others, including another Dominick Byrne, a cattle jobber of about thirty years of age, a courageous and powerful man. As they stood gazing at the apparition in profound astonishment the rain began to fall heavily, and the wind to blow; but they remained where they stood, drenched with the downpour, and never leaving the spot. After gazing on it for some time, Dominick Byrne, the cattle jobber, said, "Let us go over the wall, and come nearer and see what it is all about." "No," said Dominick Byrne, Jr., who is clerk of the church, "no, not till the priest comes down. We shall send some one for the priest." "Let us go in at once," said Byrne, the cattle jobber, "what can they or she do to us? Surely no harm; and if harm, why we shall call out. In the name of God, I'll go in; here's my hat, take care of it."

Again they are at the schoolhouse wall as if they had to stand there to see it correctly. That was rather far away.

He then went over the wall, the others followed, gradually approaching nearer to the gable. As they approached, the figures seemed to recede back, closer to the gable. When they came within two yards of the apparition, though the rain continued to come down in torrents, the ground was perfectly dry, and there was a semicircle around the gable—the rain beat down on the gable wall above the apparition, and stopped when it came to the figures; turning on either side it ran down to the ground and formed a pool of water, which was collected next morning in bottles and preserved, by Archdeacon Kavanagh, the parish priest, but which he has long since distributed to the faithful. ... To the right of the Lamb was what seemed to be an altar; this extended from the ground to about a foot of the window-sill of the sacristy, and like the figures, it seemed to rest on the tops of the grass. It was between seven and eight feet wide. The base of the altar had on it what seemed to be a large, heavy moulding; and on the altar there appeared to be, in rows of three, statuettes of angels or saints—Dominick Byrne could not define which. Mary Byrne could give no description of the altar whatever. The middle row of angels and saints on the altar was more numerous than the lowest, and the uppermost more numerous than the other two.

No wonder it was thought to be a projector trick. The images were intangible so what did they need to go back to the wall for? This sounds like images that looked flat if you went too close. Projected images look better at a distance. And the Archdeacon for a sceptic had converted very quick when he was bottling water hours later! The confusion about the altar shows the vision may not have been as clear as Byrne at times liked to make out. The story about the rain behaving so oddly is not in any other account. All that is said in the earlier account is that the gable stayed dry.

All the figures seemed to have a slight fringe of silvery cloud under them; the figure of St. John, was partially concealed, from the knees down, in the cloud; the position of St. Joseph was that of one in the act of making a profound obeisance, with hands joined, and partly turned toward our Blessed Lady. The figure of St. Joseph was clothed in one garment, perfectly white, the hair and beard somewhat gray, the flesh had a natural tint. The Blessed Virgin stood facing those who saw the apparition; the figure was clothed in resplendent white; on her head was a brilliant crown; her shoulders were covered with a short mantle; the inner garment full, flowing; her eyes directed downward, her hands raised to the shoulders, the palms turned toward each other, somewhat like a priest's when celebrating mass. The hair fell on the shoulders and back in long ringlets; the feet were visible and covered with a sort of sandal. The figure of St. John was turned partly toward the altar and partly toward the people. In his left hand he held a large book; his eyes turned toward it as if reading, and his right hand raised as if in the attitude of preaching or confirming his words. The figure of St. John was clothed in one long garment of white, and on his head was a miter of the same color. A brilliant light surrounded all the figures, which light, however, had not the effect of illuminating the places around or outside the circle of the apparition; brilliant lights were seen to coruscate now and again on the gable.

The silver tone matches other accounts. The virgins hair is a pack of lies for it was never mention in the original depositions. Only the figures lit up and we are told the light did not illuminate the gable much which means it may have been contained. It did not spread out which means Patrick Walsh who claimed to see a massive light at the Church was lying or mistaken.

Dominick Byrne, Sr., after gazing intently for some time at the apparition, took courage and gradually approached nearer, so near as to touch the figures, which he made an effort to do. An aged female in the group of those who saw the apparition, endeavored to kiss the feet of the Blessed Virgin, but could feel no substance. Dominick Byrne, when asked did he endeavor to touch the figures, said he endeavored, with the open index and middle fingers of his right hand, to touch the eyes of the figure of the Blessed Virgin, but said he could feel no substance, though he covered the eyes with the tops of his fingers. After about two hours from the time the Byrnes first saw the apparition, a messenger came to them stating that an old woman named Campbell, who resided near the church was dying. They ran off to see her; when they returned to the church the whole place was in darkness."

The touching was never mentioned before and would he really touch Mary's eyes? He says he covered the eyes as if he put them on an image on a wall.

A second apparition was seen on the 2d of January, 1880, and a third on the 6th of January following, the Feast of the Epiphany. A large number of persons witnessed these later apparitions, including the pastor, Archdeacon Kavanagh and two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The fame of Knock soon spread throughout the land, and numbers of persons afflicted with bodily ailments and infirmities flocked there. In many cases miraculous cures took place; and almost every afflicted person who visited the shrine of Knock obtained instant relief. The number of pilgrims steadily increased, some from the most remote places; and many have visited it from England, Scotland and the United States. The authenticity, both of the apparitions and of the cures effected at the Shrine of Knock has been established beyond all doubt; and it is asserted that a visit to the spot, hallowed as the scene of a celestial visitation, will inspire even a sceptic with feelings of awe and reverence.

These apparitions are without credibility. Even the Church says so. It is a cruel lie to claim that all are cured and that there is no doubt about the authenticity of any of the apparitions.