

## **KNOCK - THE LIES IN THE AFTERMATH OF AN ALLEGED MIRACLE**

An Irish apparition of Mary and Joseph and St John and the Lamb of God in a bright light that took place along a Church gable in 1879 at Knock, Mayo during a dark wet night.

It was seen by several witnesses who provided depositions which were changed and exaggerated afterwards by a dishonest Church and a dishonest publisher. Top witness Mary Beirne in the original handwritten deposition said, "I saw the statue of the BVM". This is omitted in the published version. It is telling that the witnesses never acted to stop the Church and the people coming to Knock as if Mary appeared there and not just her statue. That was very dishonest.

Judith Campbell in her real deposition - not the altered published one - declared that, "There was a beautiful light shining around the statues". Her declaration that there had been statues of Joseph and John in the chapel in the resembling the statues she saw was excised from the published account.

It is a Catholic legend that gable and the ground at it were miraculously dry despite the torrential rain battering in that direction. Now Campbell stated that the ground and the gable were quite dry. The quite is interesting. It was not as dry then as some of the other witnesses claimed.

Bridget Trench's line in her altered testimony, "The wind was blowing from the south" meaning against the gable contradicts the assertion of Mary Beirne to The Weekly News of 1880 that there was no wind. There seems nothing unusual about the alleged dryness but it is the chief reason why many think the vision was a miracle and not a trick.

Trench famously tried to feel Mary's feet and her hands clasped nothing but thin air. However, this tale is a fabrication. It is not in her original testimony. Here is the original:

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.

It even says she did touch them!

The apparition was not of Mary and Joseph and John but of their statues.

Mary McLoughlin the priest, Archdeacon Cavanagh's, housekeeper asked him to go and see the vision. He said he didn't believe her and didn't go. The next day he started credulously promoting the vision as genuine and believed all the rubbish he was told from religious nuts who claimed to be cured. The conversion was so fast that it looks like he didn't go because he was playing the innocent and was involved in the hoax. Also, he had a view of the gable from his house and had the light been as bright as some witnesses said he would have noticed.

Some of the stories of the witnesses improved with the telling which shows that God was not involved for he could organise things better than that (The Apparition at Knock, A Survey of Facts and Evidence, Fr Michael Walsh, St Jarlath's College, Tuam, Co Galway, 1959). Also, the Archdeacon who was the parish priest and his priest friends were was anxious to promote the apparition as a real miracle wrote the witness reports and could have influenced their memories and manipulated the alleged witnesses to tell much the same story. The Archdeacon reported many eccentric visions of his own in the house. The witnesses talked about the vision for a long time after it happened among themselves which means that in the excitement and wonder they would have corrupted each other's memories so that the story unconsciously got better and more convincing and consistent and more preternatural in the telling.

The witnesses could have been duped by a projector as was rumoured at the time and they would have pushed the evidence they noticed for this outside of their minds in order that they could believe they really had a miracle vision. It has been found that a light source such as a projector - a magic lantern - could have been used. It may have been on the window sill and the image was then directed at a mirror which shone it down the gable. This would have avoided the problem of spectators getting in the way of the light source.

Sceptics observe that the witnesses strangely stood at an awkward viewing angle from a schoolhouse at a distance as if they were trying to avoid disturbing the vision. It is said that there is no evidence the witnesses got in the way of the light source. But there is no evidence against it either.

It is claimed that at least some of the witnesses would have examined the scene for a hoax and would have been smart enough to spot a hoax. But when one considers how people can flock to venerate a tree stump that seems to have the virgin's face on it, it is possible that they felt no inclination to check it out. Also the witnesses were never asked if they saw anything suggestive of a hoax. If they were it was never written down. Judith Campbell's testimony is typical of most of the visionaries. She only states what was to be seen and says nothing about a hoax never mind a miracle! If the images were not that amazing that would explain why the visionaries were too embarrassed to get all the neighbours out to see it. The apparition was seen only by a few and most of them were related.

Perhaps the images were cut-out paintings stuck to the wall. The images were not seen coming and they were not seen going.

Patrick Beirne testified in 1932 as follows, "I saw three figures on the gable surrounded by a wonderful light. They appeared to be something like shadows or reflections cast on a wall on a moon-light night" (page 53, *The Apparition at Knock*). That is evidence that a magic lantern was used. This testimony is to be taken seriously because if the figures were that unclear they would have looked better at a distance. Was that why the witnesses stood at a strange spot for viewing the vision?

The other witnesses exaggerated how good the visions were. The fact that the Beirne woman said that the Virgin's crown was kind of yellow indicates that it was not supernatural for a vision from God or Satan would manage to get the colour of the crown right, get it gold. *Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, Eugene Hynes, Cork University Press, Cork, 2008 shows that the apparition was reported in a culture prone to bizarre visions and offers psychological explanations.

The Church seizes upon the tiny things that seem to indicate supernaturality. Mistakes happen if somebody said the rain was torrential and the gable was dry when they took a few seconds to check that is only a tiny thing. It is not central to the story and thus cannot be taken as verifying the paranormal nature of the event. It would be different if they checked often and more thoroughly. And if your hands are wet how do you know if the gable is dry or not?

Patrick Hill's testimony seems to indicate it. But Father Lennon, a scientist, went as far as to say his testimony was of no value. Biased supporters of the apparition, though they have no evidence, simply take comfort in the notion that that Lennon may have been prejudiced against Hill as Hill was in his early teens. That is speculation and Lennon did question the boy. Statistically, if a group of people see something unusual there will be at least one person who will add a lot of window dressing to his or her testimony. Hill's account is too good to be true. Judith Campbell like him went close to the vision but she simply stated they were statues. Had the vision been as glitzy and magical as Hill said surely she would not have been so calm and matter-of-fact about it?

No cure at Knock matched the calibre of the cures at Lourdes (which is not to say that the cures of Lourdes are as good as we are told!).

There is no evidence against the hoax theory. There is nothing to indicate a real miracle.

