

KNOCK AND ITS SHRINE

STORY OF A FAMED IRISH SHRINE

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Nazareth the unknown! Nazareth the insignificant! Our Divine Lord yet abode a Man in the midst of men, lips of the worldly-wise contemptuously curled at the claim to everlasting renown made for a village possessed of no more convincing material memorial of its vaunted distinction than the site of a wayside carpentry.

Can any good come out of Nazareth? Throughout the intervening ages, unbelief has repeatedly flung forth the olden challenge. But as frequently, through grace of Almighty God, has Faith returned the answer.

It is noteworthy that often when it has pleased God that that answer should be given, as it were, in terms of miraculous manifestation, the chosen circumstances should have been as those of Nazareth itself.

A century ago, Lourdes was a place unknown and unimportant even among those living in its nearest vicinity. Paray-le-Monial, Rue de Bac, La Salette, almost all the now universally besought shrines of Catholic Faith similarly associated with actual Heavenly indication, were scarcely distinguishable names in the ear of the outside world before there had come to pass the holy occurrences in proof of which they stand.

The fact is notably true of Knock, the now piously venerated shrine of Mary—let us say of *Our Lady Queen of Ireland*—set upon the gently-sloping hill from which the village would appear to have taken its name, about six miles beyond Claremorris, upon the road between that town and Swinford in Mayo.

“It is a big jump in time and space from Nazareth of Galilee to Knock in County Mayo,” said an eloquent pilgrimage preacher in 1936, *“But how like the resemblance one to the other, of those divinely-favoured hamlets?”* There are in Ireland many places called *Knock*, for the name is simply the common *Cnoc*, meaning *a hill*. There are even other villages of the name to be encountered in the western Irish counties. Nevertheless, it is not exaggeration to suggest that prior to the close of the eighteen—seventies, the Knock that has through such blessed wonder become *Knock-Mhuire*, or *Knock of Mary*, was the least known of all.

They were a lowly, plain-going folk that inhabited the place, having nothing of the social importance or industrial association that would have commended them to the interest of the world that lay without their parish confines. They were, consequently, so wholly absorbed in pursuit of their own humble affairs that few living even within a few miles of the village thought of it, whilst by many its existence was undreamt of.

In the condition of the villagers of the later ‘seventies’, the resemblance between Knock and Nazareth bore with remarkable fidelity. The priest already quoted, a native of the Knock of that period, has said that the social plight of the people was in every respect akin with that of the people of Nazareth in the time of Our Lord. *“Poor, peaceful and unknown, dead to the outside world: rich only in the treasures of grace and faith.”* Privation had been their lot longer than the oldest among them could remember. The tyrannical landlordism that crushed human hope in the hearts of the West of Ireland generally, pressed mercilessly upon defenceless Knock. The village, too, experienced ever-recurring periods of crop failure and scarcity, one spell of anxiety quickly succeeding another, the latter differing from the former, perhaps, in category, but seldom in dread.

Thus opened the year 1879, presently to be rendered dismally historic for Knock by a potato blight which stigmatized the year as possibly the worst known in that part of Mayo since the desolating Famine of 1847. But the tender glance of Divine Pity rested upon the village.

“Cum ipso sum in tribulatione—I am with you in your tribulations!” That period of greatest trial in the memory of the inhabitants of the time had been the chosen of God for the wonderful manifestation of His Grace, which, under Heaven, they were induced to appraise as Mary’s mission of compassion and comfort to them in their sorrow and suffering.

It was auspiciously upon the octave-vigil of the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, 21st August, 1879, at about half-past seven in the evening, the daylight having not yet faded, and at the moment in which their human anguish had reached the climax, that villagers, men, women, and children, came forth among the homesteads, crying out in voices of joyous conviction that Our Blessed Lady, with St. Joseph and St. John Evangelist, had been seen by them in an

indescribable glow of heavenly light at the gable of the parish church.

At once, the hearers hastened to the spot, and the wonder, which lasted without the slightest diminution for about two hours, was seen by many persons. Fifteen of these witnesses subsequently made their testimony in writing, and later withstood the test of rigorous examination as to their experience, with, of course, special reference as to comparability of detail in respect of first impressions as related to after recollection, and in regard of the distinct accounts of the several persons concerned. These recitals comprised a beautifully simple, and in that connection, convincing record of the vision.

Mary Beirne, afterwards known as Mrs. O'Connell, who lived until October, 1936, was at the date of the vision, a girl of twenty-six. Her testimony, which is the most convenient for inclusion here exactly as given, stated that "it was eight o'clock, or a quarter to eight, at the time . . . The first I learned of it was on coming at the time from my mother's house, in company with Mary McLoughlin, and at a distance of three hundred yards or so from the church, I beheld standing out from the gable, and rather to the west of it, three figures which appeared to be that of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and St. John. That of the Blessed Virgin was life-size. The Virgin stood erect with eyes raised to Heaven, her hands elevated to the shoulders, or a little higher, the palms inclined slightly towards the shoulders, or bosom. She wore a crown on her head, rather a large crown, and it appeared to me somewhat yellower than the dress, or robes, worn by Our Blessed Lady."

"When I arrived there, I threw myself upon my knees, and exclaimed: 'A hundred thousand thanks to God, and to the glorious Virgin, that has given us this manifestation!'" attested seventy-five-year-old Brigid French, whose evidence was given in Irish. This witness added that she was *so taken up with the Blessed Virgin*, and felt such great delight in looking at her, that, although she saw the other figures, she did not give much attention to them.

Patrick Hill, then about fifteen years of age, testified, however, that he saw with Our Lady, "St. Joseph and St. John, and an altar with a lamb on the altar, and a cross behind the lamb. The figures were full and round, as if they had body and life. As we approached, they seemed to go back a little towards the gable." It rained during the manifestation, he continued, but the people remained there, some praying, all looking at the vision. When he, himself, had prayed a little, he went into the chapel yard, and thus closer to the vision, seeing everything distinctly. Obviously, the figure of the Blessed Virgin as then seen, and afterwards scrupulously attested by this boy has been perpetuated in the study which, thanks to the reverent concern and genius of artists of recent years, we may now happily distinguish as that of *Our Lady of Knock*.

"I distinctly beheld the Blessed Virgin life-size," he declared, "standing about two feet or so above the ground, clothed in white robes which were fastened at the neck. She appeared to be praying. Her eyes were turned, as I saw, towards Heaven. She wore a brilliant crown on her head, and, over the forehead, where the crown fitted the brow, a beautiful rose. The crown appeared brilliant, and of a golden brightness, or deeper hue, than the striking whiteness of the robes she wore. The upper part of the crown appeared to be a series of sparkles, or glittering crosses. I saw her eyes. I noticed her hands and face, and her appearance."

The general testimony showed that St. Joseph appeared upon the right of Our Lady, his head inclined towards her, whilst St. John occupied the left of the vision, his left hand clasping a book, and his right hand raised as if in preaching. No word was uttered by any of the heavenly visitants. Such was the *Apparition of Knock*, the convincing appeal of which has been unshaken in countless hearts not only in Ireland but in every part of the world in which the name of Mary Mother of God is known and loved, for three score years.

The vision upon the evening of the 21st was not, however, the only one. Several further manifestations took place at intervals during the ensuing seven months.

Prodigious lights, flaming orbs, and stars of extraordinary radiance were seen about the spot of the Apparition on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6th January, 1880.

A little more than a month later, 10th February, eve of the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, silvery clouds appeared, with red tongues of flame shooting down from the skies, and in the midst of the wonder, standing upon a cloud, the Immaculate Mother. Three figures, with Our Blessed Lady again in the central position, were seen two days afterwards, 12th February. Finally, on 24th March and the two following days, embracing the vigil and Feast of the Annunciation, Our Saviour crucified was manifest. A peculiarly illuminated figure of the Blessed Virgin was also

seen, and, ultimately, St. Joseph with the Divine Child.

Long inherent traditions of a characteristic devotion to the Mother of God had, so to speak, prepared the people of Knock for the worthy acceptance of the wonder. Mary had been the loved intermediary of their trust in God through years of temporal travail. The humble piety with which they celebrated the Apparition shows how clearly they appreciated the unparalleled favour as an occasion only for the rejoicing of the soul. All their pious appreciation of the occurrence was concentrated in quiet thanksgiving to Almighty God. Spoken pride in the matter there was none, and their innocence of any endeavour to advance the fact of the Apparition to the material advantage of themselves, or of their village, and, indeed, of any desire that it should be availed of for the glorification of Knock, *a hamlet of poor sinners*, as one of them declared, or even be noised beyond the parish boundaries, was very marked. It was evidence of their worthiness that such a heavenly manifestation should have taken place in their midst.

The parish priest of Knock at the date of the Apparition was the Ven. Bartholomew Aloysius Cavanagh, Archdeacon of Tuam, a man of great sanctity and austerity, who was referred to as a saint even whilst he lived. In his priestly labours, it is said, love for the Mother of God, and attachment to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, were two particular characteristics. *“His sermons, always simple, were full of that ever-present devotion to the Mother of God, for whom his favourite title was ‘the ever Immaculate Mother of God.’ We now know that his people attributed the great favour of the reported vision of Our Blessed Lady to the holiness of their pastor. The late Mrs. O’Connell (née Mary Beirne), who was one of the most important witnesses, held that view strongly, and repeatedly, expressed it.”*

Archdeacon Cavanagh was not himself a witness of the Apparition, nor yet of any of the visions of the subsequent months. But in the seclusion of the thatched and whitewashed cottage, than which he would suffer no grander parochial residence, he had, it would appear, his own intimate visions of Our Lady. *“I heard the Blessed Virgin speaking on two occasions, and saw her more than once,* he has related. The same personal account reveals how from the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, 3rd December, 1880, when he was so favoured for the first time, he frequently, in the morning as well as at night, saw heavenly lights in his room, particularly on the Feasts of St. John Evangelist, 27th December and the Epiphany, but oftener, as he declared, than he would relate. *“I called my niece and my servants on two or three occasions to - witness these lights,”* the account concludes, *“and they saw them for nearly an hour each time, as they can testify. A great many other manifestations took place, which I would not wish to speak of.”* It should, however, be added that the saintly Archdeacon also testified as to having seen at the gable of the church at noon-day, heavenly lights in four columns with a figure surmounting one. Two men, who had seen this phenomenon at a considerable distance, drew his attention to it. There was a representation of an altar with stations grouped upon it to the east of the columns, he stated, whilst the remaining spaces of the gable were scrolled.

It was not to have been expected that the Apparition at Knock should have long remained a merely local wonder. Rapidly the news spread into the neighbouring parishes, thus throughout the country and abroad, bringing to the previously obscure village before a week had passed a concourse of pilgrims and of sufferers in need of heavenly relief from spiritual or physical maladies. The sensationalist and the curious, too, descended in force upon the village, the rear of this motley army of interest being brought up by press representatives from many parts, and prominent among them the special writers of several of the leading British newspapers.

The first recorded cure, the prodigious recovery of a person who had been hopelessly deaf, took place twelve days after the Apparition. It was quickly followed by others even more wonderful. A man stark blind regained his sight . . . A tubercular hip was miraculously made whole . . . A man was completely cured of spinal trouble. Spiritual favours kept pace with temporal blessings. There were in abundance, recalls to grace, reclamations from long lives of sin, rescues from moral despair, conversions to the True Faith, vocations. Within a year, the Diary kept by Archdeacon Cavanagh had record of several hundred cures, among the number, cases of cancer, paralysis, dropsy, rupture and epilepsy. The sixty years diffusion of heavenly aid through the advocacy of Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland, had been graciously inaugurated. *“Miracles were then the order of the day,”* declared our previously-quoted preacher of 1936, *“Never a Sunday or feast-day without some half-dozen miracles; but the one I was privileged to witness that day (the cure of the blind man already mentioned) was one of those we term in Theology as of first-class order.”*

As the Church, following the essential course of caution, is never precipitate in such matters, the ecclesiastical authorities of the Archdiocese of Tuam in which the parish is situate, remained, reticent and inactive in regard of the

Apparition during the immediately ensuing months. But presently the reports from Knock, and the daily scenes there rendered the practical attention of the diocesan superiors advisable, if not imperative. Accordingly, on 8th October, 1879, an informal Commission of Enquiry, constituted by authority of the Archbishop of Tuam, was set up, and the depositions of the witnesses taken. The Commission consisted of the illustrious Irish scholar and historian, Canon Ulick Bourke, Canon James Waldron, Parish Priest of Ballyhaunis, and Archdeacon Cavanagh. Its deliberations, however, referred only to the occurrence of 21st August, omitting consideration of the subsequent phenomena, of which there exists, as a consequence, no official record.

As to the evidence which it was their duty to take, the Commissioners are said to have been satisfied that it was trustworthy. Among the heads of their enquiry were the considerations (a) as to whether the Apparition could be claimed to have emanated from natural causes; (b) as to whether there was any positive fraud. In the first cited particular it was reported that no solution as from natural causes could be offered, and in the second that such a suggestion had never, even remotely, been entertained.

But with the presentation of the report, the activities of the Commission obviously came to an end. Nor after the death of Archdeacon Cavanagh in 1897, was there any official, or systematic, return of the graces and favours attributed to recourse to the intercession of Our Lady at Knock, though these have been as numerous and as prodigious since that date as ever before. Yet it is right to acknowledge that all record of intervening cures and answers to prayer at the Shrine have not been lost, for through the years, private persons have taken notes as a result of which, account of many marvellous favours vouchsafed to pilgrims of the period, 1897-1929, has happily been preserved.

It would be almost a contempt of the historic renown of Knock-Mhuire to suggest, even by omission, that its claim to the veneration of men was suffered to pass unchallenged by scepticism, or uncommented upon by the ribald and profane. For, at least, a year after the Apparition, indeed, the Shrine attracted the scoffer and the doubter but exercised, too, the minds of many who were to be regarded as honest critics.

The attempted jibes of a section of the English and Scottish press, and the verbose hostility of the Orange-tinted organs of the Irish press, fell successively flat, and the doubter, as a rule was charitably left to nurse his misgivings in conscience and silence. Yet, when some of the latter made open controversy of their disbelief in the genuineness of the Knock vision, Catholics not being absent from their ranks, the matter had to be faced and the defence of the Shrine as openly prosecuted.

An extensive series of arguments was sustained by different persons in different parts to suggest for the Apparition an origin lesser than that of the supernatural, but these were effectively disposed of by the inability of their very protagonists to prove that the phenomenon had been produced by natural causes, or by material methods. The challenge of doubt, therefore, dwindling in a short time to the one contention that defenders of Knock frankly admitted could have suggested a possibility of solution, namely that a magic lantern had been availed of.

It was decided that the possibility should be explored, at Father Francis Lennon, Professor of Science at Maynooth College made little delay in transporting to Knock a powerful magic lantern, the rays of which he directed from every conceivable angle upon the gable of *the* Apparition, but only with such result as compelled him to declare the magic lantern contention as "*morally speaking, impossible.*" A like endeavour was made with equally negative result by an English journalist, and again by a body of some twenty priests from different places, who, with a complete and up-to-date magic lantern, as unavailingly re-picturized the vision before the eyes of all the original witnesses.

Mary Beirne declared that the priests sought to convince them that the pictures were what they had seen on the evening of 21st August, 1879, but added that they were not like the manifestation. "*No one could make them like the Apparitions!*" she concluded. At length, even the correspondent of the London *Daily Telegraph*, who had given vigilant attention upon the spot to the story of Knock and its immediate sequence, particularly to -the magic lantern theory, expressed his agreement that the impossibility of that contention had been proven, and, to his credit be it said, he duly reported his finding to the world in the columns of his newspaper.

Here it were meet to refer to what has been written concerning Knock-Mhuire by the erudite liturgical authority and canonist, Father Herbert Thurston, S.J. "*I find it hard to believe that these people—simple folk of all ages—were deliberately lying when they stated that they stood or knelt for an hour or more looking at these motionless figures and the illuminated wall of the church in the pouring rain. Although there were two or three children among those who*

saw the figures, the children were not the first to see them. All the witnesses there were in substantial agreement, though with slight divergences in their description of what they saw."

After the conclusion of the Commission of Enquiry in 1879, the ecclesiastical authorities took no further step in the matter of the shrine. But during the ensuing half-century the spontaneous and affectionate devotion of the faithful in all parts of the country fostered the habit of approach and confidence to such effect that Knock became one of the outstanding memorials of Irish Catholic Faith. Meanwhile, the return of remarkable spiritual and temporal favours continued, and there gradually generated a feeling among some leading Catholics in the West that the definite perpetuation of the Shrine, and of the honour of Our Lady of Knock, had assumed the character and urgency of a conscientious duty.

It was in 1935 that His Grace the present Archbishop of Tuam, Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin, having been approached by these zealous lay people, was pleased to appoint a Commission for the purpose of formulating all matters relevant to the ultimate submission to the Holy See of the claim for the approval of the Shrine. This Commission, which still functions, takes the evidence of all reported cures or favours. A year after its appointment, its deliberations had so magnificently progressed that the Archbishop was enabled to take the forward step of submitting the facts and claim of Knock-Mhuire for examination by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

The year 1935 was, in fact, a period of the most encouraging advance. Simultaneously with the establishment of the Commission, His Grace the Archbishop ordered a Crusade of Prayer, still enthusiastically proceeding, that its avowed endeavour for the canonical recognition of the Shrine would be speedily and fully attained. A few months later, he approved of the recruitment of a body to be known as the *Society for the Promotion of the Cause of Knock Shrine*. The objects of this association, the members of which have already rendered splendid service in the development of the devotion of Knock-Mhuire, are the furtherance of the Crusade of Prayer, the organization of pilgrimages, and the assistance at the Shrine of sick and infirm pilgrims. The members are also expected to co-operate, when required, with the Doctors in control of the Medical Bureau.

The latter essential establishment also dates from 1935. More than thirty doctors immediately offered their services, and the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul placed at their disposal a room in their hostel, also guaranteeing the assistance of a trained nursing sister throughout the annual pilgrimage season. Valuable work has been done at Knock by the devoted professional men of the Medical Bureau, which is now under the auspices of that praiseworthy association of Catholic physicians, *The Guild of SS. Luke, Cosmas, and Damian*.

Definite directions have been made by the Bureau for all invalids approaching the Shrine, and these are rigidly enforced, the principal requirement being that invalids come to Knock provided with a certificate from their own doctor, so that in the event of a cure a full history of the case should be immediately available. But the only purpose of the Bureau is to decide whether a cure had been, or could have been, effected by any means known to medical knowledge, and non-Catholic, or non-believing, doctors may be admitted to it.

In regard to this concentration of expert medical opinion upon the spot in case of emergency the dream of Archdeacon Cavanagh has been realized. He is said to have visualized, and even predicted the rise of the many institutions which have grown up around, and attendant upon, the Shrine. The provision of a hostel for pilgrims may have been inevitable, but it originated, none the less, in the plans for the Knock of the future pondered by the good pastor of the Apparition period. The existing hostel, in which since 1930 the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul have provided for the accommodation of visitors, temporary and permanent, was, indeed, by him erected. In it he hoped some day to house a community of priests, or monks, charged with providing for the passing needs of men visiting the shrine.

This aspect of his dream has almost been realized in the Committee of Priests desirous of rendering voluntary assistance in the spiritual interests of pilgrims, which, with the approval of Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin, has more recently been formed. The duties undertaken by these priests consist, of course, of the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, when necessary, at hours not provided for in the standing parochial arrangements, the hearing of Confessions, and the conduct of prayers and of the Stations of the Cross during pilgrimage devotions and vigils.

All services rendered at Knock-Mhuire are voluntarily discharged. Doctors, Nurses, Stewards (or male volunteers for general duty) and Handmaids, which is the description accorded the ladies who come forward to help in the

performance of the innumerable duties towards the comfort and convenience of invalids necessary during pilgrimage, are at their posts in pursuit of a labour of Christian love. All come to Knock and board there entirely their own expense.

Pilgrimage experiences are always highly edifying. It is at all rare to see non-pilgrimage visitors at Knock affected even to tears as quickly by the evidences of Irish Catholic Faith appreciable upon every hand as by the plight of the more helpless invalids, very many of whom stoically, and only too obviously, endure increase of pain, and even challenge discomfort and physical danger, in furtherance of their heroic piety and submissive spirit of hope.

Non-Catholic visitors frequently remain over a pilgrimage week-end in order to witness for themselves the singular scenes of which they shall have heard in the hotels and boarding houses of Claremorris and Ballyhaunis, the nearest neighbouring towns and cases have been known in which the experience has resulted in conversion to the True Faith of Christ.

The principal pilgrimage exercised is the traditional *Station* performed in full requirement by the active pilgrims, passively by the infirm invalids reposing upon bath-chairs and stretchers in front of the out-of-doors altar, though it is right to say that occasionally some of the latter insist upon being wheeled into the general procession, a wish honoured whenever advisable by the Handmaid, or Steward, on duty. The *Station* requires a preliminary visit to the Blessed Sacrament, after which the Stations of Cross are performed. The pilgrim next recites the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary as he moves around the exterior of church, an exercise most impressive when, as upon organised occasions, hundreds, sometimes thousands, join in processional performance. The Litany of the B.V.M. is then said at the Apparition gable as a prelude, so to speak, to return to the church for a concluding visit to the Blessed Sacrament. The order for organized pilgrimages is the same, with, however, the addition of hymns, including the *Credo*. Invariably in connection those more-public approaches of the Shrine the recitation of the entire Rosary, each five decades being said at pre-arranged intervals is extended throughout the period of the journeys to, and from Knock.

From the outset, all-night vigils have been peculiarly characteristic of the established devotions at the Shrine, and it has been suggested that the hallowed atmosphere of Knock-Mhuire may not fully be appreciated until one shall have participated in this impressive, if somewhat exacting exercise. It has transpired moreover, that many of the outstanding cures have taken place during the vigil, or immediately afterwards. Each vigil commences - with the celebration of the Eucharistic Hour from midnight. Private devotions for a further hour are then prescribed, and from two o'clock until four the pilgrim is engaged in the performance of the traditional *Station*. This exercise concluded, individual devotion is again resorted to, in preparation for Mass and Holy Communion, whereupon the vigil ends. On the evening of each recurring twenty-first of August, the Apparition is commemorated by a procession in and around the church with lighted candles.

It would be manifestly impossible to include in a work of our present limited scope any recital even remotely approaching a full account of the graces and favours reported from Knock-Mhuire during - recent years. We may, however, briefly offer details of a few of the more arresting cures accounted during the short interval since the launching of the Crusade of Prayer in 1935. Possibly the most remarkable among these later claims was that of a London Sister of Charity, who had long suffered from an ear-trouble, having been attended without avail by several leading specialists. An operation was eventually performed, and the patient was ordered to bed for six months, the surgeon expressing but little hope for her survival, and none for her hearing. But on the following day, the Sister was out of bed, and apparently restored to normal vigour. A non-Catholic doctor, who had previously treated her, was then brought to examine her. He found the wounds healed, and the hearing perfect. "*You are cured,*" he said, "*But it was nothing that I did!*" The Sister attributed her cure solely to the intercession of Our Lady of Knock, in whose honour she had commenced a Novena, applying a piece of cement from the Apparition gable to the affected part. On the fourth day of the Novena she rose in obedience, as she declared, to a voice, saying "*Get up, Sister, you are cured!*"

In 1936, a young Co. Mayo man was cured of an unsightly and painful rash of long-standing, after bathing his face with water in which a little clay brought from Knock had been placed This sufferer mentions in his thanksgiving that he had had no relief whatever from different methods of treatment, undergone in Dublin and London. A County Wexford child made in 1937 marvellous recovery from an attack of meningitis, which had threatened him with imbecility, after his heart-broken parents had, as a last resource, bathed his head with holy water from Knock. From

Cork a victim of a serious mastoid reported during the same year, how the wound had unaccountably begun to heal upon return from a pilgrimage to the Shrine, a complete cure being ultimately effected, despite the fact of earlier protracted surgical treatment, which had culminated in two unsuccessful operations. In this case, a slight injury to the face and one of the eyes, sustained during the second operation, was also cured after recourse to Our Lady of Knock. A Sligo pilgrim was cured of neuritis; a Kildare man reported how as a child he had been brought from stone-deafness to perfect hearing after performing the *Station* at the guidance of his parents; a Mayo mother preserved her baby from imminent danger of choking by sprinkling of Knock water; the crippled arm of a priest was miraculously restored to normality; an American devotee was cured of gangrene after the pious application of clay from near the Shrine; an Australian professional man attributed his recovery from pyorrhea and complete restoration to health, to the advocacy of Our Lady of Knock; a County Galway woman after visiting the shrine was cured of a serious nervous malady which doctors told her had baffled them. Cures as recently reported include also cases of leprosy, cancer, and advanced lung disease. -

There are, however, other categories in which the intercession of Mary of Knock has worked wonders for her clients in need.

"My married brother, who has five young children was two years out of work," runs an acknowledgement from County Limerick. *"I made a novena to Our Lady of Knock for him, and the very next day he called to tell me that he had got a permanent job with good pay."* A mother attested from County Wicklow that, thanks to Our Lady of Knock, her son successfully passed an examination. Three special favours vouchsafed, one upon the day upon which a Cork pilgrim prayed at the shrine. *"I have never ceased to pray that Knock would become the Lourdes of Ireland,"* wrote a London lady who after making a pilgrimage had a wonderful answer to prayer. A Galway student, told by his teachers that he was hopelessly backward, and had no chance of success, put his trust; in the intercession of Our Lady of Knock, and passed the examination. The official publications in connection with the Shrine suggest that spiritual favours, too, have been so numerous during the short period referred to as to be considered particularly characteristic of Knock.

In view of the references made in the above-quoted acknowledgements to Knock cement, it may be necessary to explain that this substance indicates the coating of the Church gable against which the Apparition was actually manifest. During the years immediately following upon the wonder, pilgrims made a habit of piously detaching portions which they availed of, as seen, in the character of a relic. But for obvious reasons, the practice had to be discontinued, so that pieces of the original wall-fabric are no longer obtainable. Pilgrims, however, are now accustomed to treasure clay taken from the Church enclosure in the near vicinity of the shrine, which, of course, is permissible. Knock water is the ordinary holy water contained in two large tanks placed adjacent to the Apparition Gable, and always accessible to pilgrims. Knock-Mhuire is situated in that part of East Mayo through which meanders the little River Gloire, at a distance of about one hundred and twenty miles from Dublin, and at equal distance from Claremorris, Ballyhaunis, and Kiltimagh, a half dozen miles in either instance.

The journey is made by rail to one of the centres named, thence by bus, always in readiness in the case of organized pilgrimages, or by hired conveyance always easily to be procured by private pilgrims. Claremorris is invariably the railway destination of pilgrimages from the South of Ireland, and from the southernmost parts of the West, whilst Kiltirnagh serves for Northern seekers of the Shrine. Pilgrims from Dublin and the East detrain, as a rule, at Ballyhaunis, and come from the West generally by one or other of the railway branch lines connected with either of the termini named. In many cases it should be remarked, pilgrims resident in the nearer but still distant, parts of Connacht make the journey on foot, frequently returning to their homes by the same method.

The village is but one of the many such places characteristic of County Mayo, having in itself but a very small population, housed chiefly in cottages clean and comfortable, but of the olden peculiarly picturesque type. The fame of Knock, however, has pardonably stimulated modest town-planning ambitions in the breasts of its inhabitants, and the interests of the future in this regard are being championed and vigilantly guarded by the Mayo County Council. Grateful tribute is due to that body for having so promptly and so determinedly defeated the attempt to commercialize the possibilities offered by the continual stream of pilgrims at the hallowed place made by persons from outside parts soon after the devotional appeal of Knock had received the new impetus accorded it by the several forward

developments of 1935. This action resulted in the removal of some stalls hastily erected for mercantile purposes upon the public road near the church and Shrine, and in the formulation of regulations which will prevent for all time the commercial exploitation of the appeal of Knock-Mhuire by any means. The powers sought and obtained by the Council will, it is pleasing to read, enable that body *to negotiate with persons concerned for the purpose of acquiring the land necessary for the better laying out of a suitable surrounding for an Irish Shrine to Our Blessed Lady.*

Historically, the village is non-distinctive. Even though within hearing distance of Killala's broad bay and places of like high sounding note in national story, Knock would appear to have slumbered in philosophic peace whilst the more strenuous chapters of Irish history were being written. Two years previous to the penning of these lines, the writer endeavoured to discover by casual enquiry upon the spot something of outstanding importance in the secular, or national history of the place, but the effort was unrewarded. Two or three men seemed to harbour an idea that something or other had happened in the neighbourhood during *Ninety-Eight*, though neither could refer informedly to any such occurrence, and all appeared indifferent in regard of its historical importance. Their attitude was a reproof, and though I did not immediately so recognize it, a well-deserved one. I was to have known, as I ought, and as all corners and goers in the village must know, that Knock was reserved for the one occurrence which was to raise its name high above all considerations of common historical import. Nothing meriting special record happened there until that Assumption octave—eve of holy renown. The only illustrious one concerned in extending the name of this Mayo village, and in the making of its fame, was Our Lady of Knock. Mary, the secret of its holiness, is also the secret of its history.

Knock, therefore, has no man-made memorials of village patriotism or prowess. Its parish church, scene of its one and incomparably-memorable event, disclose in its plain walls and slightly ornate bell-tower, the only architectural pretensions of the place. The edifice, which is of cruciform order, and not spacious, was built by Father Patrick O'Grady, P.P., in 1825, the tower, accommodating the principal entrance, being added by Archdeacon Cavanagh during the year following the Apparition. A later pastor, Father John J. Tuffy, considerably enlarged the building in the endeavour to meet the ever-increasing pilgrimage demands. The interior was greatly beautified as a result of further zealous activity upon the part of the same parish priest, though it had already been embellished by frequent gifts made by pilgrims vouchsafed favours at the Shrine. These are now many, the most remarkable being, perhaps, an elaborate banner of green satin, inscribed in letters of gold: "*Toronto is Grateful.*"

This was presented to the shrine by Most Rev. Dr. Lynch, Archbishop of Toronto, in order to perpetuate his thanksgiving for a favour received upon recourse to Our Lady of Knock very soon after the Apparition. He travelled from Canada in 1882, specially in order to make personal thanksgiving at the Shrine. Archbishop Lynch was probably the first apostle of devotion to Our Lady of Knock beyond the Atlantic, for he preached of her advocacy almost without cease to his own flock, and never failed to urge priests of his own archdiocese visiting Ireland to include in their itinerary a visit to Knock. Afterwards, he wrote an account of the deep impression which his own visit had made upon him, and expressed his conviction that ultimately the Shrine and its devotion would be given canonical approval. Gifts from two other Archbishops are also included among the votive offerings seen in the church interior. One, presented by the late Archbishop Murphy, of Hobart, Tasmania,—a painting in oils of the Apparition, nine feet by seven—is to be seen above the door upon the Epistle side, and, in the corresponding position upon the Gospel side, is a beautifully executed canvas of St. Joseph with the Holy Child, given by Most Rev. Dr. Clune, C.S.S.R., Archbishop of Perth, Australia.

The church occupies an expansively enclosed space in mid-village, wherein the first object of interest is the gable (the end, or altar, wall) upon which the Apparition was seen. The hallowed space has now been railed in, but life—size figures of whitest marble have been arranged in reproduction of the wonder exactly as described by the witnesses. Other marble statues are to be seen at different points around the enclosure, the devotional aspect of which has latterly been brought to irresistible completion of appeal by the erection of Stations of the Cross, which are the happy outcome of a widely-circulated shilling-subscription list furthered by the members of the *Society for the Promotion of the Cause of Knock Shrine.*

Despite the glory of its three score years, and in fact of the almost hourly reports of marvellous graces and favours granted upon supplication of Almighty God through Our Blessed Lady in its name, Knock still, if even to fast-

diminishing extent, excites the objections of scepticism. Nevertheless, contention has been reduced to one note of challenge, namely that, contrary to the experience of St. Bernadette at Lourdes, and of favoured mediums of other heavenly manifestations, no word was heard by those to whom the Blessed Virgin appeared at Knock, no message given such as the plea for *penance* -addressed by the Mother of God to the little rustic maiden of 1858 from the Grotto above the waters of the Gave. Nor did the Apparition occur at any moment of import for the Faith, or for the world, it has been objected, such, as if in confirmation of the Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in the case of Lourdes.

But spoken messages are not essential to the authenticity of claims to visions. Many saints have had visions of Our Divine Lord, of Our Lady, and of other Saints, in which no word was uttered. St. John of the Cross expressed the view that messages *are* sometimes apt to occasion difficulty in interpretation, the inference being that they are likely to be misunderstood by the average mortal hearer. The Cistercian Father already quoted has dealt with the objection put forward as upon this point, and the reasonableness of his rejoinder cannot but help to fortify the defences of the Knock devotion against further attacks by the sceptics:

The mission of Mary to Knock was not one of rebuke or complaint against our people as was the case at La Salette and Lourdes against the prevailing vices and abuses that were shaking the very-foundations of the Faith in France in those days. Neither was it a call to do penance, as on those occasions. No, Mary's mission to her faithful Irish people that day was rather one of compassion and comfort in those dark days of their sorrow and sufferings, with an implied admonition, no doubt, of dangers ahead, and the imperative need of prayer."

As to the urgency of heavenly indication at the period in which the Apparition at Knock occurred, it need only be recalled that even as late as 1879, the peasant population of Ireland lived under conditions in regard of which an English writer stated humanity would shrink *startled and appalled*. Injustice trod cruelly upon Ireland. The Apparition of the Virgin Mother of God at Knock, proved then, the illumination of the temporal future of the Irish peasant or agricultural population. With what satisfaction may we get recall the inspiring experience of having heard the utmost proof of that illumination, in the person of a Catholic Minister of an Irish native government (Mr. Tomas Derrig, Minister for Education) declare in a lecture on the Apparition, delivered in a Dublin theatre in December, 1936 "*This bright light seems to have been the harbinger of better days for our people. World-wide sympathy was aroused. America, Australia, France, India, and Great Britain subscribed huge sums for relief. Seed was distributed; works were started; a good harvest followed. A tragedy, perhaps, as great as that of 1846 was averted. Michael Davitt established the Land League, and this was soon followed by a Land Act and other measures of amelioration. Since then conditions have been improving steadily, and, thank God, we are never likely to see the spectre of Famine in Ireland again.*"

As we close this sketch, the sixtieth year since the Apparition at Knock has been completed. In the fact we find our concluding reflection. Does it not suffice as proof of the authenticity of the claim that even under the fire of ridicule, adverse criticism, and open hostility, the belief that Our Blessed Lady with St. Joseph and St. John Evangelist stood for two hours in the midst of those humble Mayo villagers has flourished as a flower of Irish Faith, sending forth its fragrance to the ends of the earth?
