

Biddy Early

Lady Gregory

1920

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Visions and beliefs in the West of Ireland

IN talking to the people I often heard the name of Biddy Early, and I began to gather many stories of her, some calling her a healer and some a witch. Some said she had died a long time ago, and some that she was still living. I was sure after a while that she was dead, but was told that her house was still standing, and was on the other side of Slieve Echtge, between Feakle and Tulla. So one day I set out and drove Shamrock, my pony, to a shooting lodge built by my grandfather in a fold of the mountains, and where I had sometimes, when a young girl, stayed with my brothers when they were shooting the wild deer that came and sheltered in the woods. It had like other places on our estate a border name brought over from Northumberland, but though we called it Chevy Chase the people spoke of its woods and outskirts as Daire-caol, the Narrow Oak Wood, and Daroda, the Two Roads, and Druim-da-Rod, their Ridge. I stayed the night in the low thatched house, setting out next day for Feakle " eight strong miles over the mountain." It was a wild road, and the pony had to splash his way through two unbridged rivers, swollen with the summer rains. The red mud of the road, the purple heather and foxglove, the brown bogs were a contrast to the grey rocks and walls of Burren and Aidhne, and there were many low hills brown when near, misty blue in the distance; then the Golden Mountain, Slieve nan-Or, " where the last great battle will be fought before the end of the world." Then I was out of Connacht into Clare, the brown turning to green pasture as I drove by Raftery's Lough Greine.

I put up my pony at a little inn. There were portraits of John Dillon and Michael Davitt hanging in the parlour, and the landlady told me Parnell's likeness had been with them, until the priest had told her he didn't think well of her hanging it there. There was also on the wall, in a frame, a warrant for the arrest of one of her sons, signed by, I think, Lord Cowper, in the days of the Land War. " He got half a year in gaol the same year Parnell did. He got sick there, and though he lived for some years the doctor said when he died the illness he got in gaol had to do with his death."

I had been told how to find Biddy Early's house " beyond the little humpy bridge," and I walked on till I came to it, a poor cottage enough, high up on a mass of rock by the roadside. There was only a little girl in the house, but her mother came in afterwards and told me that Biddy Early had died about twenty years before, and that after they had come to live in the house they had been " annoyed for a while" by people coming to look for her. She had sent them away, telling them Biddy Early was dead, though a friendly priest had said to her, " Why didn't you let on you were her and make something out of them?" She told me some of the stories I give below, and showed me the shed where the healer had consulted with her invisible friends. I had already been given by an old patient of hers a " bottle" prepared for the cure, but which she had been afraid to use. It lies still unopened on a shelf in my store-room. When I got back at nightfall to the lodge in the woods I found many of the neighbours gathered there, wanting to hear news of " the Tulla Woman" and to know for certain if she was dead. I think as time goes on her fame will grow and some of the myths that always hang in the air will gather round her, for I think the first thing I was told of her was, " There used surely to be enchanters in the old time, magicians and free-masons. Old Biddy Early's power came from the same thing."

An Old Woman in the Lodge Kitchen says : Do you remember the time John Kevin beyond went to see Biddy Early, for his wife, she was sick at the time. And Biddy Early knew everything, and that there was a forth behind her house, and she said, “ Your wife is too fond of going out late at night.”

I was told by a Gate-keeper : There was a man at Cranagh had one of his sheep shorn in the night, and all the wool taken. And he got on his horse and went to Feakle and Biddy Early, and she told him the name of the man that did it, and where it was hidden, and so he got it back again.

There was a man went to Biddy Early, and she told him that the woman he'd marry would have her husband killed by his brother. And so it happened, for the woman he married was sitting by the fire with her husband, and the brother came in, having a drop of drink taken, and threw a pint pot at him that hit him on the head and killed him. It was the man that married her that told me this.

Mrs. Kearns : Did I know any one that was taken by them ? Well, I never knew one that was brought back again. Himself went one time to Biddy Early for his uncle, Donohue, that was sick, and he found her there and her fingers all covered with big gold rings, and she gave him a bottle, and she said : “ Go in no house on your way home, or stop nowhere, or you'll lose it.” But going home he had a thirst on him and he came to a public-house, and he wouldn't go in, but he stopped and bid the boy bring him out a drink. But a little farther on the road the horse got a fall, and the bottle was broke.

Mrs. Cregan : It's I was with this woman here to Biddy Early. And when she saw me, she knew it was for my husband I came, and she looked in her bottle and she said, “ It's nothing put upon him by my people that's wrong with him.” And she bid me give him cold oranges and some other things—herbs. He got better after.

Daniel Curtin : Did I ever hear of Biddy Early ? There's not a man in this countryside over forty year old that hasn't been with her some time or other. There's a man living in that house over there was sick one time, and he went to her, and she cured him, but says she, “ You'll have to lose something, and don't fret after it.” So he had a grey mare and she was going to foal, and one morning when he went out he saw that the foal was born, and was lying dead by the side of the wall. So he remembered what she said to him and he didn't fret.

There was one Dillane in Kinvara, Sir William knew him well, and he went to her one time for a cure. And Father Andrew came to the house and was mad with him for going, and says he, “ You take the cure out of the hands of God.” And Mrs. Dillane said, “ Your Reverence, none of us can do that.” “ Well,” says Father Andrew, “ then I'll see what the devil can do and I'll send my horse tomorrow, that has a sore in his leg this long time, and try will she be able to cure him.”

So next day he sent a man with his horse, and when he got to Biddy Early's house she came out, and she told him every word that Father Andrew had said, and she cured the sore. So after that, he left the people alone ; but before it, he'd be dressed in a frieze coat and a riding whip in his hand, driving away the people from going to her.

She had four or five husbands, and they all died of drink one after another. Maybe twenty or thirty people would be there in the day looking for cures, and every one of them would bring a bottle of whiskey. Wild cards they all were, or they wouldn't have married her. She'd help too to bring the butter back. Always on the first of May, it used to be taken, and maybe what would be taken from one man would be conveyed to another.

Mr. McCabe : Biddy Early ? Not far from this she lived, above at Feakle. I got cured by her myself one time. Look at this thumb—I got it hurted one time, and I went out into the field after and was ploughing all the day, I was that greedy for work. And when I went in I had to lie on the bed with the pain of it, and it swelled and the arm with it, to the size of a horse's thigh. I stopped two or three days in the bed with the pain of it, and then my wife went to see Biddy Early and told her about it, and she came home and the next day it burst, and you never seen anything like all the stuff that came away from it. A good bit after I went to her myself, where it wasn't quite healed, and she said, " You'd have lost it altogether if your wife hadn't been so quick to come." She brought me into a small room, and said holy words and sprinkled holy water and told me to believe. The priests were against her, but they were wrong. How could that be evil doing that was all charity and kindness and healing ?

She was a decent looking woman, no different from any other woman of the country. The boy she was married to at the time was lying drunk in the bed. There were side-cars and common cars and gentry and country people at the door, just like Gort market, and dinner for all that came, and everyone would bring her something, but she didn't care what it was. Rich farmers would bring her the whole side of a pig. Myself, I brought a bottle of whiskey and a shilling's worth of bread, and a quarter of sugar and a quarter pound of tea. She was very rich, for there wasn't a farmer but would give her the grass of a couple of bullocks or a filly. She had the full of a field of fillies if they'd all been gathered together. She left no children, and there's no doubt at all that the reason of her being able to do cures was that she was away seven years. She didn't tell me about it but she spoke of it to others.

When I was coming away I met a party of country people on a cart from Limerick, and they asked where was her house, and I told them : " Go on to the cross, and turn to the left, and follow the straight road till you come to the little humpy bridge, and soon after that you'll come to the house."

But the priests would be mad if they knew that I told any one the way.

She died about twelve year ago ; I didn't go to the wake myself, or the funeral, but I heard that her death was natural.

No, Mrs. Early is no relation to Biddy Early—the nuns asked her the same thing when she was married. A cousin of hers had her hand cut with a jug that was broke, and she went up to her and when she got there, Biddy Early said : " It's a thing you never should do, to beat a child that breaks a cup or a jug." And sure enough it was a child that broke it, and she beat her for doing it. But cures she did sure enough.

Bartley Coen : There was a neighbour of my own, Andrew Dennehy : I was knocked up by him one night to go to the house, because he said they were calling to him. But when they got there, there was nothing to be found. But some see these things, and some can't. It's against our creed to believe in them. And the priests won't let on that they believe in them themselves, but they are more in dread of going about at night than any of us. They were against Biddy Early too. There was a man I knew living near the sea, and he set out to go to her one time. And on his way he went into his brother-in-law's house, and the priest came in there, and bid him not to go on. " Well, Father," says he, " cure me yourself if you won't let me go to her to be cured." And when the priest wouldn't do that (for the priests can do many cures if they like to), he went on to her. And the minute he came in, " Well," says she, " you made a great fight for me on the way." For though it's against our creed to believe it, she could hear any earthly thing that was said in every part, miles off. But she had two red eyes, and some used to say, " If she can cure so much, why can't she cure her own eyes ?"

No, she wasn't *away* herself. It is said it was from a son of her own she got the knowledge, a little chap that was astray. And one day when he was lying sick in the bed he said : " There's such and such a woman has a hen down in the pot, and if I had the soup of the hen, I think it would cure me." So the mother went to the house, and when she got there, sure enough, there was a hen in the pot on the fire. But she was ashamed to tell what she came for, and she let on to have only come for a visit, and so she sat down. But presently in the heat of the talking she told what the little chap had said. " Well," says the woman, " take the soup and welcome, and the hen too if it will do him any good." So she brought them with her, and when the boy saw the soup, " It can't cure me," says he, " for no earthly thing can do that. But since I see how kind and how willing you are, and did your best for me, I'll leave you a way of living." And so he did, and taught her all she knew. That's what's said at any rate.

Mr. Fahy : Well, that's what's believed, that it's from her son Bidly Early got it. After his death always lamenting for him she was, till he came back, and gave her the gift of curing.

She had no red eyes, but was a fresh clean-looking woman ; sure any one might have red eyes when they'd got a cold.

She wouldn't refuse even a person that would come from the very bottom of the black North.

" I was with Bidly Early myself one time, and got a cure from her for my little girl that was sick. A bottle of whiskey I brought her, and the first thing she did was to open it and to give me a glass out of it. " For," says she, " you'll maybe want it my poor man." But I had plenty of courage in those days.

The priests were against her ; often Father Boyle would speak of her in his sermons. They can all do those cures themselves, but that's a thing it's not right to be talking about.

The Little Girl of Bidly Early's House : The people do be full of stories of all the cures she did. Once after we came to live here a carload of people came, and asked was Bidly Early here, and my mother said she was dead. When she told the priest he said she had a right to shake a bottle and say she was her, and get something from them. It was by the bottle she did all, to shake it, and she'd see everything when she looked in it. Sometimes she'd give a bottle of some cure to people that came, but if she'd say to them, " You'll never bring it home," break it they should on the way home, with all the care they'd take of it.

She was as good, and better, to the poor as to the rich. Any poor person passing the road, she'd call in and give a cup of tea or a glass of whiskey to, and bread and what they wanted.

She had a big chest within in that room, and it full of pounds of tea and bottles of wine and of whiskey and of claret, and all things in the world. One time she called in a man that was passing and gave him a glass of whiskey, and then she said to him, " The road you were going home by, don't go by it." So he asked why not, and she took the bottle—a long shaped bottle it was—and looked into it, holding it up, and then she bid him look through it, and he'd see what would happen him. But her husband said, " Don't show it to him, it might give him a fright he wouldn't get over." So she only said, " Well, go home by another road." And so he did and got home safe, for in the bottle she had seen a party of men that wouldn't have let him pass alive. She got the rites of the Church when she died, but first she had to break the bottle.

It was from her brother that she got the power, when she had to go to the workhouse, and he came back, and gave her the way of doing the cures.

The Blacksmith I met near Tulla : I know you to be a respectable lady and an honourable one because I know your brothers, meeting them as I do at the fair of Scariff. No fair it would be if they weren't there. I knew Bidly Early well, a nice fresh-looking woman she was. It's to her the people used to be flocking, to the door and even to the window, and if they'd come late in the day, they'd have no chance of getting to her, they'd have to take lodgings for the night in the town. She was a great woman. If any of the men that came into the house had a drop too much drink taken, she'd turn them out if they said an unruly word. And if any of them were fighting or disputing or going to law, she'd say, "Be at one, and ye can rule the world." The priests were against her and used to be taking the cloaks and the baskets from the country people to keep them back from going to her.

I never went to her myself—for you should know that no ill or harm ever comes to a blacksmith.

An Old Midwife : Tell me now is there anything wrong about you or your son that you went to that house ? I went there but once myself, when my little girl that was married was bad, after her second baby being born. I went to the house and told her about it, and she took the bottle and shook it and looked in it, and then she turned and said something to himself [her husband] that I didn't hear—and she just waved her hand to me like that, and bid me go home, for she would take nothing from me. But himself came out and told that what she was after seeing in the bottle was my little girl, and the coffin standing beside her. So I went home, and sure enough on the tenth day after, she was dead.

The lodge people came rushing out to see the picture of Bidly Early's house and ask, "Did she leave the power to any one else ?" and I told of the broken bottle. But Mr. McCabe said, "She only had the power for her own term, and no one else could get it from her."

I asked old Mr. McCabe if he had lost anything when she cured him, and he said : "Not at that time, but sometimes I thought afterwards it came on my family when I lost so many of my children. A grand stout girl went from me, stout and broad, what would ail her to go ?"

I was told by Mat King : Bidly Early surely did thousands of cures. Out in the stable she used to go, where her friends met her, and they told her all things. There was a little priest long ago used to do cures,—Soggarthin Mina, they used to call him,—and once he came in this house he looked up and said, "There—it's full of them—there they are."

There was a man, one Flaherty, came to his brother-in-law's house one day to borrow a horse. And the next day the horse was sent back, but he didn't come himself. And after a few days more they went to ask for him, but he had never come back at all. So the brother-in-law went to Bidly Early's and she and some others were drinking whiskey, and they were sorry that they were near at the bottom of the bottle. And she said : "That's no matter, there's a man on his way now, there'll soon be more." And sure enough there was, for he brought a bottle with him. So when he came in, he told her about Flaherty having disappeared. And she described to him a corner of a garden at the back of a house and she said, "Go look and you'll find him there," and so they did, dead and buried.

Another time a man's cattle was dying, and he went to her and she said, "Is there such a place as Benburb, having a forth up on the hill beyond there ? for it's there they're gone." And sure enough, it was towards that forth they were straying before they died.

An Old Man on the Beach : The priests were greatly against Bidly Early. And there's no doubt it was from the faeries she got the knowledge. But who wouldn't go to hell for a cure if one of his own was sick ? And the priests don't like to be doing cures themselves. Father Flynn said to me (rather incoherent in the high wind), if I do them, I let the devil into me. But

there was Father Carey used to do them, but he went wrong, with the people bringing too much whiskey to pay him—and Father Mahony has him stopped now.

Maher of Slieve Echtge : I knew a man went to Bidly Early, and while she was in the other room he made the tongs red hot and laid them down, and when she came back she took them up and burned herself. And he said, if she had known anything she'd have known not to touch it, that it was red hot. So he walked off and asked for no cure.

The Spinning-Woman : Bidly Early was a witch, wherever she got it. There was a priest at Feakle spoke against her one time, and soon after he was passing near her house and she put something on the horse so that he made a bolt into the river and stopped there in the middle, and wouldn't go back or forward. Some people from the neighbourhood went to her, and she told them all about the whole place, and that one time there was a great battle about the castle, and that there is a passage going from here to the forth beyond on Dromore Hill, and to another place that's near Maher's house. And she said that there is a cure for all sicknesses hidden between the two wheels of Ballylee mill. And how did she know that there was a mill here at all ? Witchcraft wherever she got it ; away she may have been in a trance. She had a son, and one time he went to the hurling beyond at some place in Tipperary, and none could stand against him ; he was like a deer.

I went to Bidly Early one time myself, about my little boy that's now in America that was lying sick in the house. But on the way to her I met a sergeant of police and he asked where was I going, and when I told him, he said, to joke with me, " Bidly Early's dead." " May the devil die with her," says I. Well, when I got to the house, what do you think, if she didn't know that, and what I said. And she was vexed and at the first, she would do nothing for me. I had a pound for her here in my bosom. But when I held it out she wouldn't take it, but she turned the rings on her fingers, for she had a ring for every one, and she said, " A shilling for this one, sixpence for another one." But all she told me was that the boy was nervous, and so he was, she was right in that, and that he'd get well, and so he did.

There was a man beyond in Cloon, was walking near the gate the same day and his little boy with him, and he turned his foot and hurt it, and she knew that. She told me she slept in Ballylee mill last night, and that there was a cure for all things in the world between the two wheels there. Surely she was *away* herself, and as to her son, she brought him back with her, and for eight or nine year he lay in the bed in the house. And he'd never stir so long as she was in it, but no sooner was she gone away anywhere than he'd be out down the village among the people, and then back again before she'd get to the house.

She had three husbands, I saw one of them when I was there, but I knew by the look of him he wouldn't live long. One man I know went to her and she sent him on to a woman at Kilrush—one of her own sort, and they helped one another. She said to some woman I knew : " If you have a bowl broke or a plate throw it out of the door, and don't make any attempt to mend it, it vexes *them*."

Mrs. McDonagh : Our religion doesn't allow us to go to fortune tellers. They don't get the knowledge from God, and so it must be from demons.

The priests took the bottle from Bidly Early before she died, and they found black things in it.

I never went to Bidly Early myself. I think there was a good deal of devilment in the things she did. The priests can do cures as well as she did, but they don't like to do them, unless they're curates that like to get the money.

There was a man in Cloughareeva and his wife was that bad she would go out in her shift at night into the field. And he went to Biddy Early and she said, “ Within three days a disgraced priest will come to you and will cure her.”

And after three days the disgraced priest that had been put out for drink came bowling into the house, and they reached down from the shelf a bottle of whiskey. Father Boyle was mad when he heard of it, but he cured her all the same.

There was a man on this estate, and he sixty years, and he took to the bed, and his wife went to Biddy Early and she said, “ It can't be by *them* he's taken, what use would it be to them, he being so old.” And Biddy Early is the one that should surely know. I went to her myself one time, to get a cure for myself when I fell coming down that hill up there, and got a hurt on my knee. And she gave me one and she told me all about the whole place, and that there was a bowl broken in the house, and so there was. The priests can do cures by the same power that she had, but those that have much stock don't like to be doing them, for they're sure to lose all.

I knew one went to Biddy Early about his wife, and as soon as she saw him, she said, “ On the fourth day a discarded priest will call in and cure your wife” ; and so he did—one Father James.

Mrs. Nelly : The old man here that lost his hair went to Biddy Early but he didn't want to go, and we forced him and persuaded him. And when he got to the house she said, “ It wasn't of your own free will you came here,” and she wouldn't do anything for him.

She didn't like either for you to go too late. Dolan's sister was sick a long time, and when the brother went at the last to Biddy Early she gave him a bottle with a cure. But on the way home the bottle was broke, and the car, and the horse got a fright and ran away. She said to him then, “ Why did you go to cut down the bush of white thorn you see out of the window ?” And then she told him an old woman in the village had over-looked him—Murphy's sister—and she gave him a bottle to sprinkle about her house. I suppose she didn't like that bush being interfered with, she had too much charms.

And when Doctor Folan was sent for to see her he was led astray, and it is beyond Ballylee he found himself. And surely she was taken if ever any one was.

An Old Woman : I went up to Biddy Early's one time with another woman. A fine stout woman she was, sitting straight up on her chair. She looked at me and she told me that my son was worse than what I was, and for myself she bid me to take what I was taking before, and that's dandelions. Five leaves she bid me pick and lay them out on the table with three pinches of salt on the three middle ones. As to my son, she gave me a bottle for him but he wouldn't take it and he got better without.

The priests were against her, but there was one of them passed near her house one day, and his horse fell forward. And he sent his boy to her and she said, “ Tell him to spit on the horse and to say, “ God bless it,” and he did and it rose again. He had looked at it proud-like without saying “ God bless it” in his heart.

Daniel Shea : It was all you could do to get to Biddy Early with your skin whole, the priests were so set against her. I went to her one time myself, and it was hard when you got near to know the way, for all the people were afraid to tell it.

It was about a little chap of my own I went, that some strange thing had been put upon. When I got to her house there were about fifty to be attended to before me, and when my turn

came she looked in the bottle, a sort of a common greenish one that seemed to have nothing in it. And she told me where I came from, and the shape of the house and the appearance of it, and of the lake you see there, and everything round about. And she told me of a lime-kiln that was near, and then she said, "The harm that came to him came from the forth beyond that." And I never knew of there being a forth there, but after I came home I went to look, and there sure enough it was.

And she told me how it had come on him, and bid me remember a day that a certain gentleman stopped and spoke to me when I was out working in the hayfield, and the child with me playing about. And I remembered it well, it was old James Hill of Creen, that was riding past, and stopped and talked and was praising the child. And it was close by that forth beyond that James Hill was born.

It was soon after that day that the mother and I went to Loughrea, and when we came back, the child had slipped on the threshold of the house and got a fall, and he was screeching and calling out that his knee was hurt, and from that time he did no good, and pined away and had the pain in the knee always.

And Biddy Early said, "While you're talking to me now the child lies dying," and that was at twelve o'clock in the day. And she made up a bottle for me, herbs I believe it was made of, and she said, "Take care of it going home, and whatever may happen, don't drop it"; and she wrapped it in all the folds of my handkerchief. So when I was coming home and got near Tillyra I heard voices over the wall talking, and when I got to the Roxborough gate there were many people talking and coming to where we were. I could hear them and see them, and the man that was with me. But when I heard them I remembered what she said, and I took the bottle in my two hands and held it, and so I brought it home safely. And when I got home they told me the child was worse, and that at twelve o'clock the day before he lay as they thought dying. And when I brought the bottle to him, he pulled the bed-clothes up over his head, and we had the work of the world to make him taste it. But from the time he took it, the pain in the knee left him and he began to get better, and Biddy Early had told me not to let many days pass without coming to her again, when she gave me the bottle. But seeing him so well, I thought it no use to go again, and it was not on May Day, but it was during the month of May he died. He took to the bed before that, and he'd be always calling to me to come inside the bed where he was, and if I went in, he'd hardly let me go. But I got afraid, and I didn't like to be too much with him.

He was but eight years old when he died, but Ned Cahel that used to live beyond there then told me privately that when I'd be out of the house and he'd come in, the little chap would ask for the pipe, and take it and smoke it, but he'd never let me see him doing it. And he was old-fashioned in all his ways.

Another thing Biddy Early told me to do was to go out before sunrise to where there'd be a boundary wall between two or three estates, and to bring a bottle, and lay it in the grass and gather the dew into it. But there were hundreds of people she turned away, because she'd say, "What's wrong with you has nothing to do with my business."

There was a Clare woman with me when I went there, and she told me there was a boy from a village near her was brought tied in a cart to Biddy Early, and she said, "If I cure you, will you be willing to marry me?" And he said he would. So she cured him and married him. I saw him there at her house. It might be that she had the illness put upon him first.

The priests don't do cures by the same means, and they don't like to do them at all. It was in my house that you see that Father Gegan did one on Mr. Phayre. And he cured a girl up in the mountains after, and where is he now but in a madhouse. They are afraid of the power

they do them by, that it will be too strong for them. Some say the bishops don't like them to do cures because the whiskey they drink to give them courage before they do them is very apt to make drunkards of them. It's not out of the prayer-book they read, but out of the Roman ritual, and that's a book you can read evil out of as well as good.

There was a boy of the Saggartons in the house went to Bidy Early and she told him the house of his bachelor [the girl he would marry] and he did marry her after. And she cured him of a weakness he had and cured many, but it was seldom the bottle she'd give could be brought home without being spilled. I wonder did she go to them when she died. She got the cure among *them* anyway.

Mrs. Dillon : My mother got crippled in her bed one night—God save the hearers—and it was a long time before she could walk again with the pain in her back. And my father was always telling her to go to Bidy Early, and so at last she went. But she could do nothing for her, for she said, “What ails you has nothing to do with my business.” And she said, “You have lost three, and one was a grand little fair-haired one, and if you'd like to see her again, I'll show her to you.” And when she said that, my mother had no courage to look and to see the child she lost, but fainted then and there. And then she said, “There's a field of corn beyond your house and a field with hay, and it's not long since that the little fellow that wears a Llanberis cap fell asleep there on a cock of hay. And before the stooks of corn are in stacks he'll be taken from you, but I'll save him if I can.” And it was true enough what she said, my little brother that was wearing a Llanberis cap had gone to the field, and had fallen asleep on the hay a few days before. But no harm happened him, and he's all the brother I have living now. Out in the stable she used to go to meet her people.

Mrs. Locke : It was my son was thatching Heniff's house when he got the touch, and he came back with a pain in his back and in his shoulders, and took to the bed. And a few nights after that I was asleep, and the little girl came and woke me and said, “There's none of us can sleep, with all the cars and carriages rattling round the house.” But though I woke and heard her say that, I fell into a sound sleep again and never woke till morning. And one night there came two taps at the window, one after another, and we all heard it and no one there. And at last I sent the eldest boy to Bidy Early and he found her in the house. She was then married to her fourth man. And she said he came a day too soon and would do nothing for him. And he had to walk away in the rain. And the next day he went back and she said, “Three days later and you'd have been too late.” And she gave him two bottles, the one he was to bring to a boundary water and to fill it up, and that was to be rubbed to the back, and the other was to drink. And the minute he got them he began to get well, and he left the bed and could walk, but he was always delicate. When we rubbed his back we saw a black mark, like the bite of a dog, and as to his face, it was as white as a sheet.

I have the bottle here yet, though it's thirty year ago I got it. She bid the boy to bring whatever was left of it to a river, and to pour it away with the running water. But when he got well I did nothing with it, and said nothing about it—and here it is now for you to see. I never let on to Father Folan that I went to her, but one time the Bishop came, MacInerny. I knew he was a rough man, and I went to him and made my confession, and I said, “Do what you like with me, but I'd walk the world for my son when he was sick.” And all he said was, “It would have been no wonder if the two feet had been cut off from the messenger.” And he said no more and put nothing on me.

There was a boy I saw went to Bidy Early, and she gave him a bottle and told him to mind he did not lose it in the crossing of some road. And when he came to the place it was broke.

Often I heard of Biddy Early, and I knew of a little girl was sick and the brother went to Biddy Early to ask would she get well. And she said, “ They have a place ready for her, room for her they have.” So he knew she would die, and so she did.

The priests can do things too, the same way as she could, for there was one Mr. Lyne was dying, a Protestant, and the priest went in and baptized him a Catholic before he died, and he said to the people after, “ He’s all right now, in another world.” And it was more than the baptizing made him sure of that.

Mrs. Brennan, in the house beyond, went one time to Biddy Early, where the old man was losing his health. And all she told him was to bid him give over drinking so much whiskey. So after she said that, he used only to be drinking gin.

There was a boy went to Biddy Early for his father, and she said, “ It’s not any of my business that’s on him, but it’s good for yourself that you came to me. Weren’t you sowing potatoes in such a field one day and didn’t you find a bottle of whiskey, and bring it away and drink what was in it ?” And that was true and it must have been a bottle they brought out of some cellar and dropped there, for they can bring everything away, and put in its place what will look like it.

There was a boy near Feakle got the touch in three places, and he got a great desire to go out night-walking, and he got sick. And they asked Biddy Early and she said, “ Watch the hens when they come in to roost at night, and catch a hold of the last one that comes.” So the mother caught it, and then she thought she’d like to see what would Biddy Early do with it. So she brought it up to her house and laid it on the floor, and it began to rustle its wings, and it lay over and died. It was from her brother Biddy Early got the cure. He was sick a long time, and there was a whitethorn tree out in the field, and he’d go and lie under it for shade from the sun. And after he died, every day for a year she’d go to the whitethorn tree, and it is there she’d cry her fill. And then he brought her under and gave her the cure. It was after that she was in service beyond Kinvara. She did her first cure on a boy, after the doctors giving him up.

An Old Man from Kinvara : My wife is paralysed these thirty-six years, and the neighbours said she’d get well if the child died, for she got it after her confinement, all in a minute. But the child died in a year and eleven months, and she got no better. And then they said she’d get taken after twenty-one years, but that passed, and she’s just the same way. And she’s as good a Christian as any all the time.

I went to Biddy Early one time about her. She was a very old woman, all shaky, and the crankiest woman I ever saw. And the husband was a fine young man, and he lying in the bed. It was a man from Kinvara half-paralysed I brought with me, and she would do nothing for him at first, and then the husband bid her do what she could. So she took the bottle and shook it and looked in it, and she said what was in him was none of her business. And I had work to get him a lodging that night in Feakle, for the priests had all the people warned against letting any one in that had been to her. She wouldn’t take the whiskey I brought, but the husband and myself, we opened it and drank it between us.

She gave me a bottle for my wife, but when I got to the workhouse, where I had to put her in the hospital, they wouldn’t let me through the gate for they heard where I had been. So I had to hide the bottle for a night by a wall, on the grass, and I sent my brother’s wife to find it, and to bring it to her in the morning into the workhouse. But it did her no good, and Biddy Early told her after it was because I didn’t bring it straight to her, but had left it on the ground for the night.

Biddy Early beat all women. No one could touch her. I knew a girl, a friend of my own, at Burren and she was sick a long while and the doctors could do nothing for her, and the priests read over her but they could do nothing. And at last the husband went to Biddy Early and she said, "I can't cure her, and the woman that can cure her lives in the village with her." So he went home and told this and the women of the village came into the house and said, "God bless her," all except one, and nothing would make her come into the house. But they watched her, and one night when a lot of them were sitting round the fire smoking, she let a spit fall on the floor. So they gathered that up (with respects to you), and brought it in to the sick woman and rubbed it to her, and she got well. It might have done as well if they brought a bit of her petticoat and burned it and rubbed the ashes on her. But there's something strange about spits, and if you spit on a child or a beast it's as good as if you'd say, "God bless it."

John Curtin : I was with Biddy Early one time for my brother. She was out away in Ennis when we got to the house, and her husband that she called Tommy. And the kitchen was full of people waiting for her to come in. So then she came, and the day was rainy, and she was wet, and she went over to the fire, and began to take off her clothes, and to dry them, and then she said to her husband : "Tommy, get the bottle and give them all a drop." So he got the bottle and gave a drink to everyone. But my brother was in behind the door, and he missed him and when he came back to the fire she said : "You have missed out the man that has the best heart of them all, and there he is behind the door." And when my brother came out she said, "Give us a verse of a song," and he said, "I'm no songster," but she said, "I know well that you are, and a good dancer as well." She cured him and his wife after. There was a neighbour of mine went to her too, and she said : "The first time you got the touch was the day you had brought a cart of turf from that bog at Ballinabucky to Scahanagh. And when you were in the road you got it, and you had to lie down on the creel of turf till you got to the public road." And she told him that he had a pane of glass broke in his window and that was true enough. She must have been away walking with the faeries every night or how did she know that, or where the village of Scahanagh was ?

Mrs. Kenny has been twice to Biddy Early. Once for her brother who was ill, and light-headed and sent to Galway. And Biddy Early shook the bottle twice, and she said, "It is none of my business, and it's a heavy cold that settled in his head." And she would not take the shilling. A red, red woman she was.

Mary Glyn : I am a Clare woman, but the last fifty years I spent in Connacht. Near Feakle I lived, but I only saw Biddy Early once, the time she was brought to the committee and to the courthouse. She lived in a little house near Feakle that time, and her landlord was Dr. Murphy in Limerick, and he sent men to evict her and to pull the house down, and she held them in the door and said : "Whoever will be the first to put a bar to the house, he'll remember it." And then a man put his bar in between two stones, and if he did, he turned and got a fall someway and he broke the thigh. After that Dr. Murphy brought her to the court, "Faeries and all," he said, for he brought the bottle along with her. So she was put out, but Murphy had cause to remember it, for he was living in a house by himself, and one night it caught fire and was burned down, and all that was left of him was one foot that was found in a corner of the walls. She had four husbands, and the priest wouldn't marry her to the last one, and it was by the teacher that she was married. She was a good-looking woman, but like another, the day I saw her. My husband went to her the time Johnny, my little boy, was dying. He had a great pain in his temple, and she said : "He has enough in him to kill a hundred ; but if he lives till Monday, come and tell me." But he was dead before that. And she said, "If you came to me before this, I'd not have let you stop in that house you're in." But Johnny died ; and there was a blush over his face when he was going, and after that I couldn't look at him, but those that saw him said that *he* wasn't in it. I never saw him since, but often and often the father would go out thinking he might see him. But I know well he wouldn't like to come back and to see me fretting for him.

We left the house after that and came here. A travelling woman that came in to see me one time in that house said, "This is a fine airy house," and she said that three times, and then she said, "But in that corner of it you'll lose your son," and so it happened, and I wish now that I had minded what she said. A man and his family went into that house after, and the first summer they were in it, he and his sons were putting up a stack of hay in the field with pitchforks, and the pitchfork in his hand turned some way into his stomach and he died.

It is Biddy Early had the great name, but the priests were against her. There went a priest one time to stop her, and when he came near the door the horse fell that was in his car. Biddy Early came out then and bid him to give three spits on the horse, and he did that, and it rose up then and there. It was himself had put the evil eye on it. "It was yourself did it, you bodach," she said to the priest. And he said, "You may do what you like from this out, and I will not meddle with you again."

Mrs. Crone : I was myself digging potatoes out in that field beyond, and a woman passed by the road, but I heard her say nothing, but a pain came on my head and I fell down, and I had to go to my bed for three weeks. My mother went then to Biddy Early. Did you ever hear of her ? And she looked in the blue bottle she had, and she said my name. And she saw me standing before her, and knew all about me and said, "Your daughter was digging potatoes with her husband in the field, and a woman passed by and she said, 'It is as good herself is with a spade as the man,' " for I was a young woman at the time. She gave my mother a bottle for me, and I took three drinks of it in the bed, and then I got up as well as I was before.

Peter Feeney : Biddy Early said to a man that I met in America and that went to her one time, that this place between Finevara and Aughanish is the most haunted place in all Ireland.

Surely Biddy Early was *away* herself. That's what I always heard. And I hear that at a hurling near Feakle the other day there was a small little man, and they say he was a friend of hers and has got her gift.

Visions and beliefs in the west of Ireland (1920)

Author : Gregory, Lady, 1852-1932 ; Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865-1939

Subject : Folklore — Ireland

Publisher : New York : G. P. Putman's sons

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : University of California Libraries

Collection : cdl; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/visionsbeliefsin00gregrich>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

June 7 2011