

ASPECTS OF THE 1904 POGROM

Limerick April 4th 1904: Three foreign looking men walk down a city street. A small group of boys standing at a corner watch them approach. There is tension in the air. The men speak in hushed tones in a foreign language. As they come level with the corner, the youngsters shout abuse and throw stones at them. The noisy clatter of the stones rings out sharply in the quiet street. Suddenly there is a cry of pain; one of the three, a tall bearded man in black clothes, is hit. Limping, he is helped on by his companions who are desperately trying to get out of range of the flying stones. The injured man is the Jewish rabbi, Elias Bere Levin. The boys run off down a side street, off Carey's Road.

Within a fortnight a boy, John Raleigh, not quite fifteen years old, was brought before the court and charged with throwing the stone that struck the rabbi. In evidence Elias Levin said that he knew the boy quite well, as Raleigh had abused him on a number of previous occasions and had thrown stones at him on St. Patrick's Day. Isaac Vinegrand, a fellow Jew, corroborated this.

A friend of John Raleigh's testified that he had been with him at a Trades' Exhibition and later accompanied him to the house of a Mrs. Holmes where, he claimed, Raleigh was at the time of the assault. Mrs. Holmes supported this testimony in her evidence.

An R.I.C. sergeant said that he took Levin to Raleigh's house where he identified the boy as the person who had struck him with the stone.

Mr. Nash, Raleigh's solicitor, whose logic was cloudy but whose feeling for the Jews was clear, said that the evidence proved his client was innocent. There was a lot of talk, he said, about assaults on Jews in Limerick but he was walking the streets of the city day and night and never witnessed an assault. As far as he was concerned the assaults were just fabrications and were put about to enrich the Limerick Jews.

The residing magistrate, Mr. Hickson, who in some earlier assault cases had taken a lenient view, decided it was time to teach the citizens of Limerick that they could not go on harassing the Jews even if they (the Jews) had been condemned by the Director of the Redemptorist Confrater-

by Pat Feeley

nity. He said it was quite clear that Raleigh was guilty of the charges and that it was not his first time to cause trouble and annoyance to the Jews. Hickson, who was a Protestant, made it quite clear that he did not hold the youngsters responsible for the crusade against the Jews - 'other parties' were responsible for that. Nor was he in favour of sending young boys to jail.

But, on the other hand, the magistrates had a duty to protect people walking the streets and he was therefore sentencing Raleigh to one month's imprisonment, without hard labour.

There was consternation in the court when the sentence was announced. The defendant and his mother were crying. His brother appealed for clemency. Nash asked that the sentence be increased to allow for an appeal. But Hickson remained unmoved and the sentence stood. Raleigh was led away into tearful custody.



Father John Creagh

MAYORS OFFICE.

TOWN HALL.

LIMERICK, 20TH APRIL.

DEAR SIR,

A Requisition having been presented to me to call a Special Meeting of the Corporation to adopt a Memorial to the Lord Lieutenant on behalf of John Raleigh, sentenced to one month's imprisonment on 15th inst., and as such Meeting could not be properly held before the 25th inst., I have decided, in view of the

Notice of the special meeting of the Corporation.

The boy's family were not the only ones who were unhappy about the verdict. In an editorial the **Limerick Leader** said that deep indignation was felt throughout the city and accused the Jews of exaggerating the situation for their own ends. The writer worried that the 'outside world' would think the city was in a 'state of siege', with the Jews being 'stoned, mobbed, boycotted and starved'. (This in fact was what was happening). The editorial called for a public meeting which it hoped the 'Catholic magistrates' would attend. (1)

The public meeting did not take place but a special meeting of the Corporation did. It adopted a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant requesting clemency. There was unanimous support for this decision.

The meeting then went on to deal with the 'bad publicity' the city was getting. The Mayor, Councillor Michael Donnelly, denied that violence was being used against the Jews. One councillor said that ill-feeling towards them stemmed from their 'usurious practices' and not from religious antipathy. Another said that Fr. Creagh's intervention was prompted by commercial considerations and not by religion and went on to say that it was an unhappy state of affairs that 'their own people' should be forced to walk the streets and to emigrate to America while the Jews could come into the city and make a living.

A resolution condemning Dr. Bunbury, the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, for a speech he had made on the issue was also passed.

The bishop, whose speech was delivered to the Church of Ireland Synod in Dublin, had said that there were about 200 Jews in Limerick in all and that they made a living selling 'articles of apparel and such like things to

country people'. It was claimed that they made excessive profits but he said he had spoken to Mr. Levin who had assured him that they charged no more than the other shopkeepers in Limerick. Another accusation made against them was that they sold goods to women when their husbands were out of the house, tea, in particular, being mentioned in this regard. But Mr. Levin had told him that they did not sell tea at all. Neither did they bring court actions for debts owed to them; they were most forbearing in their dealings and were willing to accept small instalments spaced over a long period.

In return for this, the bishop said, the Jews were jeered and assaulted in the streets, and when their attackers appeared in court the magistrates dealt leniently with them. He said two aspects of the affair continued to surprise him: firstly why Fr. Creagh's superiors had not silenced him and, secondly, why the government had not acted more firmly to end the persecution. (2)

This was part of the 'bad publicity' the City Council had referred to. Unfortunately the speech was marred by factual inaccuracies and by what many would have seen as sectarian motivation.

(There was bad feeling between the two churches in Limerick at the time. Much of this arose from the activities surrounding Dr. John Long, a proselytizing Protestant doctor with a medical hall in Catherine Street. The Catholics regarded his attempts to convert them through his Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics as insulting. Many Protestants disapproved of him, too, because he was stirring up bad feelings towards them and damaging their business and trade. But fair-minded people deplored the fact that

he could not walk the streets without a police escort to protect him from hostile Catholics).

The Limerick papers were quick to pick holes in Dr. Bunbury's speech. It was suggested to him that he should have tried to stop the vilification in 'the Irish and English Protestant papers' rather than contribute to it.

The **Limerick Echo** correctly pointed out that the Jews sold not just to country people but also to city people, especially to the poor of the slums - the bishop was not right in saying the Jews were no longer trading in the country. They could be seen leaving the city in the trains each morning. Nor was he correct in saying that they did not take court action for recovery of debts. The Jews, the paper said, had 337 summonses issued for debts totalling £303 1s. 1d. in 1902, and 226 in 1903 for a gross total of £172 11s. 4d. The summonses were all brought at the Mayor's Court of Conscience and were for sums less than £1. 16s. 8d.

The Jews, the writer maintained, were not starving, being amongst the best dressed promenaders of the city and it was as a result of their business practices that many Limerick shopkeepers had lost business. The Protestant bishop's call for the silencing of Fr. Creagh was said to be nothing more than a manifestation of religious bigotry. (3)

At this time also the Jewish community broke the two month period of silence they had agreed to with the Catholic Church authorities on the understanding that they would stop Fr. Creagh's campaign. Elias Levin wrote to the **Limerick Leader** attacking the paper for its attitude to the trial and saying that if they were to perish it would not be in silence, their names would be inscribed in 'the bloody civilization and tolerance of Limerick in the twentieth century'. (4)

Meantime John Raleigh was sent to Mountjoy Jail to serve his sentence. He was released in May and returned by train to Limerick to an enthusiastic reception. His admirers and sympathisers carried him shoulder high from the railway station to his home and he was presented with a silver watch and chain.

Johnny Raleigh, of course, was just a high-spirited, impulsive youngster swept along on the high tide of anti-semitism and could not have had a full understanding of what was happening at the time. He played a minor, though not insignificant, part in the campaign against the Jews, many of whom had been living in Limerick for years before he was born.

References:

- (1) **Limerick Leader** 18/4/1904.
- (2) *Ibid.*
- (3) **Limerick Echo** 19/4/1904.
- (4) **Limerick Leader** 18/4/1904.