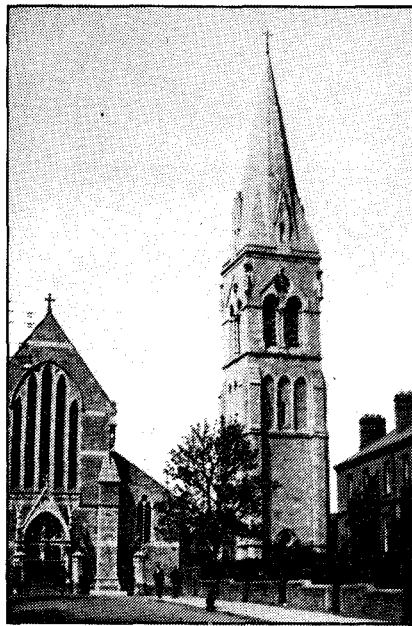




# THE LIMERICK VISIT OF FR. RAUS 1904

BY DES RYAN



Mount St. Alphonsus, the Redemptorists' church in Limerick.

The Redemptorist Order first arrived in Limerick, in 1851, to preach a mission in St. John's Cathedral. The missionaries came from a variety of countries, and nothing like their method of conducting the mission had been seen in the city before. The mission was an impressive success, and the order soon set up a foundation in Limerick. In 1854, the site for a monastery and church was acquired, and the first superior was appointed.

Pat Feeley has studied the formative years of the Redemptorists in Limerick, and has written a series of articles, in a variety of publications, on the subject. In particular, he has described the visit to the city, in 1904, of the Frenchman, Fr. Mathias Raus, the Superior-General and Rector-Major of the order:

*In November, 1903, the Limerick Redemptorists had held their fiftieth jubilee celebrations. On Friday evening, 20 July, 1904, the Rev. Mathias Raus, Superior-General and Rector-Major of the Redemptorist Order, arrived in the city by train on a journey from Rome, a little after seven o'clock. Raus was a native of Alsace, France, and did not speak English. With him came Fr. Magnier, Consultor-General at Rome, who, thirteen years previously, had been Spiritual Director of the Confraternity and Rector of the community at Limerick. The timing of the visit and the prestigious positions of the visitors was significant and gave Limerick a central place in the order's jubilee celebrations.*

*When the train carrying Raus and Magnier arrived at the Limerick station the Confraternity men, wearing medals, ribbons and chains of office, 'sent up salvoes of welcoming cheers'. The Boherbuoy Brass and Reed Band headed a procession of Confraternity members marching in 'perfect order' before the foreign ecclesiastic. Up to 8,000 people lined the streets from the railway station to Mount St. Alphonsus, the order's house, where an address was presented to Raus by Mayor Michael Donnelly, on behalf of the Corporation. He replied in French, and his address was translated into English by Fr. Magnier.*

*The County Limerick-born Magnier addressed meetings of the Arch-Confraternity on the following Monday and Tuesday nights, speaking of Rome and of the life of the Pope, and praising the men for their dedication to the*

*Confraternity. The assembled members gave him the Confraternity salute, all standing with right hands uplifted. Mr. J.F. Barry, J.P., an ex-mayor, presented him with an address on behalf of the Confraternity. The raised hand salute was also given to the Superior General who, from reading between the lines of a newspaper report, seems to have been somewhat taken aback by the intensity of emotion. Fr. Raus praised what he called the 'great army' of 7,000 men and boys which was 'a spectacle for angels and men and would delight their Holy Father, the Pope'. He went on to say that before leaving Rome he had been empowered by the Pope to give the Papal blessing to the Confraternity members of the Holy Family and he proposed to do this on the Monday night to the members of that division, on the Tuesday night to its division's members and on the Wednesday night to the boys.*

It was a week of great religious excitement and fervour and, as the bells pealed and the cheers echoed through Collooney Street, the city's Little Jerusalem, the Rabbi Elias Bere Levin sat down to write an appeal to the visiting ecclesiastic. The letter was a respectful, plaintive plea to the leader of the Redemptorist Order to end an economic

boycott, then being enforced against the Jews, and to call off the campaign of hatred, led by Fr. Creagh. The rabbi also requested a meeting with Raus. The letter stated:

*Up to a very recent time the Jews of Limerick have had no cause to complain of any unjust or oppressive treatment from their Christian fellow Citizens, and enjoyed the same facilities as every other citizen.*

*I regret I have to say to your Excellency that at present it is useless for a Jew to keep open his shop for any trade, for though the Catholic people who were their customers will no longer deal with them, under the mistaken idea that in so depriving us of our means of living, they are complying with some religious requirement of which they would be breaking the requirements if they were to trade with us.*

*I therefore ask your Excellency, during your stay in Limerick, to address such remarks on this subject to your people, as will remove from them the idea, that we are under the ban of your Church and will give them to understand, that there is no objection from any religious grounds to them dealing with any honest trader, whether Christian or Jew.*

*If your Excellency would accord me the honour and pleasure of an interview, I shall avail myself of the honour with very great pleasure, and shall call on you whenever and wherever you name, either alone or accompanied by one or more of our Elders.*

*It is necessary to the very existence of my little flock, only Twenty-four families, that their trade shall be restored and relieved from the terrible blight which has now fallen on it, owing to the mistaken view of our Christian fellow Citizens that they are forbidden by their religion to deal with us.*

Pat Feeley states that it is not known whether Fr. Raus ever replied to the letter, but the appeal certainly fell on deaf ears. Over the years, many people have pondered on the reasons for Fr. Creagh's sermons and on the boycott of the Jews. Some writers have sought an answer in the activities of the small Jewish community which lived in Limerick in 1904. But Fr. Creagh may well have been influenced by a more potent force than has been thought – and it is to France that one must look for the source of his motivation. Fr. Creagh said as much himself, in his sermon of 11 January, 1904:



*Dreyfus is stripped of his military stripes.*

*If you want an example, look to France. What is going on at present in that land? The little children are being deprived of their education. No nun, monk or priest can teach in a school. The little one's are forced to go where God's name is never mentioned – to go to Godless schools. The Jews are in league with the Freemasons of France, and have succeeded in turning out of that country all nuns and religious orders. The Redemptorist Fathers, to the number of two hundred, have been turned out of France, and that is what the Jews would do in our own country if they were allowed to get into power.*

What caused the trouble for the Redemptorists in France? While much of the underlying reasons for the trouble are to be found in the history of that country, one incident could be said to have embodied the essence of the matter.

Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jew, was arrested for spying in 1894. The struggle in France to prove his innocence was also a struggle between the forces of the left and the right: between those who wanted a republic, and those who wanted a monarchy, involving the state, the army and the Catholic church. In that struggle, Dreyfus became the sacrificial lamb.

After the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the

deputies of the National Assembly, of whom the majority were monarchist, were unable to agree as to who should succeed to the throne of Napoleon III. This failure played into the hands of the minority who wanted a republic. Eventually, a majority of deputies were won over to the idea of a republic, believing it to be the form of government which least divided France.

In January, 1875, the Assembly voted, by a majority of one vote, for the Third Republic.<sup>(1)</sup> Politically, the National Assembly divided into three groupings, radicals on the left, opportunists, as the conservative-to-moderate republicans were known, in the centre, and monarchists on the right. A typical radical would usually be a staunch republican, an opponent of militarism and colonial expansion and, almost certainly, anticlerical. A typical monarchist would despise the republic, be in favour of a strong army and of colonial expansion, and most probably be a Roman Catholic.<sup>(2)</sup> But there were no hard and fast lines. Most governments were coalitions, and, because of this, the average life of a government, between 1871 and 1914, was ten months.

After the republicans had won the struggle for power, they set about reforming the educational system, one of their aims being to take it out of the

hands of the religious orders, who, they felt, were turning the children against the republic. The disaster of 1870 was believed by some republicans to have been a victory for the German educational system. Since 1866, the League of Education had supported the educational theories of Jules Ferry (a republican, who had served as Prime Minister in 1880-1 and 1883-5) that education must be compulsory, free and secular. During the period 1880-90, religious orders were forbidden to teach in state schools, unless authorised by the state. The Vatican tried to improve relations between church and state, but there were elements on both sides who were against reconciliation. While the struggle with the religious orders had, at times, been fierce, with members of the orders often barricading their houses,<sup>(3)</sup> it was clerical support for the right, in the Dreyfus Affair, that finally brought it to boiling point.

Alfred Dreyfus was born on 19 October, 1859, in Mulhouse, in the French province of Alsace, where the family owned a cotton and textile business. After the Franco-Prussian war, the Germans annexed the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. The French nationals were allowed eighteen months to decide whether they wanted to stay in the new German empire, or to move across the new frontier into France. Although the Dreyfus family opted for French citizenship, Alfred's parents decided to settle, temporarily, with the younger members of the family, in Basle, Switzerland. There, the elder Dreyfus could keep a closer eye on the family business. Two of his older sons remained in Mulhouse to look after the factories. Later on, in 1897, they moved some of the business across the border into France.

Dreyfus was educated in Basle and Paris and, apparently, had a hard time adjusting to boarding-school life. He spent several months working in the family mill at Mulhouse. His military career began when he applied to the Ecole Polytechnique, where, at his graduation, in 1880, he was appointed a sub-lieutenant. By the time he had married, in 1890, a Jewish girl named Lucie Hadamard, he had reached the rank of captain. In January, 1893, he was posted to the War Office as a staff-learner.

On a September evening, in 1894, as Mme. Bastian, a French intelligence operative, working as a cleaning lady in the German Embassy in Paris, rummaged through a wastepaper basket, she came across a partly-torn letter, whose contents promised a series of notes on military matters to the German military attaché, Colonel von Schwartzkoppen. She gave this letter to one of her superiors, Major Henry, of the counter-espionage section, at the War Office. It was believed that the note had been written by an officer attached to the General Staff. The finger of suspicion



# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE JEWS

BY  
DUDLEY WRIGHT



DUBLIN CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF IRELAND

Dublin Catholic Truth Society of Ireland pamphlet.

pointed to Captain Alfred Dreyfus, whose handwriting appeared to resemble that of the letter found at the German Embassy.

On 15 October, Dreyfus, was accused of high treason and arrested. While the army tried to keep his arrest secret, the press, somehow or other, got hold of it. On 1 November, *Libre Parole* (Free Speech), an anti-semitic newspaper, ran these headlines: *High Treason. Arrest of Jewish Officer, A. Dreyfus*. The story said that Dreyfus had confessed to selling secrets to Germany, but that the case 'will be hushed up because the officer is a Jew'.<sup>10</sup> Edouard Drumont, the editor of *Libre Parole*, had been ranting about the Jews since the early 1880s. In 1892, he had ran a campaign against Jewish officers in the army, denouncing them as potential traitors. He was joined in this by another anti-semitic newspaper, *La Croix*, which was owned by the Augustine Fathers of the Assumption. With the arrest of Dreyfus, more fuel was added to the fire of anti-semitism.

Meanwhile, the War Office faced a dilemma. Some of the officers connected with the case believed that the evidence was not strong enough to convict Dreyfus, and one of them, Major Du Paty de Clam, recommended dropping the case. But General Mercier, the Minister of War, and General de Boisdeffre of the War Office, rather than admit that a mistake had been made, were prepared to have Dreyfus convicted at any cost.

Dreyfus's court-martial began at noon, on 9 December, and lasted four days. On the last day of the trial, 22 December, Major Du Paty de Clam, one of the officers who had interrogated Dreyfus, handed to the president of the

court-martial, Colonel Maurel, a secret file on behalf of the Minister of War, General Mercier. This was a file of fabricated evidence, which had been put together by the Statistical Bureau, whose head was Colonel Sandherr, an anti-semitic, who was also from Alsace. Neither the government nor Dreyfus's lawyer, Edgar Demange, a Catholic, knew anything about the file.

Dreyfus was found guilty, and sentenced to deportation for life and military degradation. Due to military procedure, Dreyfus was not allowed to be present when the verdict was read out: it was his lawyer, Demange, who broke the terrible news to him.

On Saturday, 5 January, 1895, Dreyfus was taken from Cherche-Midi prison in Paris, and brought to Ecole Militaire on Place Fontenoy, where at least several thousand people had gathered

outside the grounds. And there, amid shouts of 'Death to the Jews', 'Death to Judas', and 'Dirty Jew', Sergeant-Major Bouxin, of the Garde Republicaine, tore the decorations from Dreyfus's hat and sleeves, as well as the red stripes from his trousers, and, finally, took his sword and broke it into two pieces. Dreyfus cried out that he was innocent, but the words fell on deaf ears. On 22 February, the *Ville-de-Saint-Nazaire*, with Dreyfus aboard, set sail for Devil's Island, a small island off the coast of French Guiana in South America.

The Dreyfus Affair lasted twelve years. It is a long and complicated story, too complicated to set down on a few pages. The villain of the piece was an officer named Esterhazy. When his identity was uncovered in 1896, by the new head of the Statistical Bureau, Colonel Picquart, another Alsatian anti-semitic, the generals involved in the case refused to right the wrong. Picquart was posted off to Tunisia, from where, it was hoped, he would not return alive. Major Henry, who had forged more documents to prove Dreyfus's guilt, succeeded Picquart at the Statistical Bureau. When Henry's forgers were discovered, he committed suicide. Esterhazy, who had been tried and acquitted, under the protection of the generals, sensed that the game was up, and fled to England. Picquart was arrested, but was later released and dismissed from the army. It had now become clear that a re-trial for Dreyfus was necessary. In June, 1899 Dreyfus was brought back from Devil's Island. Tried again by court-martial, he was, once more, found guilty. Due to popular indignation at the verdict, and the condition of Dreyfus's health, the

government intervened and pardoned him.

The government now felt that the affair was over, and that it was time to come to terms with the religious orders. In June 1901, the first major congress of 'all those adhering to the politics of Radicalism or Radical Socialism' was held. Seventy-eight senators, 201 deputies, and 849 delegates of departmental councils were present; 155 Masonic lodges were also represented. The anti-clerical struggle was presented as their principal battle.<sup>11</sup> One of the leaders, Emile Combs, a radical and former seminarian, became Prime Minister, in 1902. He closed down the religious schools, and dissolved all the religious orders - one of them being the Redemptorists. The anti-clericalism of the republicans, and the fight to prove Dreyfus's innocence, was seen by the forces of the right as a Jewish-masonic conspiracy.

These events, then, formed the French background to Fr. John Creagh's anti-Jewish sermons in Limerick, in January, 1904. They also make the visit to Limerick of that other Alsace man, Fr. Mathias Raus, all the more significant.

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Fr. Creagh.

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