

The Limerick 'pogrom', 1904

In the first decade of the new century, the impulse grew in Ireland to replace a foreign *esprit de domination* with a nationalist alternative. That new-found assertiveness is well illustrated in Fr Michael O'Riordan's *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland*, which was published in 1906 in answer to Horace Plunkett's *Ireland in the New Century* of the previous year.¹ Irish political Catholicism was not characterised by a hostility towards Jews which might be found among co-religionists on the right and on the left in France and other continental countries. On the other hand, Irish Catholicism was not noted for its toleration of other religious minorities. While most antagonism was reserved for Protestants, the liturgical and theological antipathy towards Jews was rooted in an intellectual foundation out of which a strong anti-Semitism might emerge at any time.

Michael Davitt stood out among his generation as a defender of the Jews.² In 1903, he reported on the pogroms in Kishineff (Kishinev) in Bessarabia, Russia.³ A book based on his experiences there, *Within the Pale*, deservedly attracted international attention and gained him added respect for his commitment to humanitarian causes.⁴ The year following his return from Russia, he was called upon to speak out on behalf of the Jews of Limerick.

Various writers have described as a 'pogrom' the events in Limerick of early January 1904. Is the retention of the term justified, considering nobody was killed or seriously injured? I believe it is, for the following reason: based on their experiences in Lithuania, the word pogrom came immediately to the lips of Limerick's Jews when they found themselves under attack in January 1904.⁵ Those fears must further be seen in the context of a country which was overwhelmingly Christian. The radical asymmetry between members of the Catholic Church and the Jewish congregation in Limerick in 1904 may be illustrated by focusing attention on the size and activities of the Arch-confraternity of the Holy Family, from a meeting of which first emanated the incitement against the local Jews. Founded on 20 January 1868 by the

Redemptorists, an order of Italian origin, the arch-confraternity had about 6,000 members in 1904. The numbers were so large that it met in sections three nights a week. It recruited its support mainly, although not exclusively, from the poorer sectors of Limerick city and countryside.

Fr John Creagh and anti-Semitism

Fr John Creagh took over as director of the arch-confraternity in 1902 at the age of thirty-two; he was the first Limerick-born priest to hold the office.⁶ A contemporary newspaper article described him as an 'athletic, clean-built "figure of a man"', with the characteristic cheerfulness and frankness of a son of the soil.⁷ Creagh has been portrayed by the Redemptorist priest, Samuel Boland as follows:

His preaching was irresistible, said Sister Ignatius, a St John of God sister who remembered him vividly up to her death. One dour North of Ireland Protestant used to come each Sunday to 'sit under Fr Creagh', ostentatiously leaving the church after the sermon. He spared no one, and the people just loved it, regularly overflowing the church into the street.⁸

This description well fitted the man who was warmly received at his first arch-confraternity meeting in 1902 with the 'customary [Roman] salute'.⁹

From the outset, Creagh's preaching style was demagogic and revivalist, as can be seen by the manner in which he addressed the question of alcohol abuse in the city:

I need not, my dear men, tell you that the great evil of today is drink. . . . There are publicans who have no conscience – no scruples. . . . What appeals to their conscience? Money – blood money. Money, the price of souls – the money of Judas. Judas sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, and these publicans will sell souls, that Jesus Christ died to redeem, for the sake even of a pint of stout or a half glass of whiskey. Appeal to their conscience! Nothing would appeal to their conscience but the prison cell – the lash of the convict.¹⁰

In early 1904 those same forensic skills were directed against the Jews in the city.¹¹ It would appear that the priest had been approached by shopkeepers in the city who were hostile to the Jewish pedlars because they provided unwelcome competition. Although the topic of his sermon was not publicised, members of the arch-confraternity had been warned in advance to attend the Monday meeting on 11 January in large numbers. Creagh began innocently enough by talking about Christian charity and the duty to look upon all men as brothers, even those who hate or persecute Christians:

[but] it would be madness for a man to nourish in his own breast a viper that might at any moment slay a benefactor with its poisonous bite. So too is it madness for a people to allow an evil to grow in their midst that will eventually cause them ruin.¹²

Back this
up with
evidence
please!

Based on
1 person's
account
the author
allows the
term pogrom
to stand

He then broke silence on the topic which was troubling him so much:

* It was that they were allowing themselves to become the slaves of Jew usurers. They knew who they were. The Jews were once the chosen people of God. God's mercy and favours toward them were boundless. They were the people of whom was born the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Master. But they rejected Jesus, they crucified Him – they called down the curse of His precious blood upon their own heads – 'His blood be upon us and upon our children', they cried, and that curse came upon them.¹³

Creagh continued in an even more strident tone:

* Nowadays, they dare not kidnap and slay Christian children, but they will not hesitate to expose them to a longer and even more cruel martyrdom by taking the clothes off their back and the bit out of their mouths. Twenty years ago and less Jews were known only by name and evil repute in Limerick. They were sucking the blood of other nations, but those nations rose up and turned them out and they came to our land to fasten themselves on us like leeches, and to draw our blood when they had been forced away from other countries. They have, indeed, fastened themselves upon us, and now the question is whether or not we will allow them to fasten themselves still more upon us, until we and our children are the helpless victims of their rapacity.

He proceeded to describe how the fortunes of the Jewish community in Limerick were being transformed.

* The Jews came to Limerick apparently the most miserable tribe imaginable, . . . but now they had enriched themselves, and could boast of very considerable house property in the city. Their rags have been exchanged for silk. They have wormed themselves into every form of business. They are in the furniture trade, the mineral water trade, the milk trade, the drapery trade, and in fact into business of every description, and traded even under Irish names.¹⁴

Creagh then dramatically produced a copy of the *Limerick Chronicle* which had just been handed to him. He read to his congregation the account of a recent Jewish wedding in the city. Creagh was referring to the wedding of Fanny Toohey and Maurice B. Maissell on Thursday, 7 January without using their names. This wedding may have indirectly contributed to the growing tension between local residents and a section of the Jewish community. Fanny Goldberg, who was eleven at the time, remembered it well; she recorded in her unpublished memoirs how childish curiosity took her unwitting (the schism in the Jewish community meant that the Goldbergs had not been on the guest list) to the synagogue to see the bride:

It was the usual kind of wedding with the horse drawn carriages, and white satin clad bride, and satin clad bridesmaids. And all men in top hats and of course the guests in their best. I thought the bridesmaids were beautiful in their long dresses, and coloured satin capes trimmed with swans down. There was a crowd of onlookers outside the [synagogue], with women in

ragged shawls, and overawed barefoot children. It was said at the time that this display of 'silks and satins' put the light to the smouldering fire.

That may or may not have been the case. But Creagh made the most of it. Reading from the *Limerick Chronicle* report, he recounted how, outside the synagogue, were those who wore 'poverty's motley', while those inside 'were clad in fine broadcloth, and silks and satins goodly to look upon'.¹⁵ Creagh asked how Jews managed to make this money:

* Some of you may know their methods better than I do, but still it is my duty to expose their methods. They go about as pedlars from door to door, pretending to offer articles at very cheap prices, but in reality charging several times the value more than they were bought in the shops. The Jew is most persevering and barefaced in his statements as to the value of his goods. He does not mind to whom he offers his wares. . . . They force themselves and their goods upon the people, and the people are blind as to their tricks.

Creagh then outlined the evil of the weekly payments system where the client was often unable to make the repayments:

When the summons is for less than 1.16s.8d. it must go before the Mayor's Court of Conscience; if for a larger sum it goes before another court. Then a decree is given, and the Mayor's sergeants are forced to become collectors of money for the Jews and the bailiffs are put in, and the little property seized and sold by the rapacious Jews.¹⁶

Creagh alleged that housewives were mostly the victims:

The Jew has got a sweet tongue when he wishes – he passes off his miserable goods upon her. She has to spare and stint to get the money to pay off the Jew without her husband knowing it, and then follow misery, sorrow and deceit. The wife is afraid lest her husband should find out that she has been dealing with the Jews. . . . The wife . . . will beg the Jew not to come to her house – she does not want him to be seen coming, and then stealthy visits must be paid at night, in the darkness, lest the dealings might be found out.

He invited members of the congregation to stand at a prominent Jew's house at night

and you will be surprised to see the number and the class of people who are going in and out, under cover of shawls, to pay the Jew his usury. Nor does the Jew care what excuse he makes to carry on business in the dark, if necessary, but after that comes the court day. Visit the Mayor's Court on a Thursday – you may not see it now for some time, for the Jews may hold their hands – but if you visited it during the past two years you would think it was a special court for the whole benefit of the Jews.¹⁷

Creagh told the congregation that he had in his possession an authentic document containing a list of the summonses issued by Jews during the past two years. He read out the contents:

In 1902 some 337 summonses were issued for 303.1s.1d. In 1903 226 summonses for 172.11s.4d. Surely this reveals a terrible state of things. If so many people had to be sued for money week after week, and for sums under 1.16s.8d., how many people, must we conclude, are constantly dealing with them? And those figures do not deal with processes in the other courts.¹⁸

Creagh was also concerned about the Jewish influence in the countryside:

They have made Limerick their headquarters, from which they can spread their rapacious nets over the country all round. When they came here first they had to carry their packs upon their shoulders. Now they can afford to have horses and traps to carry their goods, and they can go long distances by train, and succeed in making the farmers their dupes as well as those living in the towns. To make their traffic easier they will barter in kind instead of in money. They will take a hen or a goose, or a turkey, eggs or butter, and people will only receive half the market value of their poultry and dairy produce.

He admitted that some benefit might return to the local community if Jews bought their goods from local traders. But, he claimed, they did so only to a limited extent:

they prefer to get their goods from other Jews across the Channel, and week by week tons of goods of every description are landed in Limerick from Jews outside the country, and thus the Jews cripple local trade and industry. For instance, the furniture made in London deprives the local tradesmen of their work and the weekly wage to support their family.

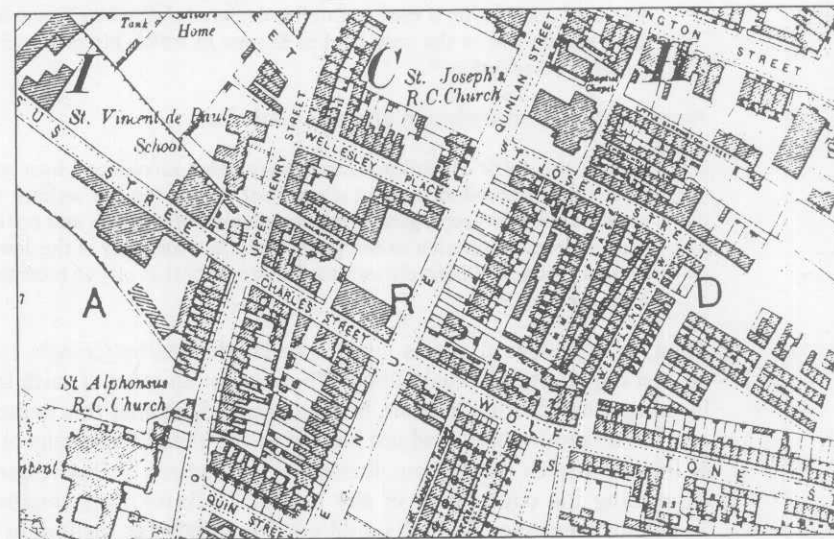
Finally, Creagh turned his attention to the question of religion:

I do not hesitate to say that there are no greater enemies of the Catholic Church than the Jews. 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 ones are forced to go where God's name is never mentioned.—to go to Godless schools. The Jews are in league with the Freemasons in France, and they succeeded in turning out of their country all the nuns and religious orders. The Redemptorist Fathers to the number of two hundred had been turned out of France, and that is what the Jews would do in our country if they were allowed into power.¹⁹

Creagh advised his congregation to have no commercial dealings with Jews. If they had any transactions with them they should get out of them as soon as possible, and then keep far away from them.²⁰ His message was interpreted as a call for a boycott. He soon got his wish.

Michael Davitt, John Redmond and the Jews

Colooney Street, where most Limerick Jews lived, was only a few minutes' walk from the Redemptorist church. The hundreds who left the church after



2. Jewish quarter, Limerick, near Colooney St

the meeting had to pass the top of Colooney Street on their way home. The Jewish community remained locked in their homes as the church militants passed by. Jewish shops, however, remained open and their owners felt menaced. One old Fenian – a member of the confraternity – single-handedly defended a shop from attack until the police arrived to mount a guard. Fearing an all-out attack on his community, Rabbi Elias Bere Levin wrote to Irish political leaders and to Jewish organisations in England asking for their public support. He told Michael Davitt in a letter on 12 January that the priest's allegations were 'devoid of any particle of truth'. He recalled that during the previous quarter of a century Jewish families in the city had lived 'in perfect peace and harmony with their Christian neighbours of all classes'. He added: 'The feeling of respect between them and their Christian neighbours seemed hitherto to be quite mutual, so that we are utterly at a loss to assign this very sudden event to any cause on our part.'²¹ Levin asked Davitt to conclude for himself whether the anti-Semitic outburst had its roots in religious prejudices or had been 'promoted by local traders'. He sought Davitt's intervention to avert a general boycott of Jewish traders and prevent an anti-Semitic riot, as already 'several of us have been insulted, assaulted, and threatened with the most menacing language'.²²

Davitt responded immediately. In a letter on 16 January to the *Freeman's Journal*, he said that it had been Ireland's unique glory that its original conquest to Christianity had been effected without bloodshed, and that the sons of St Patrick had truly upheld that reputation ever since:

Irish Catholics have suffered every possible form of religious oppression known to the perverted ingenuity of the authors of the Penal Code, but it

is their proud boast that neither in Ireland nor in any land to which English rule has forced them to fly did they ever resort to a counter-religious persecution. . . . A few years ago, perhaps a dozen, the Chief Rabbi of London, on a visit to Dublin, declared that when he set foot on Irish soil he was in the only land of Europe in which his race had never suffered persecution.²³

He protested as an Irishman and as a Catholic

against the spirit of barbarous malignity being introduced into Ireland, under the pretended form of a material regard for the welfare of our workers. The reverend gentleman complained of the rags and poverty of the children of Limerick as compared with the prosperity of the Jews, and on this ground deliberately incited the people of that city to hunt the Jew from their midst.²⁴

Then, in a passage that was later to be challenged by Creagh, Davitt wrote against the charge of ritual killing: 'There is not an atom of truth in the horrible allegation of ritual murder, here insinuated, against this persecuted race . . . the dissemination of which has led to the slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent lives throughout Europe in past times.'²⁵ Davitt concluded by expressing his confidence in the city of Limerick, 'a stronghold of true Nationalist sentiment' which could not 'be induced to dishonour Ireland by any response to such unworthy and un-Catholic invitations'.²⁶ Praising the bishop of Limerick, Dr Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, Davitt encouraged the rabbi to seek a meeting with him.²⁷

The leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, also replied promptly in defence of the Limerick Jews: 'I have no sympathy whatever with the attacks upon the Hebrew Community in Limerick or elsewhere. I feel sure that the good sense and spirit of toleration of the Irish people will be sufficient to protect them from any wrong.'²⁸ Levin must have been comforted by the fact that no major public figure, no national politician or bishop, rushed to endorse Creagh's anti-Semitic attack.

The boycott begins

Besides seeking the support of major public figures, Rabbi Levin had also to ensure that the local police would protect the Jewish community from further intimidation. On 13 January, he sent a copy of Creagh's sermon to the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) county inspector, Thomas Hayes:

I beg to inform you that every member of my community regards his life at this moment in peril. As a matter of fact several of us have been already in this two foregone days *insulted, assaulted*, and abused with menacing language.²⁹

Levin sought 'ample protection' and 'constables posted in every street in all parts of the City' as members of his community were 'obliged to go about everywhere to earn a living'.³⁰ District Inspector C. H. O'Hara was instructed

on 14 January to make 'such arrangements with the local police as to prevent their [the Jews] being molested'. O'Hara reported on 16 January that he had personally visited two of the stations to give instructions to the sergeants. He had directed that special attention be paid to Jews by all the city stations, especially on the following Monday, 18 January, when they were due to collect the weekly instalments. O'Hara also visited Rabbi Levin at his home in Colooney Street. He asked Levin to let his people know that they would get every assistance from the police and to have them report any cases of assault or abuse. O'Hara also alerted RIC stations in the surrounding countryside to offer protection to Jewish pedlars.³¹

In view of the rising tension in the city, County Inspector Hayes called personally to see Rabbi Levin on the morning of 18 January. Levin was out, so Hayes left a message asking the rabbi to provide him with a written account of the position in which the Jews now found themselves. Upon his return, Levin wrote to thank the police: 'there is hardly any incident worth complaining of, except insults and abusive language given us to which we are no aliens'.³² But a boycott was in operation against the Jews:

Those of us who trade on the weekly pament [sic] system are literally ruined, I am informed that they hardly collect 10% of their usual collection, and as for selling goods that is out of the question, not one shilling's worth of goods having been sold by them for the last fortnight in the city of Limerick.³³

The rabbi explained that economic sanctions against the Jews were on the increase:

The people who have hitherto dealt with the members of my community say that they were ordered by Fr Creagh neither to pay their debts nor to purchase goods. There are six petty hucksters [sic] shops, whose owners until now managed to live, but whose ruin is already visible, having lost all their Christian custom since the first address on Jewish trade was delivered by Fr Creagh.³⁴

Levin said that Jewish traders were being pressed for payment by wholesalers with whom they had done business for years 'and who had always placed the greatest confidence in them'. To give the county inspector some idea of what he meant, Rabbi Levin cited the example of two 'petty shop-keepers' who did business in the milk trade and were now being boycotted. One did business with a Mr James Gleeson of Kilpeacon Road.

The latter used to supply him ten or twelve gallons of milk daily and since last fortnight, he refused to do so any more. The other petty shop-keeper who also deals a little in the milk trade has been given notice by the farmer who used hitherto to supply him with milk that he will not supply him any more. So much for the Jewish businesses in Limerick.³⁵

Dublin Castle was advised by District Inspector O'Hara on 18 January that he had again issued 'instructions to the police to afford every protection to the Jews'. But the policing problem proved very difficult, as he told his superiors:

To-day a number of them [Jews] – about 40 – went about collecting their instalments and *in most cases got nothing but abuse*. [Crowds followed them hissing and, in some cases, throwing mud at them.] It was difficult to keep an eye to them all *as they went in many cases to back streets without the knowledge of the police*. The names of several persons who followed them in a disorderly manner were taken and one boy, who had picked up a stone – thrown at them, was arrested and was, later on, discharged to be summoned to Petty Sessions.³⁶

He felt, however, that 'things will probably settle down in a few days'.³⁷ O'Hara also reported on a meeting he had had that afternoon with the administrator of St Michael's parish, Fr J. Cregan, his curate Fr John Lee, and the priests of the neighbouring St John's parish. These parishes were located in the inner city and were the personal parishes of Bishop O'Dwyer. O'Hara was pleased to learn that Cregan and Lee were hostile to Fr Creagh's actions:

Both these gentlemen exercise a very large influence here *and they disapprove of Fr Creagh's attack entirely* and I gathered from them that the latter – who is not one of the parochial clergy but belongs to the Redemptorist order, which has a church here – was not authorised by any one to speak as he did.³⁸

O'Hara reported to Dublin Castle that Cregan and Lee would advise 'their people not to interfere with or molest the Jews and *I think after a while that the excitement will subside*'.³⁹

The spiritual director of the women's confraternity in St John's Cathedral, Fr Murphy, denounced the violence against the Jews but otherwise offered little comfort:

If the people owed money to the Jews they should pay it as they were bound to pay all their lawful debts. If it was their desire to get rid of the Israelites, this was the best way to accomplish it, and when this was done they need have no more dealings with them.⁴⁰

An editorial in the *Limerick Leader*, which appeared on the evening of 18 January, was supportive of the boycott but sought to calm matters in the city in the interest of fair play:

It has come to our knowledge that the Jews for the past few days have been subjected to ill-treatment and assault while passing through our public thoroughfares. We regret that such has been the case. We are living in critical times when every advantage is taken by unscrupulous opponents to misinterpret our acts and the cause of our religion. In such a crisis it is not wise to give a handle to vilification. If the people do not want the Jews, then leave them severely alone. Above all things have no recourse to violence. Such a policy only shows weakness, if not foolish vindictiveness, and will never succeed in accomplishing that which is, or may be desired.⁴¹

The Jews had not been left 'severely alone' throughout that day.

Rabbi Levin's mood had changed radically between the time he had written to County Inspector Hayes in the morning of 18 January and the late

afternoon when he cabled the chief rabbi in London, Dr Ernest W. Harris: 'Anti-Semitic riots took place through the day. General boycott in force. Community in peril. Every member assaulted.'⁴² A special correspondent for the *Jewish Chronicle*, reporting from the city on 18 January, wrote with Kishineff-like fear about what was likely to happen:

My pen trembles as I sit down to write to you about the situation of the Jews in Limerick. I can hardly steady my nerves to give you a full and graphic account of the anxiety I feel lest, at any moment, some Jewish house should be attacked.⁴³

Although only a week had passed since Creagh's sermon, the correspondent of the *Jewish Chronicle* felt that it was like an eternity. He thought he was back again in the Middle Ages, as he wrote that

the miserable cry: 'Down with the Jews!' 'Death to the Jews!' 'We must hunt them out' is still ringing in my ears, and sends a cold shiver through my body. Today, Monday, the chief business day, Jews were attacked right and left. I myself witnessed one scene where a Jew was actually running for his life, and as he passed through one crowd he was actually hemmed in by another, till the police came on the scene. But that is only one case out of many! And this in a land of freedom, this in the twentieth century, this only two weeks after Christmas, when peace and goodwill to all mankind was preached throughout the land!

The correspondent concluded on a depressing note:

When I witnessed the organised attacks today and heard the mob yell 'Down with the Jews: they kill our innocent children', all the horrors of Kishineff came back to me, and then, and only then, was I able to realise what Kishineff meant.⁴⁴

The *Jewish Chronicle* wrote that 'the Jews of Limerick are living in a state of terror' and that Rabbi Levin feared 'a general boycott, and perhaps a regular anti-Semitic riot'.⁴⁵ The 'regular anti-Semitic riot' was not to happen.

Fr Creagh's second anti-Semitic sermon

Fr Creagh's sermon on Monday 18 January attracted international press attention.⁴⁶ Though members of the arch-confraternity were instructed to prevent journalists from being present at their meeting, the text of his sermon was published in the local papers the following day.⁴⁷ Creagh entered the pulpit to loud applause from the congregation. While seeking to be conciliatory in view of the disturbances in the city during the day, his sermon confirmed that he was an intransigent and unrepentant anti-Semite. He emphasised, at the outset, that he entirely and fully deprecated any violence towards Jews. Violence, he said, had never been his intention, and he felt that it would only ruin the people's cause. The Jewish religion – as a religion – had nothing to do with his statements, he said. He had only taken up the issue in order to save

confraternity men from the 'ruinous trade of the Jews'.⁴⁸ And later on he concluded his sermon by admonishing members of the arch-confraternity:

Remember, I warn you to do them no bodily harm. Such a thing I could never approve of. It would not be Christian like. But keep away from them, and let them go to whatever country they came from, and not add to the evils of our fates.⁴⁹

However, in between these reproaches, Creagh's sermon was filled with an injudiciousness of language that only went to heighten and inflame emotions against Jews.

Let the members of the Confraternity investigate Jewish dealings for themselves, and then if they find what I have said is true, and I am convinced that it is true, then I appeal to you not to prove false to Ireland, false to your country, and false to your religion, by continuing to deal with the Jews. If the Jews are allowed to go on as they have been doing in a short time we will be their absolute slaves, and slavery to them is worse than slavery to which Cromwell condemned the poor Irish who were shipped to the Barbadoes.⁵⁰

Creagh claimed that, in view of the greatness of the evil, he would have considered himself a traitor to his religion and to his country if he had not raised his voice.⁵¹ 'If Limerick is typical of other localities as regards Jewish methods', he added, 'then all I can say is God help our nation and our race, unless something is done, and done speedily also, to change such a deplorable state of things.'⁵²

He then read out Davitt's letter in defence of the Jewish community which had been published in that day's issue of the *Freeman's Journal*. Creagh denied that he had ever insinuated ritual murder.⁵³

... but if Mr Davitt was in daily and hourly touch with the people here as I am – if he were to see the curse brought upon the poor by the Jewish trade, if he were to see the robbery that is going on by the weekly instalment system of the Jews, and the exorbitant prices demanded for wretched goods, if he were to see the misery and strife caused in the households by the dealings of the woman of the home with the Jews – if he were to see the result of their enormous usury and the efforts made by the poor to release themselves when they have become entangled in the Jewish nets, he might begin to think they were as bad an evil to Ireland as landlordism and over-taxation, and he might think that there was enough for me to mind without my trying to do what he and his colleagues failed to do on the floor of the British House of Commons.⁵⁴

Creagh felt that it was fair to conclude that 'the Jews have proved themselves to be the enemies of every country in Europe, and every nation had to defend itself against them'. The priest told the congregation: 'Let us defend ourselves before their heels are too firmly planted upon our necks.'⁵⁵ Creagh's words were an incitement to violence.

Following the second sermon, the local RIC feared an outbreak of general disorder. But on 19 January, District Inspector O'Hara reported a general

improvement in the situation. Although the endeavours of the Jewish traders that day to obtain the instalments due to them had failed, no attempt had been made to 'molest them or to follow them about by crowds as happened yesterday'. The police had taken measures to afford them 'all possible protection'.⁵⁶ Dublin Castle authorities, in the circumstances, did not see the need to send in extra police from outside. The RIC deputy inspector general, H. Considine, minuted on 19 January that the police were doing what they could to contain a problem which had been exacerbated by the fact that the Jews were 'moving about in the many lanes and back ways of the city'. The police had 'much difficulty' in preventing isolated attacks. But sending a 'large force of police in for such duty might only accentuate the feeling which has been so ill advisedly aroused'. He felt it was better to act as if 'nothing really serious has occurred', and to leave matters to the local police force and 'to the good sense of the people'. He concluded that 'after some little time no doubt with the assistance of the local Parish clergy ... the matter will blow over'.⁵⁷

Minuting his reaction to Creagh's second sermon on 21 January, Considine felt it probable that the worst of the matter had passed:

The Rev Gentleman's second address makes it clear that he does not counsel nor desire overt acts directed against the Jewish Community – but he did and does advocate Boycotting; not so much because they are Jews as because their methods of dealing are in his judgment injurious to the poorer classes.⁵⁸

But an unidentified superior did not entirely share that view:

This may be the commencement of a very serious business: and calls for further inquiry. The Revd Mr Creagh's historical and religious references may be injudicious but this account of the methods and objects of these Jews is but a ... repetition of methods which Jews have practised elsewhere to the great detriment of the — and thriftless mores.

The Under Secretary asked to review the file. O'Hara reported on 22 January that 'no further demonstrations against the Jews have taken place'. They had been 'transmitting their business without molestation for the last few days but in very many cases have been unable to recover instalments due to them'. He also reported that several people had been fined between 2s 6d and 10s 6d at petty session in Limerick that day for disorderly conduct and assaults on Jews the previous Monday.⁵⁹ The police had, without the need for outside reinforcements, contained a dangerous situation.

Bishop O'Dwyer and the Redemptorists

Limerick Jews – in anticipation of further attacks on the community following the second Creagh sermon – followed Davitt's advice and sought a meeting with the Catholic bishop of Limerick, Dr Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, in order to secure his intervention in the matter.⁶⁰ Rabbi Levin and another leader of the community, Sol Goldberg, went to the bishop's palace on

Tuesday, 19 January, where they were met by O'Dwyer's secretary. The bishop did not receive them himself, but asked the two men through his secretary to refrain from making any comment to the press.⁶¹ No account of that meeting has been found in the archives of the Limerick diocese.⁶² Nevertheless, the bishop's views may be inferred from the views of the priests in his personal parishes mentioned earlier: it is unlikely that Frs Creagh and Lee, who voiced opposition to Creagh, would have held views contrary to those of their bishop on the matter.

Rabbi Levin – influenced by Bishop O'Dwyer's request – made only a brief public statement on 21 January, stating that he was constrained from replying in full to Creagh by two considerations. First, Creagh's attack was against Jews as a whole and not against the Limerick Hebrew Congregation. Second, Levin had been informed by the Limerick Hebrew Congregation that it had been requested by a high authority of the Catholic Church to avoid public controversy in connection with 'this outrageous affair'.

How did Bishop O'Dwyer respond to Creagh's attack on the Jews?⁶³ Creagh was a member of a religious order and that made the question of disciplining him awkward for the local bishop. O'Dwyer's position was further complicated by the fact that, according to the provincial journal of the Redemptorists, a former consultor general of the order, Fr John Magnier, and the provincial, Fr Boylan, 'were with Fr Creagh on his attack on the Jews and consequently Fr Creagh continued his campaign against the Jews'.⁶⁴ (Creagh's immediate superior, the rector of Mt St Alphonsus house in Limerick, Fr Edward O'Laverty, was not mentioned.) The same source stated that 'Bishop O'Dwyer was certainly not defending the Jews, but he was offended because he was not asked beforehand about the sermons attacking the Jews'. It was further recorded that the bishop 'gave up coming to the house. He also declared that he would not come to the General Communion of the [Feast of the] Holy Family'.⁶⁵ That event took place in the autumn at the time of the annual retreat for the members of the arch-confraternity. Is it likely, therefore, that Bishop O'Dwyer refused to visit the Redemptorist house from January until the autumn? This episcopal 'boycott' might be mistakenly perceived as a weak and inadequate response: in the world of ecclesiastical diplomacy, it was a stiff and a stern rebuke to the Redemptorists.⁶⁶

In the months that followed Creagh's sermons, the boycott of the Jews in Limerick received widespread attention in the international press. There was pressure on the leadership of the Irish hierarchy to intervene from prominent Catholic sources in England. The duke of Norfolk wrote to Cardinal Michael Logue to ask him to help put an end to the boycott.⁶⁷ The president of the London-based Jewish Board of Deputies, David Alexander, also wrote to the cardinal asking him to intervene: 'The fact that we Jews have always received active sympathy from the Church to which your Eminence belongs adds poignancy to the grief with which we regard this outbreak'.⁶⁸ Logue replied to Alexander's letter 'in sympathetic terms but stated that as Limerick was outside his Ecclesiastical province he had no jurisdiction to interfere except by way of friendly suggestion'. Logue said that he was expecting to meet O'Dwyer within a few days and that he would

bring Alexander's communication to O'Dwyer's attention.⁶⁹ If the two men met – and that is probable – both would have wished to see an immediate end to the boycott.

The superior general of the Redemptorists, Fr Mathias Raus, visited Limerick on 22 July 1904. He was accompanied by his secretary, Fr J. Reuss. Raus, who was from Alsace where traditionally there was a fairly large Jewish community, was a mild-mannered man who did his best to avoid conflict.⁷⁰ He received a warm reception when he addressed the arch-confraternity, and Creagh was loudly cheered when he thanked the congregation for the welcome given to Raus.⁷¹ The superior general 'called upon the Bishop upon his arrival and had a long talk with him at the Palace Corbally'. It is unlikely that the meeting passed without reference to Fr Creagh.⁷² Bishop O'Dwyer did not return the visit.

Raus also received an address from Rabbi Levin respectfully requesting a meeting with the superior general and his intervention to stop the boycott.

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 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.⁷³

Raus did not give Rabbi Levin an interview, but it could be argued that the superior general's visit to Bishop O'Dwyer and the Levin petition did have an impact. The *Limerick Leader* reported on 24 August 1904 that Fr Collier, formerly of Dundalk, had been appointed sub-director of the arch-confraternity. In the autumn, Bishop O'Dwyer signalled that he was prepared to visit the Redemptorist house for the General Communion of the Feast of the Holy Family but the reconciliation may not have been total.⁷⁴

Local and international support for Creagh's anti-Semitism

Whether as a consequence of the displeasure of Bishop O'Dwyer or the action of a prudent superior, Creagh was sent in February 1904 on mission to Belfast for a few weeks. Before leaving, he found that he had much popular support in Limerick. A trade union group, meeting in the Mechanics' Institute on 20 January, passed a motion that 'we fully endorse the action of the Rev. Father Creagh regarding Jews as we consider their system of trading detrimental [sic] to the workers of our city. We also strongly condemn the action of Mr Michael Davitt for interfering in this matter'.⁷⁵ There was a special meeting on 22 January of prefects, subprefects and other officials of the Arch-confraternity of the Holy Family. Three resolutions were passed unanimously. The first stated that the meeting, representing 6,000 members, thanked Fr Creagh 'for his recent lectures on the ways and means of Jewish trading' and expressed the members' 'fullest confidence with their views'. The 'tone' of Michael Davitt's letter was condemned, and it was asserted that their spiritual director

was 'actuated by no motives except the good of the Confraternity and the general benefit of the workers of this city, especially as regards its poorest members, and that he was in no way actuated by any feeling of malignity to the Jews'.⁷⁶ The final resolution stated that 'we condemn any violence towards the Jews in this city, and this Confraternity dissociates itself from any acts of violence towards them'.⁷⁷ Creagh later thanked the members of the arch-confraternity, saying that they all knew his action in the matter was 'actuated by only the deepest interest for the good of the people and to direct attention to what was a great evil and one likely to cause great danger to the common good if left to go unchallenged'.⁷⁸

While in Belfast, Creagh commented in the local press that he had no animosity against the Jews as a race,

and, as for the Jews in business, I am quite prepared to admit that there are many who are irreproachable. What people have been pleased to call my crusade has been directed only against a class of Jewish traders who grind and oppress those who are unfortunate enough to get into their power – who exact extortionate sums under the instalment system from those who can ill afford to pay them . . .⁷⁹

Creagh stated that his sole object was to safeguard 'my people from ruinous trading'. He said that he had strongly deprecated any violence and had always used – and always would use – his influence to prevent it. He had simply asked the men of the arch-confraternity to 'have no dealings with them for their own sake'. However, he said that he was not 'the man to be frightened by threatening letters, and even if my life were really in peril through my action I should continue as I have been doing'.⁸⁰

There is only one letter abusive of Creagh in the Redemptorist archives. A 'Galbally man and no Fenian' wrote:

So you *low cur* had you nothing better to tell your people than to set them on the poor unfortunate Jews? You call yourself a minister of *God*. You are a minister of the Devil. You are a disgrace to the Catholic religion, you brute.⁸¹

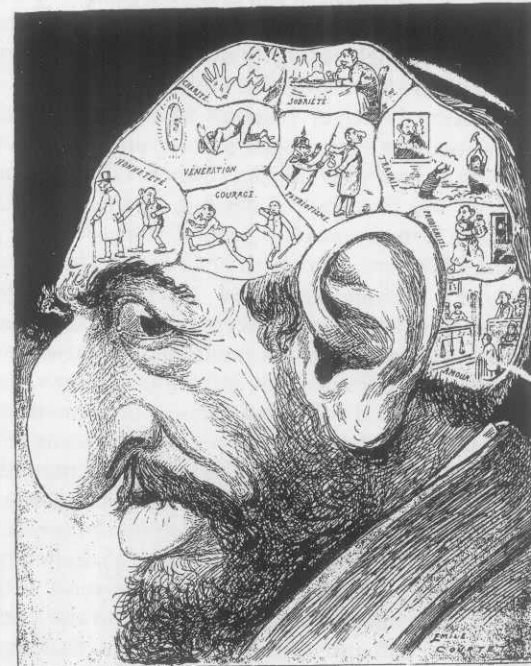
Creagh, meanwhile, continued to receive many letters of support. For example, the secretary of the British Brothers' League sent the text of a resolution passed on 27 April. It thanked Creagh

for the noble work he has undertaken to prevent a class of undesirable aliens who have received the hospitality of the Irish race from demoralising the nation and bringing misery into the homes of our Irish Brothers and Sisters through their inborn instinct of greed, usury and arrogance.⁸²

A letter from 'Milesian' in the London *Times* spoke about 'an invasion of low-class Polish and Russian Jews'. The feeling in the country had turned against the Jews 'but it is chiefly against their usury and extortion'.⁸³ An anti-Semitic illustration from France also found its way into the arch-confraternity's records; it was from the front page of an issue of Edouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole* (*Grand Journal Antijuif*).

PRIME GRATUITE offerte par **LA LIBRE PAROLE**

GRAND JOURNAL ANTIJUIF
Directeur: Edouard DRUMONT



3. Anti-Semitic cartoon, *La Libre Parole* - grand journal antijuif, circa 1900

Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* commented that its sympathy went out to

our countrymen the artisan whom the Jew deprives of the means of livelihood, to our countrymen the trader whom he ruins in business by unscrupulous methods, to our countrymen the farmer whom he draws into his usurer's toils and drives to the workhouse or across the water. In short, our sympathy is so much drained by that dreary weekly procession of our own flesh and blood out of Ireland that we have none left to bestow on the weekly procession of aliens coming in.⁸⁴

Whereas twenty years before there were very few Jews in Ireland, the *United Irishman* argued that

today there are Jewish magistrates to teach us respect for the glorious constitution under which we exist; Jewish lawyers to look after our affairs, and Jewish money lenders to accommodate us; Jewish tailors to clothe us; Jewish photographers to take our picture; Jewish brokers to furnish our homes, and Jewish auctioneers to sell us up in the end for the benefit of all our other Jewish benefactors. We are told the Jews are industrious people, and deserve to prosper. We do not object to their prospering by industry. We object to their prospering by usury and fraud. We object to their being given unfair advantages over the people whom they enter into competition with.⁸⁵

The article ended:

We are glad Father Creagh has given the advice he did. We trust he will continue to give it. We have no quarrel with the Jews' religion; but all the howling of journalistic hacks and the balderdash of uninformed sentimentalists will not make us, nor should it make any honest man, cease to expose knavery, because the knavery is carried on by Jews.⁸⁶

The front page of an earlier edition of the *United Irishman* stated: 'And what greater "persecution" could be inflicted upon the Jew than to prohibit him taking his pound of flesh – with interest, three pounds.'⁸⁷ Inside, the paper protested that it did not object to the Jew seeking an honest livelihood in Ireland but 'we object to his seeking a dishonest one, and howling out that he is being martyred for his faith when the people object to him putting his hand in their pockets'. The *United Irishman* then raised the emotional issue of emigration:

No thoughtful Irishman or woman can view without apprehension the continuous influx of Jews into Ireland and the continuous efflux of the native population. The stalwart men and bright-eyed women of our race pass from our land in a never-ending stream, and in their place we are getting strange people, alien to us in thought, alien to us in sympathy, from Russia, Poland, Germany, and Austria – people who come to live amongst us, but who never become of us. When fifteen hundred of our strong men and good women sail on the liner from the Cove of Cork, we can count on receiving a couple of hundred Jews to fill their places by the next North Wall boat. But has Ireland gained or lost by the exchange?⁸⁸

A letter from Jacob I. Jaffe, a member of the Jewish community, appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle*:

I know that the utterances of Father Creagh do not voice the sentiments of Irishmen in general. But – and herein the danger lies – there exists in many parts of Ireland, especially in the South and West, a class of people who, brought up in the chains of Catholicism, and trained to unquestioning and unreasoning obedience to all the dicta of their priests, need but a slight stimulus to excite them, and to rouse them from their erstwhile friendly attitude to one of defiance and frenzied hostility.⁸⁹

The sentiments of moderate 'Irishmen in general' were reflected in the nationalist *Freeman's Journal* and in the unionist *Irish Times*.⁹⁰ But while public opinion may have reduced the level of intimidation in the city, it did not stop the boycott.

Norah Keefe, the Jewish pedlar and the parish priest

Throughout February and March the boycott of Jews continued. They could not sell their goods and, in some cases, they were not served in shops. Jewish children were being ostracised in the schools.⁹¹ The RIC county inspector, Thomas Hayes, reported that he had visited some members of the Jewish community on 27 January. He 'encouraged them to hold out' and told them that 'the matter would blow over – probably'. He stated that '*the Police are affording all the protection they [the Jews] desire*'. It is rather a difficult matter because if the Police are too prominent it will destroy their trade. They are quite satisfied that what is being done is ample.⁹² In the subdistrict of William Street, police acted upon a series of allegations made by members of the Jewish community. On 30 January they dealt with an alleged refusal to supply groceries to Mr Miessel by Messrs Egan. District Inspector O'Hara had investigated immediately and was assured by Mr Egan that he was quite willing to supply Jews and that his shop assistant told the Jew that the groceries could not be delivered. 'The Jew being told this was offended and went across the street to Quinn and Co. and was supplied there.'⁹³ The same day the police investigated an allegation that a member of the Jewish community, who had bought milk from James Gleeson of Kilpeacon, was no longer getting his supply: 'Gleeson assigned no reason to the Jew, but there was no scarcity of milk among the Jews as a farmer named Clancy supplied them.'⁹⁴ The police also investigated a complaint by Rabbi Levin that 'two of his community had been ill used at Newport' in County Tipperary. On 15 February, police investigated a complaint from Ephraim Goldman that he had been stoned while passing Bank Place. On 10 March a Mr Ginsberg complained that his house was being watched by two men. That proved groundless. On 25 March, Patrick Sheehan was fined £1 and costs for assaulting Mr Recusson on 18 March.⁹⁵

There was also evidence of intimidation of Jews in rural areas. Isaac Sandler of 67 Henry Street was selling out of a car at Foynes, in the

Shanagolden area, in mid-March. He had just completed the sale of two blankets to Norah Keeffe, Kilbradran, when the parish priest of Kilcolman and Coolcappa, Fr James Gleeson, drove up. Sandler explained: 'When he saw my car he pulled up, and came off his car, and asked me what I had sold her. I said "a little not much".'⁹⁶ When Norah Harrington, who was with Norah Keeffe, saw Fr Gleeson coming, she ran into an outhouse and hid till the priest went away. In Norah Keeffe's own words, the priest told her:

'I will get you out of the parish for dealing with the Jews and be sure and be gone out of it before a week and to give out the blanket which you have bought from him at once.' I then took out the blankets the minute he told me. I don't remember him saying anything else to me. He then went as far as the door and told the Jew to clear off the road and that he would make him keep out of his parish. The Jew said he did not care about him nor his parish.⁹⁷

According to Sandler's account, Fr Gleeson said 'something to the girl about buying goods from her equals'. Norah Keeffe returned the blankets, saying that the priest 'would not let me keep them'. The priest then said to Sandler: 'This is my parish and to clear out of it at once.'⁹⁸

When Sergeant William McEvoy interviewed Norah Keeffe, he found that she was

very frank in her version of the occurrence and appears also to resent Fr Gleeson's interference in such a manner. She is a poor herdsman's daughter and says only for the Jews that a good many of her class would often be in a bad way for clothing and bed covering.⁹⁹

McEvoy reported to Dublin on 30 March 1904 that 'this priest's action is beyond anything I have yet had to encounter. Those Jews are examples of sobriety, industry and good conduct. They never break the law.'¹⁰⁰ McEvoy indicated that he was going out to the district but 'would take no action without direction'.¹⁰¹ He did not interview the priest concerned.

When the matter was discussed in Dublin Castle, the RIC deputy inspector general, H. Considine, took a pragmatic view. He minuted on 8 April: 'This is a regrettable incident and I trust it will prove exceptional – but a prosecution even if sustainable (which is very doubtful) would unquestionably do infinitely more harm to the Jews than anything else.'¹⁰² Another minute, dated 9 April, read: 'A police prosecution would be absurd.' No action was taken against the priest.¹⁰³

Dublin Castle and pressure to prosecute Fr Creagh

Dublin Castle also withstood an appeal to prosecute Creagh. On 21 March the Jewish Board of Deputies in London wrote to Dublin Castle urging that Creagh be prosecuted, but the reply, drafted on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant, stated that there was not sufficient evidence to justify the institution of legal proceedings:

Even if it were otherwise, it would be undesirable to take any steps now that would tend to revive the excitement against the Jews in Limerick which is happily subsiding, or that might subject them to further injury or ill-treatment.¹⁰⁴

The London committee sent another letter on 5 April, claiming that twenty of the thirty-five Jewish families in Limerick were stated to be now ruined and compelled to beg for a bare sustenance. It was further claimed that no member of the community was able to step out of doors without risk of bodily injury. The reply from Dublin Castle pointed out that the Lord Lieutenant had earlier directed the police force to 'afford every protection to the members of the Jewish faith' in Limerick and he was satisfied that those instructions had been fully carried out.¹⁰⁵

Both the local police and Dublin Castle officials reacted negatively to correspondence in the press which painted – as they perceived it – a distorted and exaggerated view of the situation of the Jews in Limerick. The director of the Irish Mission to Jews, I. Julian Grande, had written to the *Irish Times* on 1 April 1904 claiming that 'no Jew or Jewess can walk along the streets of Limerick without being insulted or assaulted'. Justice, he wrote, had 'long since departed from lawless Limerick' where the police only gave the Jews 'passive protection'.¹⁰⁶ Grande also had a letter published in the *Daily Express* on 1 April.¹⁰⁷ An editorial in that paper on the same day spoke of the authorities contenting themselves with the expression of 'pious opinions, and in the meantime the victims of religious hatred must go hungry':

... we think that it is a crying scandal that the educated bigots of Limerick should be allowed to make life intolerable for law-abiding and industrious members of the community, whose only offence is that they belong to a different creed.

The Jews were being denied their daily bread and were the 'victims of Limerick race-hatred'.¹⁰⁸

Deputy Inspector General Considine, in Dublin Castle, minuted on 9 April 'That these people should suffer is earnestly a matter for regret to every one.' However, he insisted that the police 'have done, are doing, and will continue to do all they can to prevent any illegal interference with the members of the Jewish Community'.¹⁰⁹ District Inspector O'Hara also took issue with the allegations made by Grande and the *Daily Express*. In a report on 7 April, he stated that Jews were collecting their instalments but 'no new business is being done and no doubt the Jews have difficulty in obtaining sums due to them in many cases'. But he did not agree with the *Daily Express*'s claim that the 'only offence of the Jews is that they belong to a different creed', as he believed that 'the methods of doing business practised by the Jews are entirely responsible for the agitation'.¹¹⁰ O'Hara repeated that point in a report on 13 April. He said that Creagh, who was 'a very excitable man', had advised his congregation to have no further dealings with the Jews 'by referring in an inadmissible and injudicious manner to the past history of the Jews, but there is no religious censure'.¹¹¹ Neither did O'Hara believe that there was a 'general boycott of the Jews'. It was, he said, a rejection of the

that they would call again for the money. Tea in particular was mentioned in that connection; it had been alleged that Jews left a 1 lb parcel of tea at a house and then overcharged for it. Bunbury said that he had asked Rabbi Levin about this, and Levin had replied that the Jews never did anything of the sort as they did not deal in tea. The people who went about the country were a different body known as teamen. That was a complete answer to the charge, the bishop told the synod to loud applause.¹²²

Bunbury then spoke of the 'persecution' of Jews in Limerick, which was 'very severe'.¹²³ He did not think that there had been a more severe case of boycotting. Money had been collected in London and other places for the support of the local community. He explained that the Jews were not allowed to practise their trade and that money due to them could not be recovered. They did not bring actions in the courts for the recovery of this money. They were most forbearing in their dealing, the bishop said, and they were willing to accept small instalments spread over a considerable period of time. But despite all that, they were hooted at and assaulted in the streets. When summonses were issued and the offenders appeared in court, the magistrates did not deal properly with them.¹²⁴ The bishop said he felt fully entitled to say that the 'respectable Roman Catholic laymen in Limerick were entirely opposed to this persecution'.¹²⁵

The general synod passed a motion drawing 'the attention of His Majesty's government and all Protestant members of parliament to the persecution of Protestants and Jews in Ireland'.¹²⁶ While the ugly situation in which the Jews of Limerick found themselves might be described as 'persecution', there was no evidence that Protestants shared the same fate. Not surprisingly, Bunbury's speech and the synod resolution were received very negatively in Limerick. District Inspector O'Hara explained to his superiors that the bishop had 'given offence locally as it is considered that he interfered gratuitously in a matter not concerning him and that he relied on statements made to him by the Rabbi without investigating their accuracy'.¹²⁷

Members of Limerick Corporation and the local press were outraged. One Mr Donnellan told the corporation meeting on 20 April that he regretted the use of 'intemperate language' by the 'learned ecclesiastic' outside the city of Limerick; the bishop had taken his information 'from a contaminated source - from those immediately concerned, the Jews themselves'.¹²⁸ As far as the question of the Jews in Limerick went, Donnellan 'was one of those who believed that their presence in the city was not needed' as 'these people' charged 100 per cent profit on their goods.¹²⁹ The *Munster News*, in an editorial on 20 April, gave full vent to the charged emotion which underpinned some local reaction to the bishop's intervention:

Let Bishop Bunbury then behave himself, as becomes one of his social position, and he may count on the courtesy which the Catholics of Limerick have always shown him. But to bear his Synodal slander in silence would not be courtesy but cowardice; and the days are gone when a Papist, ridden over by a Protestant fox-hunter, should crawl, hat in hand, to beg his honour's pardon for having been in the horse's way.

The irate editorial writer continued the history lesson:

We are now in the dawn of the 20th century, but Dr Bunbury does not seem to have yet taken the cobwebs from his eyes. So wake up, bishop, and realise that a new light has come over Ireland, that the 'old order changes giving place to new, and God fulfils himself in many ways'. We don't object to your trying to convert us, but we protest against your plan; we take to truths but we take no notice of nonsense.¹³⁰

William J. Moloney, writing in the nationalist weekly, the *Leader*, felt that the entire episode had been exaggerated by Rabbi Levin and his supporters:

You would naturally conclude from the reading of all the rancorous flummery that has appeared in bigoted Protestant journals, that Jews in Limerick are being roasted at stakes and crucified at corners, and that those who are happy enough to escape Catholic ferocity, are hid away in their wretched hovels, starving and singing the lamentations of Jeremiah.¹³¹

Moloney wrote that it was 'the opinion of shrewd people in Limerick that the whole outcry is a money-making scheme on the part of the Jews'.¹³² Bunbury, he contended, had been contradicted in every single assertion he made:

His speech has certainly been a disgrace to his position as a high Protestant dignitary, and would have been a disgrace also to his intelligence and good taste, if he were the happy possessor of either. . . . It is a high tribute to the extreme moderation of the people of Limerick that they have borne almost good-humouredly, the impertinent censure of a Protestant bishop.¹³³

Moloney asked whether 'we in Limerick' had to 'close our eyes to the evil influence on morality of the low-type Jews' who had come to the city during the previous twenty years: 'Ireland is, at present, being drained of its Gaelic population by emigration, and Jewish colonists are trooping in to fill up the places of the emigrants, and to turn Ireland into a filthy Ghetto.'¹³⁴

The legacy of anti-Semitism

However, Moloney's interpretation of what was happening in Limerick did not accord with the reality of Jewish life. M. J. Blond, who was forced to sell out his trading stock, had written to the *Times* on 10 April:

It took me all these years, with the greatest pain and trouble and working unceasingly until I established myself comfortably and enjoyed a nice trade, until, all of a sudden, like a thunderstorm, spoke hatred and animosity against the Jews, how they crucified Lord Jesus, how they martyred St Simon, and gradually in one month's time, I have none of my previous customers coming into my shop. In fact, my business is nil at present. Would you call my trade a national evil? I defy anyone in this city to say whom I have wronged, what did I overcharge . . . since the beginning of the crusade of Father Creagh against the Jews we never got a fair chance to defend ourselves or to put our case rightly before the Public.¹³⁵

weekly payments system, and he added that, in time, their trade would return as 'the poorer classes cannot pay ready money in shops'.¹¹² In Dublin Castle, Considine minuted the Under Secretary saying that O'Hara might be correct in his view that Creagh wished to attack the Jewish system of trading and was actuated by no feeling of religious rancour. Considine himself had his reservations about the system but 'the Rev. Gentleman [had] selected both an unfortunate method and an unfortunate time'.¹¹³

The Chief Secretary for Ireland, George Wyndham, faced a question on Limerick in the House of Commons on 14 April. Asked by Thomas Sloan (Belfast South) whether he would order an inquiry into the whole matter in order to protect the rights of Jews, Wyndham replied that the police had received special instructions to protect the Jewish community from acts of molestation or violence. Eight cases had been prosecuted, and in two other cases proceedings were pending. Wyndham refused to give any response to a question from Michael Joyce of Limerick who asked: 'Is there any intention to introduce legislation to safeguard the people against extortional usurers who charge 200 or 300 per cent profit on shoddy articles?'¹¹⁴

The Raleigh case

The temperature in the city was again raised in the middle of April when a fifteen-year-old youth, John Rahilly or Raleigh (he was reported under both names), was sentenced to a month in prison at Mountjoy, Dublin. He was among a group of boys who threw stones on 4 April at Rabbi Levin and two other members of the Jewish community as they passed by Carey's Row. One of the group was struck on the ankle by a stone thrown by Raleigh. The *Limerick Leader* described how the youth cried bitterly as he was taken from the court.¹¹⁵ In a long editorial, the paper said the sentence was 'extremely harsh' and regretted that there 'was not a single Catholic magistrate at the hearing of the case'.¹¹⁶ A special meeting of Limerick Corporation was held on 20 April, during which angry speeches were made over the sentencing of the boy to a month in prison. A petition for clemency was sent to the Lord Lieutenant.¹¹⁷

Raleigh served his sentence and was released from Mountjoy on 12 May. District Inspector O'Hara reported that it had been the intention of the boy's friends to 'have a demonstration with a band and to march round the Jewish quarter'. He had warned the band and all concerned that such a demonstration would not be allowed, and in the end, according to O'Hara, 'only a few people took part in the affair which was confined to the locality in which Rahilly lives'. There were no disturbances, he told Dublin Castle.¹¹⁸

Readers of the *Limerick Leader* got a very different account of the homecoming. A report referred to Raleigh's imprisonment for 'alleged stone-throwing at the Jewish Rabbi' and said he was 'looking well after his experience'.¹¹⁹ In contrast to what was reported by the district inspector, the local paper said that Raleigh was met at the station by a 'large crowd', who cheered him as he was carried shoulder-high to his home where he was

presented with a silver watch and chain. Raleigh recounted how, in jail, one of the warders had said to him the morning after he arrived in Mountjoy, 'Come here you Limerick Jew slayer.' Calling over a number of other warders, he said: 'Here is our Limerick Jew slayer.'¹²⁰ After his fifteen minutes of fame, Raleigh walked out of Irish history.

Other instances of assault are recalled by Fanny Goldberg in her unpublished memoirs. David Weinronk and Louis Goldberg were taking their accustomed stroll through Colooney Street when, she explains,

father was struck on the head and fell to the ground. His shout probably saved David a similar blow. He turned quickly and got a lesser blow in the face. A big burley man with a black shillelagh was flailing it about and shouting, 'I'll kill those bloody Jews.' Somebody picked father from the ground and he asked to be put in a side car and taken to Barrington's Hospital. This was quite a distance away. His head was bleeding profusely and I don't know how he could have got to the hospital on his own. I don't know how David Weinronk got home, but he was put to bed where he remained for some days suffering from shock. He gave mother and Bubba [grandmother] the news about father, and they were terror stricken. Father got home sometime later with stitches in his head and was in bed for a while. The shock upset him very much.

Weinronk, according to Gerald Goldberg, suffered a broken leg and was unable to appear in court when the attacker was brought to justice. The accused was declared insane and was sent to the local asylum. There the authorities declared that he was sane and he was released the following day. Another casualty was David Weinronk's wife, Sophia. She was, according to Fanny Goldberg, 'such a small little creature'. Venturing out one day to get some food during the troubles, she was attacked by a few young men in Bowman Street, off Colooney Street. One youth 'beat her head against the wall'. It was not clear how she managed to get away, 'but she too was in bed after that for a few weeks'. Violence was ever close during those early months of the boycott.

Bishop Bunbury and the boycott

At its meeting on 20 April Limerick Corporation heard strong criticism of the local Church of Ireland bishop, Dr Thomas Bunbury, who at the general synod of the Church of Ireland in Dublin on 15 April had vigorously defended the Jews of Limerick. He explained the 'persecution' of the Jews in his city to the general synod, stating that he was relying on information received from Rabbi Levin. The bishop was applauded when he related that the Jews did not charge one sixpence more on their goods than the respectable shopkeepers of Limerick.¹²¹ He was also applauded when he said that the Jews in his city bought from wholesalers and that they made merely the legitimate profits allowed by those wholesale houses. Another accusation brought against them, he said, was that they went into country districts and, finding the parents absent, persuaded children or servants to accept goods, saying

Then, having served one term as director of the arch-confraternity, Creagh was assigned to the Redemptorist order's new missions in the Philippines in early 1906. That was in no sense a demotion. The local press paid homage to his achievements. The *Limerick Echo*, in an editorial on 24 April, spoke warmly of his successful battle

with the usurers who grew fat on the people's want of thrift . . . The blows delivered were with no uncertain aim. Nor was the matter ended, as is only too often the case, when the talking was done.¹⁴⁹

Another press report praised the man who had founded the Workmen's Industrial Association:

To him is due the great movement dealing a great blow to the Jews, who had begun by their methods of usury to make life nearly intolerable for some of those poor struggling people who were so foolish as to buy their articles at most exorbitant instalment prices.¹⁵⁰

The *Limerick Leader* added its voice to the chorus of appreciation on 27 April:

To Fr Creagh is due practically the entire abolition of a system of credit trading with hawkers which had a demoralising effect on the poor families owing to the exaction in the shape of high interest levied for a deposit of the commonest class of good.¹⁵¹

An editorial in the *Munster News* on 9 May also recalled Creagh's 'success' of 1904:

Later on Father Creagh discovered that much of the money earned by the poor people of the city was being handed over week by week to astute Hebrew harpies who, at that time, swarmed over the entire country and city. . . . Father Creagh . . . resolved to change all that; and change it he did beyond question, and that in a very short time . . . [by removing] the blighting influence of the Jewish pedlar from the homes of the people.¹⁵²

The paper wondered whether his work would endure or whether he would watch from afar as the men for whom he had laboured so unselfishly 'handed themselves over to the tender mercies of the publican, the money-lender, the Jewman, the bagman, and the usurious purveyor of miscellaneous foreign shoddy'. There was no fear of that happening, the paper felt.¹⁵³

At his final meeting of the arch-confraternity, Creagh was presented with an address which recorded his 'arduous and heroic service for the spiritual and temporal welfare' of the society. The address recalled:

The indomitable effort you made to rescue the working classes of Limerick from the usurious grasp of foreigners planted in our midst and which resulted in a great victory, cannot easily be forgotten, and is a circumstance which will be proudly related to your credit in days yet to come by parents to their children. Let us hope that the lesson will not be forgotten when you are no longer amongst us.¹⁵⁴

Fr Creagh, in his reply, stated that the establishment of the Workmen's Industrial Association had been the means of keeping the poor 'independent of the Jewish usurers'.¹⁵⁵ After benediction, a 'pathetic scene' took place in the church as large numbers of men crowded around the altar to shake Creagh's hand as he passed from the pulpit. At Fr Creagh's special request, the members sang the rallying song of the confraternity – 'Confraternity men to the fight'.¹⁵⁶

On 12 May 1906, Creagh was seen off by a large crowd at Limerick railway station. He never returned to the city of his birth, dying in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1947.¹⁵⁷ *He returned for a visit in 1926*

Nearly seventy years later, the Limerick county manager, Richard Haslam, discovered that the Jewish burial ground on the Dublin Road near Castleconnell had fallen into neglect. The cemetery had become overgrown and was in need of attention. Although strictly speaking the grounds were not under his jurisdiction, Richard Haslam undertook to have the grass cut at regular intervals and an identification sign erected. He corresponded with Gerald Goldberg in Cork about the long-term upkeep of the grounds. Eventually it was decided to place the cemetery under the trusteeship of two members of the local Jewish community, the late Louis Fine and Stuart Clein.¹⁵⁸ Under Richard Haslam's direction, a sum of £1,000 was voted by Limerick County Council to the Limerick Civic Trust to help restore the burial ground and pay for its upkeep.¹⁵⁹ The director of the trust, Denis Leonard, explained that his organisation has an indirect but ongoing role in the maintenance.¹⁶⁰

An ecumenical service was held on 14 November 1990 to mark the completion of the restoration of the burial ground and prayer house.¹⁶¹ The ceremony was presided over by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, and the Catholic bishop of Limerick, Jeremiah Newman, and the Church of Ireland bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, Edward Darling, also took part. The two bishops were among those who planted six trees to mark the occasion,¹⁶² which the *Limerick Leader* described in an editorial as 'possibly the most ecumenical occasion ever witnessed in Limerick'. It added that the monument inaugurated that day was 'an essential part of our shared heritage, Gentile and Jew. Let us treasure it'.¹⁶³ Chief Rabbi Mirvis referred in his address to the economic boycott and attacks on the Jews in 1904: 'This is a significant but sad occasion, for while we recall a period of bitterness and suffering endured by Jewish inhabitants of the city a few generations ago, we gather today in a wonderful spirit of fraternity, harmony and peace'.¹⁶⁴

That small act of official generosity, initiated by Richard Haslam and executed by the Limerick Civic Trust, meant much to Gerald Goldberg and other members of the Irish Jewish community whose families had lived through the Limerick boycott of 1904. The ecumenical ceremony was a cross-community statement which explicitly acknowledged both the historical presence of Jews in the city and county, and that Jews were – and are – an integral part of that community, a fact that the late Jim Kemmy had repeatedly chronicled in the pages of the *Limerick Journal*.

Members of the Jewish community in the city, facing as they were financial ruin, offered to show their accounts in order to prove they were honest traders.¹³⁶

Fanny Goldberg, in her memoirs, recalled that Jewish men and travellers were at a complete standstill as a consequence of the boycott. She remembered a visit to Limerick by the Jewish Board of Deputies to hold an inquiry and to raise funds for the relief of those suffering discrimination:

I remember huge sheets of rolled foolscap came to father by post. I suppose from London. Everyone who had suffered losses (and who hadn't) came to our house and made a solemn declaration to father and to Mr [Solomon] Ginsberg who were in charge of the matter for our community. Every declaration was written out by Alec Ginsberg, the eldest son of the Ginsberg family. I do not know how much each person got in compensation, but after that came the exodus. Everybody had been ruined.

As the boycott continued into the autumn, there was a further attempt by an anonymous apologist for Creagh to fan the flames of anti-Semitism. A letter, signed by 'Lugaid', was published in the *Limerick Echo* on 1 October 1904:

The simple facts are that the chosen people still issue from the ghetto with clockwork regularity on Mondays to pursue their beneficent avocations throughout the week in peace, their country customers are still faithful to them . . . and the wretched creatures in the purlieus of Limerick who flouted the Jewish creditors six months ago under the pressure of public opinion, have returned like the dog to its vomit, and are again robbing their families, damning their souls and forfeiting for ever their self respect by dealing with the garbage of Europe.¹³⁷

'Lugaid' attacked the 'ignominious silence' of the local Catholic clergy and their failure to support Creagh. Left to stand alone, the Catholic press lived up, in his view, to its 'reptile traditions by sitting on the fence'. He felt that 'the humbler classes in this city are doomed for ages to come to be as Fr Creagh expressed it, "the slaves of Jewish usurers"' unless the 'manhood of Limerick, such as it is, arise and resolve, not in word but in deed', to organise a crusade against the 'evil'. He was convinced that if a determined effort was made, the Jewish colony in Limerick could be reduced to one-tenth 'and would no longer be a menace to the community'. He called for the holding of a public meeting to initiate and co-ordinate a campaign.¹³⁸ The local RIC and Dublin Castle viewed the letter as an attempt to 'kindle agitation against the Jews which had almost died out'.¹³⁹ 'Lugaid' did not get his way.

What impact did the boycott have on Jewish families in the city? This was a source of disagreement between the police authorities and the Jewish community. The county inspector, Thomas Hayes, reported on 12 March 1905 that 'the trade of the Jews has unquestionably fallen off in the city but the Jews who trade the country districts' were doing 'fairly well'.¹⁴⁰ Another report, dated 13 March 1905, stated: 'Their trade in the city is ruined: in the country except close to Limerick City, it has fallen off.' It was also stated that 'As a general rule they are left severely alone though there are one or two exceptions.'¹⁴¹

The official estimate in March 1905 of the effect of the boycott on the population of Limerick Jews was as follows:

The police now report that, within the past year, 8 Jewish families (49 persons) have left Limerick. Of these, 5 families left directly owing to the agitation, as the breadwinners could no longer obtain employment as 'travellers'. The other 3 families left the town for private reasons – two having arranged before 1st January, 1904, to go to South Africa, and the third because its head (a Rabbi) was no longer needed as Minister. The 5 families which left owing to the agitation number 32 persons. 26 families remain, of whom 8 only are in good circumstances.¹⁴²

The new Chief Secretary for Ireland, Walter Long, answered a question on the Limerick boycott in the House of Commons on 4 July 1905, using these figures.¹⁴³ Having read the reports of the Commons debate in the press, Rabbi Levin wrote to Long on 11 July stating that, according to their community records, 'the members of the Jewish Congregation who [have] been compelled to leave Limerick owing to the boycott, violence and constant abuse brought upon us by Fr Creagh [number] 75 individuals instead of 32'.¹⁴⁴ It is difficult to resolve the contradiction between the conflicting figures. Whatever the number, the Jewish community in Limerick had been dealt a severe blow which threatened its viability. The Ginsbergs left. The Jaffes left. The Weinronks followed the Greenfields to South Africa. The Goldbergs left for Leeds, before Louis brought his family back to Cork. Virtually the entire Jewish community in the city joined the exodus. The Limerick boycott was, as Louis Hyman described it, a 'sad but uncharacteristic and atypical episode' in Irish history.¹⁴⁵

Life was never the same again for Rabbi Levin and the Limerick Jews.¹⁴⁶ Remaining in the city until 1911, the rabbi then went to Leeds, where he ministered until his death in 1936.

The departure of Fr Creagh

Fr John Creagh, meanwhile, opened a bank, a shop and the Workmen's Industrial Association in autumn 1904 in order to supply the 'poorer classes with clothing etc. on the instalment payment system'. The goods were supplied at ordinary retail prices provided security was given for the weekly payments.¹⁴⁷ During the following two years he directed his attacks towards the abuse of alcohol, evil literature and obscenity in the theatre. In November 1905, Creagh supported Bishop O'Dwyer's condemnation of the play *Sapho* by Mrs Bandmann-Palmer which was playing at the Theatre Royal. He was in excellent form when he addressed the arch-confraternity:

And when such a play that was against morality was produced at the theatre he advised no one to look upon such foul representations because their eyes stimulated the mind and the imagination, and imagination easily worked upon the lower passions.¹⁴⁸

Census figures for 1901 & 1911 show this to be a blatant lie.

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Question on isolated events part, which got no response from the people it was meant to incite.