

announce at that graveside that they have indeed become princes of the world and that all other nations are their slaves. The Levite concludes with the command: 'Let us renew our oath, sons of the golden calf, and go out to all the lands of the earth!' Thereupon a blue flame appears above the tomb, while each of the thirteen throws a stone upon the tomb; and in the midst of the flame there appears a monstrous golden calf. So the meeting ends; but what none of the participants knows is that these clandestine proceedings have been observed throughout by two men, a German scholar and a baptized Jew, who now swear to spend all their strength in fighting this devilish Jewish plot.

The relevant volume of *Biarritz* was published in 1868, and the date is significant. In Germany the partial emancipation of the Jews during the years of Napoleon's sway had been followed by a violent antisemitic reaction. With the slow growth of a middle class which was at least partly liberal, Jews again enjoyed greater freedom and acceptance, until this tiny fraction of the population – 1·2 per cent, to be precise – was granted approximately the same civil rights as were enjoyed by the remaining 98·8 per cent. This came about in the North German states in 1869, and was extended to the whole of the new German Reich in 1871. Nevertheless in a country which never accepted with any real conviction the ideals of liberalism and democracy, antisemitism remained a powerful factor. Moreover, precisely because German national unity was achieved extremely late, Germans became quite abnormally emphatic in their nationalism; and this too fostered antisemitism. It is therefore not surprising that the first comprehensive formulation of the modern myth of the Jewish conspiracy should have appeared in Germany at the very moment when the Jews were about to be granted full emancipation.

But this was only the beginning of the story – for soon this frankly fictional episode began to turn into a forged document! It was Russian antisemites who first thought of treating the story as an authentic record; in 1872 the relevant chapter was published in St Petersburg as a pamphlet, with the sinister comment that, although the story was a piece of fiction, it had a basis in fact. In 1876 a similar pamphlet appeared in

Moscow, with the title *In The Jewish Cemetery in Czech Prague (the Jews sovereigns of the world)*. In 1880 a second edition of this pamphlet was published; and similar pamphlets appeared in Odessa and Prague. Some years later the story appeared in France, in *Le Contemporain* for July 1881. Now it was no longer presented as a piece of fiction. All the various speeches made by the fictional Jews at Prague were consolidated into a single speech, which was supposed to have been made by a chief rabbi to a secret meeting of Jews. The authenticity of this speech was vouched for – in fact it was supposed to be extracted from a forthcoming work by an English diplomat, *Annals of the Political and Historical Events of the Last Ten Years*.

Goedsche, as we know, had written his novel under the *nom de plume* of Sir John Retcliffe; so it was only appropriate that the English diplomat should be called the same – or rather, carelessly, Sir John Readclif. This gentleman was to have a most adventurous career. When François Bournand printed the ‘speech’ in *Les Juifs et nos contemporains* (1896) he prefaced it with a startling revelation: ‘We find the programme of Jewry, the real programme of the Jews expressed by . . . the Chief Rabbi John Readclif. . . . It is a speech made in 1880.’ Mercifully Sir John quickly recovered himself. Later editions of the ‘speech’ were often accompanied by touching tributes to that heroic antisemite, Sir John Readclif. The tributes were by no means unmerited, for when in 1933 the ‘speech’ appeared for the first time in Sweden, it was prefaced by a melancholy statement: Sir John Readclif had paid with his life for exposing the great Jewish conspiracy. It was a sad end for a man who, if he had been a German novelist, had also been an English diplomat and historian, and who if he had been a heroic antisemite had also been a chief rabbi.

This, then, is the origin of what came to be known as *The Rabbi’s Speech*.¹ But the ludicrousness of its origin did not prevent this ‘speech’ from having a most successful career. In 1887 Theodor Fritsch published it in his ‘catechism’ for anti-semitic agitators; in the same year, and again in 1891, it appeared in the famous anti-semitic anthology *La Russie juive*. In 1893 it was printed in an Austrian newspaper, the *Deutsch-*

¹ The text of *The Rabbi’s Speech* is given in Appendix I.