

## Professor Dr. Adolf Kurrein

A portrayal of his life and work commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death

By Dr. Viktor Kurrein, Rabbi in Linz.

Adolf Kurrein, Phil. Dr. Prof. and Rabbi, was born in Trebitsch (Moravia) on 28th January 1848 (1. Shewat 5606). He lost his father Marem Markus Kurrein at the age of two and was brought up by his devoted mother Bella Elisabeth, née Bassist. "My late mother," he once wrote, "was not an educated woman. She was a simple woman in the old way from time gone by. Because of the untimely death of my late father she was busy with the household and her two children (the boy Adolf and his sister Katharina) throughout the week. Saturday was a real, proper, old Jewish day of rest, dedicated to God and religion. After the service and the midday meal, my mother sat herself on the bench by the stove, opened one of the Jewish-German prayer books and read out aloud. One of her particular favourites was the beginning of the German Techinna (prayer book) by Letteris, which tells of the martyrdom of Hanna's seven sons – "Joseph at His Mother's Grave"<sup>1</sup> and other stories. On New Year's Day she always read the tale of R. Manon from Mainz' martyrdom out of the German festive prayer book by Landau, during which she would shed many deeply felt tears. It was her custom to read out aloud. I took a stool, positioned myself at her feet and listened attentively. Saturday after Saturday and on every New Year's Day she read the same passages and I listened on every occasion as intensely and interested as if I had heard it for the very first time. The impression this had made on me was such that to this day I am very fond of the Agada, the religious moralistic narrations in the Talmud, and indeed most of my publications belong to this genre."

He was sent to a private school before his sixth birthday. The lessons were almost exclusively held in Hebrew; German was only used when reading. At the age of seven he attended normal school for two hours each day. He continued Hebrew at a better private school, where he also studied other subjects. This he did so successfully that he passed the fourth grade examination in Iglau at the tender age of twelve. The Rabbi R. Chajim Josef Pollak, commentator of the "Akedath Izchak" by Isaak Arama, who was an excellent Hebrew and Talmud scholar from the R. Moses

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<sup>1</sup>German original: "Josef am Grabe seiner Mutter"

Schreiber school in Pressburg, identified Adolf Kurrein to be an attentive and talented student before long. He allowed the boy to partake in his daily two hour long talks on the Talmud. The Rabbi gave him, together with his own son, a preparatory lesson so that he could keep up with the older and more advanced boys. The methodology was of such quality that after only one and a half years the reading and understanding of easy passages of the Talmud did not require any preparations. Each Friday the students had to be able to recount the subject matter of the whole week. It was not necessary to know it word by word, but the students had to demonstrate their knowledge and explain everything correctly. They dealt with the prophets including the commentaries and translated one hour each day from German into Hebrew. He would benefit from the fruit these lessons provided for the rest of his life. He mastered the Hebrew language; he wrote pure Hebrew as found in the Bible and was able to write poetry in Hebrew without any effort. He also excelled at the exterior beauty of the language, as his quadratic as well as his italic orthography was beautiful. He was also very adept at cutting the necessary quills for writing in Hebraic. It was not easy for his mother to earn enough money for the upkeep. She was a plain seamstress – in those days a laborious and badly paid job since everything had to be done by hand. She also made Tachrichin and later on he often told the story of how his mother had sewn her own death robe. She had even tried on the hood in front of the mirror. When the upset boy ran up to his mother and cried: "Mother, what are you doing?" – she answered serenely: "My child, I want to look nice when I am dead!"

Mother and daughter often sat by the light of the tallow candle, tirelessly sewing gents' shirts, which used to have embroidered chests in those days, while the boy was leaning over his books and studied. "Just keep on studying," would the mother say, who herself knew little else but work and toil. Despite her kind-heartedness and love towards her child she lacked the understanding that a child sometimes wants to do nothing and be idle. How often would the grown-up man repeat his mother's words to his own children: "If you don't have anything to do, take a book and read – just do not be idle!"

A Franciscan friar, Pater Orthmar, who would teach both Jews and Christians with equal affection and for no remuneration whatsoever, taught him Latin and Greek. The rules were learned on an autodidactic basis as stated in the assigned books. He remained truly thankful to the noble priest for the rest of his life. Later, when his position as Rabbi and teacher brought him into close contact with Catholic

clergymen, he would gladly share his knowledge, thus continuing the legacy of the humanistic Pater Orthmar.

The modest, able boy who never missed a service – come summer or winter – was well liked in the congregation of Trebitsch. As a sign of his status he would often have the honour of reading the Haftara in the temple – which a boy even without the Bar Mizwa is allowed to do. On his thirteenth birthday he received the Bar Mizwa on the Sabbath Bo. He held his Derasha, which he had composed and written out all by himself, to everyone's satisfaction. At the age of 15 he left home equipped with an excellent understanding of the Talmud and a knowledge of the Bible which moved the famous Berlin Rabbi Dr. Baruch Placzek to call him "a living Bible-lexicon". Adolf Kurrein was actually able to recall one or more verses and their exact places in the Bible for each Hebrew root word. He went to Brünn in order to continue his studies at the local grammar school, where he started in the fourth grade. After having handed over an introductory letter from his former teacher, he asked Dr. Placzek whether he could study the Talmud with him. Dr. Placzek agreed. Because of the many students Dr. Placzek gave a number of Talmud and one Exegese lesson each week according to Samson R. Hirsch's method, who had been his teacher. The state Rabbi Abraham Placzek, Dr. Placzek's father, came to visit his Rabbi son nearly every week. When he heard that a student of R. Chajim J. Pollak was in town, he advised his son to keep an eye on him and to make sure he continued his studies. To the boy he suggested that he should study the *Shiur* in the Rabbi's study even if his son could not be present himself because of other engagements.

Kurrein remained there for two years. He was responsible for his own upkeep and took on a position as a private tutor, which included accommodation and food as well as a monthly allowance of 12 Gulden. Since the number of students had started to dwindle, he stopped attending the Talmud lectures and carried on studying by himself. He stayed in Brünn until the end of his grammar school days, which he completed with the Matura on 3 July 1866 – the same day on which the battle of Königgrätz/Sadowa with its disastrous outcome for Austria took place.<sup>2</sup> He was now confronted with a choice of career. His whole being, his wish and want and that of his pious mother, who regarded it as a blessing if her son should become a Rabbi, was to become just that. His religious teacher Stössel tried to dissuade him. He reasoned that his unprepossessing countenance would hinder his attaining a position

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: Prussian victory over the Austrian army, ending the Seven Weeks' War. It confirmed the Prussian hegemony over the German states and led to the formation of the North German Confederation 1867.

which would reflect his abilities. Placzek, however, supported Kurrein. He decided to go to Vienna to attend the lectures of the famous public speaker Dr. Jellinek at the University and at the Beth Hhamidrash. In Dr. Jellinek he found a benefactor he would retain until Jellinek's death. He supported Kurrein not only in his studies and his scientific assignments, but also remained a benevolent benefactor when it came to materialistic needs. He read philosophy under the Herbartian<sup>3</sup> scholar Zimmermann, studied history and occupied himself with orientalism taught by Professor Boller, a specialist in Indo-Germanic languages and comparative linguistics. Other tutors included the Professors of Semitic languages Goldenthal, Müller and Sachau, the latter being responsible for Kurrein securing his first larger assignment for the director of the Viennese observatory, Prof. Littrow. He had to translate the Maimonidesian lunar month calculations that were subsequently published in the reports of the scientific faculty.

On completion of three viva voces in philosophy, history and mathematics, the doctor's degree of the university of Vienna was conferred upon him on 5 March 1871. A year later, on 21 July 1872, upon successful completion of the exam he accepted the Rabbi diploma (Hatara) from the Moravian state Rabbi R. Abraham Placzek in Boskowitz. Prior to this he had received both a Hebrew and a German diploma from I. H. Weiß and Dr. Jellinek, both Beth Hamidrash teachers in Vienna. Soon after that a position of Rabbi was advertised in St. Pölten, Lower Austria. He applied and, following a well received trial sermon, was appointed Rabbi. He started on Rosh hashono 1872. *Die Neuzeit* reported at the time: "Following a trial sermon on the third of this month (August), Herr Dr. Adolf Kurrein, one of the most competent Viennese Rabbi candidates, has been appointed as Rabbi and preacher to St. Pölten. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate St. Pölten congregation on this choice." – He now held a position that perhaps did not pay much, but contented him for the time being. His benefactor, Dr. Jellinek, though, was not satisfied and reproached him for having accepted such a low position instead of waiting for a more prominent appointment in Vienna. However, Kurrein argued that this enabled him to have his poor mother join him so that he could care for her. Further, he would have enough time to administer his duties and to further his scientific studies. Indeed, he was quite pleased with his congregation. His mother did the household for him and

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<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: Herbart, Johann Friedrich (1776-1841) German philosopher, who developed a "realistic" alternative, based on metaphysics and psychology, to the idealistic philosophy of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.

the financial situation was under control. He filled the position of Rabbi and taught religion – it was not too much work. There was also enough time to devote himself to the sciences and soon he published his first literary works: "About the Notrikon Anochi",<sup>4</sup> a critique of the biblical-talmudic-rabbinical florilegium by Dr. B. Fischer; "The Ceremony of Collecting Water During the Feast of Tabernacles";<sup>5</sup> "The Prophet Ezechiel's Face";<sup>6</sup> "More Thoughts on 'Servant of the Servants' of God";<sup>7</sup> "Kindling the Fire on Sabbath"<sup>8</sup> in the *Neuzeit*, which was printed in Vienna.

Further publications include a Sabbath Chanukka-sermon "The Evil Enemy and How to Protect Ourselves From Him"<sup>9</sup> in the *Rahmers Predigt-Magazin* 1875 (2<sup>nd</sup> volume), and in 1873 the self-published speech "Pray For the Wellbeing of The Sovereign"<sup>10</sup> to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> jubilee of His Majesty Emperor Franz Josef I.

His stay in St. Pölten was a pleasant one. The majority of families had an almost patriarchal relationship to the Rabbi, who, at the time, was perhaps one of the youngest in the whole of Austria. He enjoyed a good reputation everywhere. In 1875 the Rabbi Dr. Frank was called to Cologne and his former position in Linz a. D. was advertised. It, too, was not a prominent position, neither in terms of congregation size nor income. However, Linz being a state capital, it attracted a great number of competent applicants. Trial sermons were held. To find a successor for Dr. Frank - an excellent orator - was not easy. Then a man, who visited St. Pölten frequently, suggested, that the young Rabbi from there should be invited to a trial sermon. Neither cost nor risk were prohibitive to this undertaking. After his sermon Kurrein was appointed Rabbi to Linz a. D. His first day was before Purim. On 17<sup>th</sup> January 1877 he married Jessie Loewe, daughter of Dr. Louis Loewe, principal of the Judith Montefiore theological college in Ramsgate and Montefiore's companion on his travels to the Orient. Much was ado in the congregation of Linz at the time. The first Jewish House of God in the Austrian alpine states was to be built – in Linz, the state capital of Upper-Austria. The whole undertaking was to take place with as much grandeur as possible. The governor of Linz, Graf Wiedenfeld, the privy councillor Fürst Metternich, the mayor Dr. Wiesner and other leading public figures were present at the laying of the foundation stone on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1876. The Rabbi's sermon

<sup>4</sup> German original: "Ueber das Notarikon Anochi"

<sup>5</sup> German original: "Die Feier des Wasserfüllens am Hüttenfeste, Simchat beth haschoëbah"

<sup>6</sup> German original: "Das Gesicht des Propheten Ezechiel"

<sup>7</sup> German original: "Noch ein Wort über 'Knecht der Knechte Gottes' "

<sup>8</sup> German original: "Das Feueranbrennen am Sabbath"

<sup>9</sup> German original: "Der böse Feind und dessen Abwehr"

<sup>10</sup> German original: "Bete für das Wohl des Landesfürsten"

found general approval by both Jews and Christians and was published following the specific request by Wertheimer, a member of parliament for Upper-Austria. The consecration of the temple took place more or less exactly one year later on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1877 following the last prayer in the old house of worship on 5<sup>th</sup> May and was an even grander affair; the entire gentry from Linz, regardless of their confession, attended. The preacher Dr. Jellinek from Vienna was invited to hold the inauguration speech. However, he declined with the words: "Your preacher is able to hold a very good inauguration speech." But he lit the eternal flame, during which he spoke enchanting words. On top of that Prof. Sulzer, who oversaw the musical arrangements, and a deputation from the Viennese congregation were present. The Linz congregation had now reached its golden age. Both sermons (1877), dedicated to Sir Moses Montefiore Bart, were also published under the title: "Two Sermons to Say Farewell to the Old House of Worship, to the Inauguration of the New Israeli Temple in Linz."<sup>11</sup>

A Shabuoth sermon titled "Israel, a Jewel from God"<sup>12</sup> was published in *Rahmers Predigtmagazin* (3<sup>rd</sup> volume, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, page 140). In 1880 he presented to the public a collection of five Sermons under the title "Maggid Mereshith, the Revelation of Creation"<sup>13</sup> dedicated to his teacher Dr. A. Jellinek. This, as well as the subsequent collection from 1882, titled "Maggid Leadam, the Doctrine of Humanity of the Jewry, the Human, Humanitarianism, and Humanity"<sup>14</sup> and dedicated to his parents in law Dr. Louis Loewe and Emma, née Silberstein, in Broadstairs (England) were very well received in the Jewish press of the time. "These Sermons are worth being read not only by preachers, but by laymen, too. Everybody will benefit from what these pure outbursts of soul and heart have to offer," it read. Both collections were quickly sold out and had to be republished, this time together, under the title "Pitche Olam, Prerevelations".<sup>15</sup> Kurrein went to Bielitz in Austrian Silesia in 1883 following the death of his mother Bella Elisabeth, née Bassist, in Linz. His workload in Bielitz was huge. Teaching at the middle-schools consumed most of his time. The congregation were sincere and started following him not before long. Already in 1883

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<sup>11</sup> German original: "Zwei Reden zum Abschied vom alten Bethause, zur Einweihung des neuen isr. Tempels in Linz "

<sup>12</sup> German original: "Israel, ein Kleinod Gottes"

<sup>13</sup> German original "Maggid Mereschith, die Offenbarungen der Schöpfung"

<sup>14</sup> German original "Maggid leadam, die Menschenlehre des Judentums, der Mensch, die Menschlichkeit und Menschheit"

<sup>15</sup> German original "Pitche Olam, Voroffenbarungen"

he published the greater work "Talmudic Satires Against Rome"<sup>16</sup> in the Jeshurun I. and II. volume (published by K. Bilak<sup>17</sup> in Budapest). His speeches held on the erection of the gravestones to commemorate the Bielitz Rabbis Dr. Wolf Lesser<sup>18</sup> and Michael Schöngut, were printed, too. He held a talk in support of the Israeli charitable society on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1884 in the guildhall to Bielitz on "The Woman Within the Jewry".<sup>19</sup> This talk appeared as a brochure one year later and a second edition had to be printed. He published an essay entitled "Sir Moses Montefiore" in the *Laubhütte* (S. Mayer, Regensburg, 1<sup>st</sup> volume, no. 21) and in the *Monatsblätter* (Brüll, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, no.11) in commemoration of the hundredth birthday of the Jewish philanthropist. He wrote that Sir Moses had honoured the scribe at the Feast of Tabernacles with an Ethrog from the area, which Montefiore had bought opposite the Jaffa Gate along the road to Hebron and subsequently left to the Jewish inhabitants for cultivation.

His wife gave birth to their fifth child, a daughter, in 1885.

Then he started on his scientific work "The Social Question within Jewry",<sup>20</sup> which was published in the *Monatsblätter* in 1889.

The demanding teaching schedule at the Bielitz middle-schools soon brought the lack of proper Jewish religious education teaching books to the pedagogically astute Dr Kurrein's attention. At first he produced booklets by means of autography, which contained translations of ancient texts, until, in 1887, he published a systematically depicted literal translation called "Religious Instruction of the Tora",<sup>21</sup> which included a theoretical appendix. The work was designed for teaching in middle-schools. However, it did not become popular. Not because it was not good, but because it demanded that the teacher left the old paths and venture onto a new one. Dr. Cäsar Seligmann-Hamburg wrote in a letter to Dr. Kurrein in 1892: "I admit that the more I delved into the book, the more I befriended myself with its ways. The new and original always surprises the reader and attracts criticism until it breaks through." Later, the *Jüdische Volksstimme* added on Dr. Kurrein's promotion to professor: "We would like to take this opportunity to pose a question to the professional pedagogues in Vienna on Jewish religious education: Are they familiar with the fact that a teaching book by Dr. Kurrein on the Pentateuch was published years ago, which, apart from

<sup>16</sup> German original "Talmudische Satiren gegen Rom"

<sup>17</sup> Translator's note: illegible, please refer to page six of the original

<sup>18</sup> Translator's note: illegible, please refer to page six of the original

<sup>19</sup> German original "Die Frau im jüdischen Volke"

<sup>20</sup> German original "Die soziale Frage im Judentume"

<sup>21</sup> German original "Religionslehre der Tora"

being properly translated into contemporary German, specifically guides the teacher in terms of religious content in the right direction?"

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1887 he held an excellent talk on "Work and Workers in the Jewry"<sup>22</sup> which was appropriately praised by the local press *Wochenschrift* and "Silesia", and which, in 1890, was published in the *Monatsblätter* (10<sup>th</sup> volume) and ended up being printed as a brochure. Four speeches, one funeral oration "The Home of Love",<sup>23</sup> a funeral sermon for J. S. Lengfelder and two Sukkoth festival speeches "To Be Happy And To Make Happy"<sup>24</sup> and "The Symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles"<sup>25</sup> were published at the same time as well as his "Dream and Truth",<sup>26</sup> a portrayal of Joseph following the Agadah, which *Rahmers Literaturblatt Magdeburg* and other papers from home and abroad discussed and of which a second edition was printed in 1888. In the same year he was invited to hold a trial sermon in Teplitz-Schönau, which led to him being offered and accepting the position. On 25<sup>th</sup> February 1888 he held his farewell speech "Think – Do Not Forget"<sup>27</sup> in the Bielitz temple, which, together with the exhortatory speech during the youth service by Rudolf Kestel, a loyal member of the congregation, was printed on general demand. When he said: "I saw, I heard, I observed and I did not hold back my observations" – it was not an empty phrase, but an honest self-reflection, which he substantiated by showing that he did what he could to alleviate mistakes and inadequacies.

The impression this farewell speech made was enormous. The congregation, who felt a deep and rare love towards their Rabbi, realised only now what he represented for them and what they were about to lose. The local press, once again, printed detailed accounts and thus supported the fact, that the mood was not an artificial one, but was truly felt. His farewell, however, at the train station surpassed all that had gone on before.

On 6<sup>th</sup> March 1888 Kurrein arrived in Teplitz under the provost Angelus Pick. He took on the position in the prime of his life at the age of 42. Jellinek congratulated him heartily and wrote: "You are one of my best and most talented pupils, you possess verve and knowledge and when I think of you, of Dr. David and Dr. Leimdörfer in Hamburg, I regret that I was not able to collect a greater number of pupils around me."

<sup>22</sup> German original "Arbeit und Arbeiter im Judentume"

<sup>23</sup> German original "Das Heim der Liebe"

<sup>24</sup> German original "Froh sein und froh machen"

<sup>25</sup> German original "Die Symbole des Hüttenfestes"

<sup>26</sup> German original "Traum und Wahrheit"

<sup>27</sup> German original "Denke – Vergiß nicht"



Soon, on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1888, he held and printed a speech "The Advantages That Come With Age"<sup>28</sup> to celebrate provost Angelus Pick's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The Teplitzer temple society had the speech "Israel's Treasure Cove"<sup>29</sup> printed in 1889. The funeral oration to mark the death of crown prince Rudolf and a funeral sermon for Bertha Bechert were published, too, and the second edition of "Dream and Truth" (see footnote 26) was run in the same year.

On 24<sup>th</sup> November his father in law, Dr. Louis Loewe, the famous orientalist, celebrated scholar and Montefiore's companion, passed away. Kurrein inherited a good part of his library so that his collection started to increase in size and value.

The following year his work "The Social Question within Jewry" (see footnote 20), which had already been printed in Brüll's *Monatsblätter* as a serialised essay, was published in its own right. His Bielitz-talk "Work and Workers in the Jewry" (see footnote 22) was subsequently printed in the *Monatsblätter* (10<sup>th</sup> volume) and also published as a separate print.

Kurrein's commemoration speech of the Austrian *Reichsvolksschulgesetz*,<sup>30</sup> "The Light of the People",<sup>31</sup> which celebrated its twentieth birthday in 1889, was put to print by representatives of the Jewish religious community. He spent the year of 1891 in secret preparation for the 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday of his admired teacher and loyal friend and guide Dr. Jellinek. Kurrein could not let this opportunity pass. With the perseverance of a honeybee and the love of a dedicated collector he created in his tranquil study "The Rays of Light from Dr. Adolf Jellinek's Sermons",<sup>32</sup> which he finally presented to him on his birthday. No other present – so Dr. Jellinek said and wrote again and again – was dearer to him. It had its dedicated place on his desk so that it was always there when he needed it. Already in the same year Jellinek reciprocated, or, in other words, showed how much the work of his student had delighted him, by presenting Dr. Kurrein with a beautiful silver Menorah. He enclosed nothing more than his calling-card, on which was written: "Rays of Light from Dr. Jellinek".<sup>33</sup>

It was Dr. Kurrein's task to hold the inaugural ceremony for the new cemetery in Bilin, which belonged to the Teplitz congregation, in 1892. His inaugural speech made such an impression on Christians and Jews alike, that, following a report of the ceremony, the local paper published the entire speech.

<sup>28</sup> German original "Die Vorzüge des Alters"

<sup>29</sup> German original "Israels Schatzkammer"

<sup>30</sup> Translator's note: literally translated "Elementary School Law for the Realm"

<sup>31</sup> German original "Das Licht des Volkes"

<sup>32</sup> German original "Die Lichtstrahlen aus den Reden Dr. Adolf Jellineks"

<sup>33</sup> German original "Lichtstrahlen von Dr. Jellinek"

One must not forget that the Teplitz congregation placed great demands on Kurrein not only as orator – during the spa-season he had to preach fortnightly -, but also by having to attend functions, teach, maintain congregation records, care for the poor, inspect schools as well as pastoral care and religious welfare; he never missed morning or evening worship; each sermon and speech was meticulously researched and worked through and despite all that he still managed to find the time to attend to his scientific work as well as untiringly create new and original materials. Throughout, he continued his studies, learnt his daily Shiur and kept abreast of new developments in the sciences and in literature.

The magazine *Der jüdische Kantor*, printed by Blaustein-Bromberg, 14<sup>th</sup> volume, published "Peace",<sup>34</sup> a longer essay which Kauffmann-Frankfurt printed later on. The Prague *Gemeindezeitung*, 20<sup>th</sup> volume, no. 17, wrote: "The whole book's profound content is of an appealing and popular vane. The language indicates a dextrous writer, who, and this is a fact we would like to stress, did not fall prey to a homiletic tone." Soon after that *Der jüdische Kantor* (14<sup>th</sup> volume, no. 31) published further essays "The Meaning of Property and its Impact",<sup>35</sup> "The Menorah"<sup>36</sup> (*deutsch-israelisches Familienblatt* Hamburg, published by M. Deutschländer), as well as two essays set to paper by Kurrein "Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Human Torture"<sup>37</sup> and "The 9. Ab 586 Before Conventional Chronology 70 – 135 – 1492 After Conventional Chronology".<sup>38</sup> The first article was aimed at the societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, who wanted to put an end to the slaughter according to Jewish rites. Kurrein expressed openly that their endeavours had little to do with the prevention of cruelty to animals and were more geared to tormenting all Israelites. The paper made sure that readers in Saxony were able to read the article. Jellinek wrote to Kurrein on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1891: "The new treasurer, Dr. Steinbach, held a lecture on the responsibilities that come with property in 1885, about which I wrote critically in the previous issue of the *Neuzeit* to the effect, that he was more concerned with the gospel and the fathers of the church than the views of the Jewish scriptures. A task for you could be to write about the issue: 'About the Responsibilities of Property According to Biblical and Talmudic Doctrines'.<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> German original "Der Friede"

<sup>35</sup> German original "Die Bedeutung des Eigentumes"

<sup>36</sup> German original "Die Menorah"

<sup>37</sup> German original "Tierschutz und Menschenqual"

<sup>38</sup> German original "Der 9. Ab 586 vor der üblichen Zeitrechnung 70 – 135 – 1492 nach der üblichen Zeitrechnung"

<sup>39</sup> German original "Ueber die Pflichten des Besitzes nach biblischer und talmudischer Lehre"

essay would have to be precise and written in the popular style of today." Not even a year passed before the beginnings of a remarkable study about the responsibilities of property was published by the Cologne based *Gemeindezeitung* no. 45. It was the fruit of Jellinek's advice.

"The Responsibilities of Property"<sup>40</sup> was printed as a brochure in 1892. Such was his way. Each and every idea had to be carried out and one may well wonder about the quantity of the ideas as well as the perseverance that went into their realisation.

The establishing of a rabbinical association in Bohemia and the Jewish paper *Jüdische Chronik* presented him with a welcome field into which he could direct his energies.

The "Portrayals of Patriarchs",<sup>41</sup> a result of his work in youth education, was published in the same year. Jellinek states in his essay on the "Portrayals of Patriarchs" in the *Neuzeit* (1893, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, no. 38, 33<sup>rd</sup> volume) that the "Exhortatory Sermons for the Youth Service"<sup>42</sup> is not so easy to dispatch, if it is to take into account pedagogy, the laws of oratory and, at the same time, is to make a deep and lasting impression on the minds of the youthful listeners. The exhortatory sermon during a Jewish service should be appealing, but not trivial, educational, but not condescending, well organised, but not artificially constructed, festive, but not be marked by exaggerated pathos. This task is not an easy one. The "Portrayals of Patriarchs" (see footnote 41) by Dr. Kurrein, he continues, "surpass all previous publications of the same genre. They are clear, simple, easy to understand, yet highly educational... They are a treasure cove, which contain many a jewel, especially real pearls from the Midrash."

In that year Jellenik was the cause of much joy for Kurrein. He sent him a valuable silver inkstand for the Chanukka festival with the following words: "I have sent you an inkstand for the Chanukka festival, which you are to use for composing your sermons. I will present you with an intellectual gift, too: A collection of my specially selected passages of the Talmud and the Midrash to use in sermons."

That present, however, was not to be. Jellinek passed away on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1893 and it seemed as though the present and the letter, presented a mere three weeks earlier, were given to his student in a state of premonition. Kurrein never

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<sup>40</sup> German original "Die Pflichten des Besitzes"

<sup>41</sup> German original "Patriarchenbilder"

<sup>42</sup> German original "Die Exhorte des Jugendgottesdienstes"

learned why Jellinek had bestowed him with this memento – it was a spontaneous outburst of the love that existed between student and teacher, which needed to be expressed in a worldly fashion prior to his passing away. It was only natural that the student hurried to the bier of the teacher, where he also represented the rabbinical association of Bohemia. He dedicated him the article in the *Neuzeit* (34<sup>th</sup> volume, no. 3, 19. I. 1894) "Dr. Jellinek as Teacher"<sup>43</sup>, for which he received many letters of thanks from Jellineks friends. Dr. Gustav von Schlesinger-Wien wrote: " In your article 'Dr. Jellinek as Teacher' you painted an excellent picture of the extensive and enduring activities of our late friend. His unfortunate and sudden passing away creates a void in the Jewry. Your article serves to honour you."

With Kurrein as vice-president the rabbinical association of Bohemia had commenced activities. One of the objectives of the association was to work out a uniform curriculum. The talk "Religious Education",<sup>44</sup> held at the association and published by it, was dedicated to that cause. His achievements in improving and organising religious education would require a separate article. The same can be said for his commitment to the association, whose president he became and remained until his death following the untimely passing away of Prague chief-Rabbi Dr. Ehrenfelds, the previous office holder. A monument to his deeds is the commemorative speech, which was handed to him on his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in office.

In 1894 he had laid the foundation stone of an undertaking, that was to keep him busy for the rest of his life: The Jewish congregation library of Treblitz. Over a period of a quarter of a century he acquired book after book with very little means at his disposal and kept on asking for contributions and donations, until the library could boast of an impressive collection of some 1,000 books. It stocked nearly all German publications that were of value to and concerned with Jewish science and literature. He provided rooms, organised the maintenance, did the lettings and book-keeping and catalogued everything.

The *Jüdische Chronik* was a publication which was to make the teachings available to a wider audience. During the constitutional meeting of the rabbinical association Dr. S. Stern of Saaz suggested, that a monthly popular science publication with the aim of inspiring interest in and advancing religious matters be founded. This publication, cheaply produced, yet well put together and of pleasant form and with chaste content, was bound to become a magazine for the whole family.

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<sup>43</sup> German original "Dr. Jellinek als Lehrer"

<sup>44</sup> German original "Der Religionsunterricht"

Dr. Kurrein of Teplitz, Dr. S. Stern of Saaz and Dr. J. Ziegler of Karlsbad were the publishers and Stern became editor. The first edition appeared for Pessach in 1894 and it survived for seven years with the above named committee at its head for the first three. From 1897 (4<sup>th</sup> volume) onwards, Kurrein was its sole publisher and editor. In those seven years he wrote more than 100 essays, including longer pieces, which also appeared as separately published works such as "Human Contact, Derech erez. According to the Talmud"<sup>45</sup> (1896), "The Kaddish of the Mourners",<sup>46</sup> which was reprinted twice, "The Gravestone"<sup>47</sup> (1897), "The Neshomoh-Light of the Soul"<sup>48</sup> (1898), "Judea and Rome"<sup>49</sup> (1899) and "Do Jews Need Christian Blood?"<sup>50</sup> (1900).

The chronicle closed down on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1901. Many letters were received praising the editor and stating that the discontinuation of the magazine was met with regret. A lovely and accurate note in a Jewish paper reads as follows: "The aim of *Die Chronik* was not to generate business or advertise individuals, it did not succumb to trends and popular opinions and was never ruled by dogmas. It always followed its own aims without affected piety or using the wrong pathos so often applied by orthodox rabbinical papers. Instead it pursued selflessly, unerringly and unselfishly the aim to achieve the best for the Jewry."

But it seemed, as though he could not live without idealism. His very nature and spirit made him continuously look for an ideal and cling onto it. Herzl's appearance and the first Zionist congress found mention in *Die Chronik*. On 11<sup>th</sup> February he held a speech, "Half a Sheckel! A Crown for Zion!"<sup>51</sup> which eventually got published. Early in 1899 he was once again called to the rostrum, when the Austrian-Israel Union invited him. His speech "Judea and Rome" (see footnote 49) was published by the Union and *Die Chronik* and even made its way to the public by independent means. The youth, which joined Zionism enthusiastically, soon embraced Dr. Kurrein. One can find his essay "The Hebrew Language for Education and Teaching"<sup>52</sup> in the *Jugendfrühling* the commemorative publication of the Jewish national high-school leavers of North-western Bohemia.

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<sup>45</sup> German original "Der Umgang mit Menschen, Derech erez. nach dem Talmud"

<sup>46</sup> German original "Das Kaddisch der Trauernden"

<sup>47</sup> German original "Der Grabstein"

<sup>48</sup> German original "Das Neschomoh-Seelenlicht"

<sup>49</sup> German original "Judea und Rom"

<sup>50</sup> German original "Brauchen die Juden Christenblut?"

<sup>51</sup> German original "Einen halben Scheckel! Eine Krone für Zion!"

<sup>52</sup> German original "Die hebräische Sprache als Erziehungs- und Bildungsmittel"

Over the next years the Zionist movement, which occupied the minds and as such made an impact even in the congregation of Teplitz, increased in strength. Kurrein declared himself a supporter of Zionism.

When the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, the standard reference work created by the American Jewry, was founded, Kurrein was asked to contribute and duly supplied a number of essays. Following that he became involved in the *Jüdische Volksstimme* in Brünn, for which he wrote between 100 and 150 articles. At the same time he continued working on bigger independent projects for the *Volkskalender*, published annually by Hickl – each of which was interesting and of value. The cycle about the Jewish house – "The Seder",<sup>53</sup> "Moses", "Samuel and Elia",<sup>54</sup> "Mordechai and Haman",<sup>55</sup> "The Three Heroines of the Megilla"<sup>56</sup>, "Rabbi Israel Baal Shem, Israel Besht" and "Rabbi Jehuda hachossid" – serves as an example.

Zionism soon recognised the great and powerful strength of this man and he received countless invitations to give speeches and talks from all over. One of the first to request Kurrein was the association Hashachar in Bielitz (1902). He went there, gave his talk and enraptured the entire congregation. He had to return and return he did. He held further Sermons in Brünn, Breslau, Karlsbad, Berlin, Gleiwitz, Beutzen, Chemnitz, Prague, Pilsen, Kolin and other cities. Some speeches were published, such as "Zionism",<sup>57</sup> "Herzl's Plans"<sup>58</sup> etc.

Publications such as *Mitteilungen des Distriktkommittees für Böhmen*, the *Jüdische Revue* and the annual *Die Stimme der Wahrheit (Zionismus und Idealismus)* asked for his contribution and received it. Student fraternities requested articles by him for their commemorative publications. To the anniversary of the twentieth semester (1906) of the *Emunah* he supplied the article "Jewish Centenaries"<sup>59</sup> and he sent the essay "Biblical Teachings of Happiness"<sup>60</sup> to the *Bar Kochba* in Prague. His oratory performances in the pulpit reached an ever higher degree of perfection, became simpler, more carefully researched and went deeper into the subject matter. On New Year's day in 1904 (5665) he held the sermon "Think correctly – Live correctly",<sup>61</sup> which can be described as an oratory masterpiece and

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<sup>53</sup> German original "Der Seder"

<sup>54</sup> German original "Samuel und Elia"

<sup>55</sup> German original "Mordechai und Haman"

<sup>56</sup> German original "Die drei Heldinnen der Megilla"

<sup>57</sup> German original "Der Zionismus"

<sup>58</sup> German original "Herzls Pläne"

<sup>59</sup> German original "Jüdische Centenarien"

<sup>60</sup> German original "Die biblische Glückseligkeitslehre"

<sup>61</sup> German original "Richtig denken – richtig leben"

was subsequently published by an astute member of the audience (H. Sidney Riethof in Teplitz). The same can be said of his school work and his teaching. In 1904 the state department for schools conferred the title of Professor on him – in those days a rarity. His efforts as president of the rabbinical society had the effect, that this title is bestowed on each Bohemian Rabbi following a certain time in office. The "Society for the Collection and Conservation of Jewish Art and Historical Monuments"<sup>62</sup> in Vienna appointed him as their curator.

He celebrated his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in office in 1912. It was a lovely celebration and Dr. Schwarz of Prague, Dr. Stern of Saaz, and Dr. Biach of Brüx all gave speeches in the name of the rabbinical association.

In 1913 he had his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Teplitz. It was a day the congregation did not want to let pass without festivities. It was a day of jubilation and happiness; the congregation demonstrated a sincere and heartfelt friendship and honoured Kurrein. The Provost Dr. Stein said in his speech: "The last quarter of a century has left its marks! Even if your appearance may have changed, but you have remained unchanged when it comes to carrying out your duties so untiringly and objectively. You serve as an example to all of us."

The Jewish press published articles of praise and the uncommonly active participation from Jews from all walks of life on this day of honour expressed their admiration of his exemplary behaviour. The rabbinical association dedicated an address to him, which outlined his achievements perfectly. Rabbi Dr. Schwarz of Prague was the speaker and his words received a well earned rapturous welcome. The *Jüdische Volksstimme* printed an article (by Dr. Kanters, Zwittau). "Never could anyone have honoured me in a more pleasant and true manner," Dr. Kurrein used to say. This gave him great pleasure.

But 1913 was also a year of sadness. An illness made an operation unavoidable. He, who had never been ill and who had no idea of its implications, had to cede all activities for one year on the advice of the privy councillor Dr. Eiselsberg. His son came from Meran to perform his father's duties in Teplitz. It was a serious and difficult operation on the intestine, which resulted in him being in some discomfort for the rest of his days. He did not, however, want the public to know about his sufferings. Kurrein was unable to control his weakness, which left him

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<sup>62</sup> German original "Gesellschaft für die Sammlung und Konservierung von Kunst- und historischen Denkmälern des Judentums"

needing to take short breaks during the day. But again and again he struggled to his feet to work.

During such a break from work, following a minor discomfort, and after he had fulfilled his duties over the festive days with impressive vigour and vitality, he passed away in his sleep without fight or lament on Erev rosh chodesh Cheshwan, the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1919.

His funeral on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October – one wanted to wait for the son's arrival from far away - was wistful, but provided overwhelming proof that people recognise, love and honour true value. The whole town participated in the funeral procession; there was nobody who did not have something good to say. A deep sense of respect for Dr. Kurrein was prevalent in all and sundry. What the authorities – spiritual and secular, Jewish and non-Jewish – contributed during those days in terms of paying their respect, demonstrated, that this was a recompense for honest work, for an ambition pure and ideal, which all earthly gains cannot match.