

BERNHARD KAHN*

C. Vilh. Jacobowsky

Skara

There were very few Jews born in Sweden in the 19th century whose achievements abroad were important enough to merit inclusion of their names in books of reference. One was Rabbi Morris Jacob Raphall who was born in Stockholm as early as 1798. I wrote an article about him in 1954 for the *Judisk Tidskrift* (27, 1954, pp. 171—175). Just as unknown in Sweden as Raphall is Bernhard Kahn.

He was born in Oskarshamn on April 9, 1876, but is not recorded in the parish registers of the city. A Jewish congregation was not established in the city until 1889. According to Hugo Valentin (*Judarnas historia i Sverige*, Stockholm 1924, p. 445) there were six Jews in the city in 1872 — none of whom were of Swedish citizenship. I do not know if the Kahn family was among the six. The Kahns were most likely immigrant Lithuanian Jews. The name Kahn appears in large numbers in the Jewish congregational records of Stockholm from the 1800s, but the name, most likely, refers to Swedish citizens — foreign Jews who resided in the capital only appear in the ministerial registers (birth, marriage, death and funeral registers). The parish authority in Oskarshamn informed me that Bernhard Kahn is not recorded in the city's birth register. However, according to the regional archives in Vadstena, a shopkeeper Kahn or Cahn, of the Mosaic faith and 50 years of age, lived in a house, site nos. 142 to 144 in the city of Oskarshamn in 1876. According to the same source, he appears to have moved to Kalmar

where, in the population register of 1877, the shopkeeping assistant Jacob Cahn, 50 years of age, lived at the home of the shopkeeper Fränkel in the 8th ward, number 89, in the Southern quarter. According to Wulff Fürstenberg's unpublished collection of documents on the origin and oldest history of the Jewish congregations in Kalmar, Oskarshamn and Växjö (a summary of the collection was published in 1969, "Kring Kalmar Mosaiska församlings tillblivelse", *Kalmar läns fornminnesförenings årsbok 1969*, pp. 5—27), a Jewish religious teacher Cahn lived "in the butcher Wahlgren's house in Storgatan" as early as 1874. This person cannot be the same person as the shopkeeping assistant, i.e. the salesclerk, Jacob Kahn.

In Fürstenberg's collection (cited above) he writes about Oskarshamn: "In December 1887, the borough administrators reported the number of Jews as 81 persons with 21 family names, most of whom had settled there during the 1880s; the earliest arrival, J. Katz, came in 1867." When, in 1922, I conducted an investigation of Jewish names, I received information from the respective congregations on which family names had been represented in the congregation. Oskarshamn supplied a list of the family names which had existed in the Oskarshamn congregation since 1889 and another list of names which, according to oral tradition, had existed in the city at an earlier date. The name Kahn was not found among the listed names, but the names Cohen and Katz were — all these names actually are only attributes which signify that the person concerned is a "kohen", a descendant of Aaron.

Thus, I was not very successful in finding

* Translated from the author's Swedish manuscript by Michele Micheletti.

any Swedish information on Bernhard Kahn; nor was I successful in finding any reliable information about his parents' name. In 1975 I contacted Bernhard Kahn's son, Professor Ludwig W. Kahn, in New York. He sent me a xerox copy of a certificate in English, dated on February 20, 1939 in Stockholm, in which Chief Rabbi M. Ehrenpreis affirmed that on April 9, 1874, a son, who was named Bernhard, was born in Oskarshamn to Jacob Kahn and his wife Jetta, née Goldberg. The issuance of this birth certificate was based on inspected "documents, originals and evidences". The year 1874 — in both numerals and letters — is puzzling. In all other instances the year of birth is stated as 1876. In a letter Professor Kahn wrote to me on January 19, 1976, he stated that the year 1874 given in the birth certificate is mistaken and that the correct year of birth can be found on his father's death certificate, passport, "naturalization papers etc.". Perhaps the person who recorded the year of birth confused it with the month of birth, April, the fourth month of the year.

Professor Kahn mentions in his letter that, when Bernhard was four years old, the family Kahn moved to Brückenau, a little town in Bavaria, where Jacob became the religious teacher for the small Jewish congregation. Evidently he was the religious teacher who lived in Kalmar in 1874.

Bernhard spent his childhood in Brückenau. He went to elementary school there but, since the town not had a senior high school, he continued his education in Fulda. This little cathedral town had several institutions of education and was even characterized as "die Stadt der Schulen". According to "*Zur Geschichte der Juden in Fulda. Ein Gedenkbuch*" by Paul Horn and Naftali Sonn (Tel Aviv 1969, p. 55), the educational institutions included the humanistic gymnasium, where B. K. was enrolled, a "städtische Oberrealschule" and one Catholic and one Protestant lyceum. In this work, the congregation's rabbi, Dr. Michael Cahn (1849—1920) is described as having played "a prominent role in the pedagogical work" of the Jewish elementary school and, even though the young Bernhard did not attend that school, Dr. Cahn most certainly played a role in his development. In 1877 Cahn had become provincial rabbi for the district and rabbi of the Fulda Jewish congregation. Five hundred of the city's 13,000 residents belonged

to the congregation (*Ibid.*, p. 70). Cahn, who was a very energetic rabbi, was one of the leaders of neo-orthodoxy, founded by Samson Raphael Hirsch. In consultation with the famous Rudolf Virchow and several other surgeons, he designed the meizah tube which is used throughout the Jewish world to satisfy high hygienic demands during circumcision. He also exerted an influence on Bismarck which resulted in averting a threatened prohibition of ritual slaughter, and from his friend Bishop Kopp who later became Archbishop of Mainz he obtained an affidavit stating that the accusation of ritual murder was based on slanderous lies (*Ibid.*, p. 71).

After passing the school-leaving examination, Bernhard Kahn studied at the university of Würzburg, where, in 1899, he was conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws, and then in Berlin where he became Doctor of Politics. He continued his studies in Munich. Politically he was close to the Social Democrats, and he was an organized Zionist.

Professor Kahn also gave me a copy of the historian, S(chalom) Adler-Rudel's obituary of B. K. in *M. B. Mitteilungsblatt Irgun Olej Merkas Europa*, Tel Aviv 27 May 1955: "Bernhard Kahn zum Gedenken. Ein Kapitel jüdischer Hilfsarbeit" (cited A-R).

Secretary-General in Hilfsverein

Towards the end of 1904, Kahn was employed as secretary-general of Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden which had been founded in 1901 and commenced full activity in 1903, after the pogrom in Kishinev. He succeeded the prematurely deceased Willi Bambus, an advocate of Jewish colonization in Palestine. In December 1904 Hilfsverein (HV) organized an international Jewish conference in Frankfurt am Main to discuss the emigration question. There was no American delegate among the 102 participants. An emigration plan prepared by HV was adopted and a Central Bureau was established in affiliation with HV, with Paul Nathan as chairman and Bernhard Kahn as general secretary (cf. Feder, Ernst, "Paul Nathan, the Man and his Work", Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book* III, London 1958, pp. 60—80). In 1905 Kahn published an important article, "Die jüdische Auswanderung", in the Zionist periodical, *Ost und West*. HV carried out large relief

programs in Russia in 1905 and 1906 and in Rumania in 1907. In January 1906 at a conference in Brussels which was organized by Hilfsverein, the situation of the Russian Jews was discussed but no significant results were reached. HV tried to induce the governments of Russia, as well as Rumania and other Balkan states to improve the conditions of the Jews. Up until 1918 HV spent 40 million marks in Eastern Europe and the Middle East on relief work (cf. Wischnitzer, Mark, "Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden", *Jüdisches Lexikon* II, cols. 1595—1597). At another international conference held in Brussels on the sufferings of the Jewish population of the Balkan Peninsula due to the Balkan Wars, a delegation was appointed to investigate the situation. In his biography of *Paul Nathan* (Leipzig 1929, p. 92), Ernst Feder wrote: "To this delegation belonged besides Paul Nathan, also the Englishman Adler and Bernhard Kahn, in whom Nathan won a colleague with exceptional expert knowledge and personal devotion". In January 1913, Elkan Nathan Adler, Paul Nathan and Kahn visited Serbia, Bulgaria and Salonica. "In Salonica with its population of 140,000 of whom half were Jews who had suffered heavily from the war, an aid committee was established to organize economic, financial and medical assistance" (Feder 1958, *op. cit.*, p. 70).

As secretary-general of HV, Kahn worked hard to give constructive assistance to the Jews in Eastern Europe. He endeavored to organize the disorganized emigration movement, to improve the economic position of the emigrants and to make provision for their cultural, economic and social progress. HV helped 200,000 emigrants with a total of 2,200,000 marks during the years 1904—1913 only (A-R). Together with P. Nathan and Jules Simon, Kahn worked actively to organize HV schools in the Middle East and particularly in Palestine.

Kahn furnished the American Jews with documentary material which influenced the termination of the trade agreement between the United States and Russia in 1912. During the Beilis affair in 1913, he influenced the Vatican's position on the legend of ritual murders. Thus, he acted in the spirit of the rabbi of Fulda, Michael Cahn. Due to the intensive campaign conducted by Kahn and a few others, the innocent Beilis was acquitted. Kahn

worked in HV's "Russian committee" for the repatriation of Russians who, at the outbreak of war in 1914, were detained in Germany.

Altogether, the first world war created a lot of work for Kahn, who made several trips to the German-occupied parts of Eastern Europe. Kahn is mentioned in several letters written by the German rabbi Alexander Carlebach between 1916 and 1918 and published in Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book* VI, 1961, (pp. 60—121). In July 1916, Carlebach and Kahn together visited Vilna (Letter dated July 26, 1961, *Ibid.*, p. 100). On return from a trip to Lomza in Poland, Carlebach again conducted long negotiations with Dr. Kahn, "in the presence of [the Member of Parliament Ludwig] Haas to bring about as impartial and just allotment as possible of the relatively large amount of money which had been sent there. It is completely unbelievable how money intended for relief did not only benefit the poor and miserable but also the aims of the Zionist and Nationalist Parties." (*Ibid.*, p. 101) In 1917 Kahn was with Paul Nathan in Bialystok to negotiate with the German commanding officer (Feder 1929, *op. cit.*).

Kahn visited Warsaw between March 25 and April 7, 1916. In his report on this visit, Kahn wrote that members of the Bund and other Yiddishists refused to cooperate with the representatives of HV on the distribution of joint funds. At the meeting of the Hilfskomité in Berlin on January 10, 1917, Kahn reported that he had not succeeded in bringing about unity during his visit to Poland.

Hilfsverein also devoted itself to the school system in Palestine. During Kahn's earlier years with Hilfsverein, it took charge of the Lälal school, founded in Jerusalem in 1857. In conjunction with the school for boys, it established a school for girls in 1907 and later a teachers training college. Kindergartens, eleven total, elementary schools in various places in the country, institutions for the education of rabbis and kindergarten teachers, a library and an eye clinic were also established (Wischnitzer, *op. cit.*). Hebrew was the language of instruction in all the schools.

Technion in Haifa, which had been established through donations, was to be administered by HV but, during the construction of the building for this teaching institution, a heated controversy on the language of instruction at the junior secondary school, founded as a pre-

paratory-school for Technion, brought the construction to a halt in 1913. The trustees and the leaders of HV decided that the language of instruction should be German. The Yishuv maintained, however, that Hebrew should be the language of instruction. Teachers and pupils went on strike at the HV schools in Jaffa and Jerusalem and the majority left the schools. The Zionists founded Hebrew schools which soon received larger enrolments than the Hilfsverein schools. Paul Nathan, accompanied by Kahn, rushed to Palestine to try to bring about a reconciliation but they were not very successful. The striking teachers were dismissed. A contemporary wrote: "Shameful scenes occurred, about the details of which I shall remain silent. I cannot, however, forget the deep emotion with which Paul Nathan recounted to me on his return, how he and Kahn had been jeered at and stoned in the streets of Jerusalem by teachers and pupils of those very schools which he (Nathan) had founded" (Feder 1958, *op. cit.*, p. 74). And, as Adler-Rudel pointed out, the language controversy was a great disappointment to Kahn who was a Zionist since his youth, but he endeavoured to conciliate with his usual complaisance. When the English conquered Palestine in 1918, they seized all schools considered to be enemy property. But the Zionist Organization was allowed to assume the responsibility for all schools, even Technion.

HV maintained schools and kindergartens also in Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania and Galicia. Up until 1918, HV spent 3,622,000 marks for educational purposes.

As mentioned previously, the war, with its intensification of distress and emigration from Eastern Europe, created an enormous increase in HV's workload. During the war, Kahn cooperated with Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) on its relief work which was conducted with the consent of both sides and with the help of the two organizations and other neutrals. In 1918, after the armistice, there were new assignments in connection with relocation and reconstruction work. HV established an office at the Schlesischer Bahnhof in Berlin, through which more than 237,000 people who entered or left the country passed between 1921 and the first half of 1928.

From 1920 Kahn was in charge of the Joint's refugee work. HV spent over half a million marks to help the emigrants between

1924 and the first half of 1928. As early as 1921, a collection for Ukranian pogrom victims was made and, during the next year, HV brought 120 orphaned children from the Ukraine to Germany. A subsidy program, beginning in 1924, was carried out for Eastern European students attending German universities. A program to take care of parentless children was also initiated (Wischnitzer, *op. cit.*). Kahn was, according to Adler-Rudel, the only European at the Joint's European bureau.

As we have seen, Kahn, as secretary-general of HV, had collaborated with Joint for quite a long time. He was the managing director of the Joint's European bureau since 1921 and, in 1924, he became the head of the Joint's entire effort in Europe.

His many years of work in the Hilfsverein were duly appreciated. The two leading figures in HV were James Simon and Paul Nathan who, "supported by such secretaries as Dr. Bernhard Kahn and Dr. Mark Wischnitzer, created the image of this unique organization, which accomplished remarkable results in its philanthropic activities, but was also, from time to time, involved in Jewish political controversies", as stated in a 1961 retrospect ("James Simon, Industrialist, Art Collector, Philanthropist". Compiled from various sources. Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book X*, London 1965, p. 20).

Beginning in 1905, Kahn wrote for *Ost und West* and other periodicals, in particular the one he founded and edited himself, *Korrespondenzblatt über Auswanderungs- und Siedlungswesen*. In this journal he published essays on the economic and political conditions of Russian Jewry and on the Jews of the Balkan Peninsula.

In Berlin as European director of the Joint

There is a detailed and most well-documented account of Kahn's career as chief of the Joint's European department from 1924 to 1939 in Professor Yehuda Bauer's work, *My Brother's Keeper. A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1929—1939*" (Philadelphia 1974). The book can to a large extent, be said to be about Kahn. Bauer (born in Prague in 1926) is professor of modern history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Since this section is mainly based on his ac-

count, the page references refer to his book.

On the organization of Joint, Bauer writes:

"Plans for fund raising and the overall budget were decided on in New York, but the real work of JDC was done in Europe. There, almost all decisions were placed in the hands of two individuals of great intellectual stature, Dr. Bernhard Kahn, head of the European office of JDC in Berlin, and Dr. Joseph A. Rosen, head of JDC's Russian work. We shall deal with Rosen in the discussion of the work done in Russia, but for the rest of Europe, Dr. Kahn was "Mr. Joint". The group of Jewish German-Americans, financiers and lawyers, who in fact ran JDC needed a man they could trust and who would interpret their ideas in the actual operation of JDC. Kahn was a German-educated Jew, a man Warburg could rely on. Born in Sweden of Lithuanian Jewish parents, he was a brilliant man, well-versed in Jewish law and lore, with a good knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish. He spoke all the great European languages, was deeply steeped in German culture, and was an expert in economics, with a long record of work not only with JDC, but prior to the JDC with the Hilfsverein, the great German Jewish philanthropic organization. An early adherent of the Zionist movement, Kahn had been a delegate to the 1903 Zionist Congress that had rejected the proposal to direct Zionist endeavors temporarily to Uganda. He was a reserved man, outwardly rather cold and pedantic but deeply desirous of helping fellow Jews. He was the kind of man the JDC leadership was looking for. Utterly and absolutely reliable and responsible, extremely competent, he was sufficiently conservative and rigid to recommend him to the New York office of JDC, and at the same time a man of complete independence of mind, capable of a great deal of imaginative thinking, who happened to agree with the JDC group as to how the agency should be run. There was never the slightest trace of subservience about Kahn, never a suspicion that he was not at all times honest with himself and his office in New York. In fact, it even looked as though JDC was divided into three separate parts — the money-raising agency in America and two independent disbursing corporations: one under Kahn and the other under Rosen (pp. 21—22).

Bauer continues by saying that "JDC had its sympathies and antipathies — because, in fact, JDC was Kahn and three or four people in New York" (p. 24). Nevertheless, it remained remarkably free of any political connection and impartial in its activity. JDC managed to be re-

cognized as the only really nonpartisan Jewish organization.

Joseph C. Hyman, secretary of Joint, wrote that:

"Dr. Kahn's policy has been to reconstruct, rehabilitate and make self-supporting those elements in the Jewish population which are physically and mentally capable of establishing themselves on a permanent self-supporting basis, in order that these people may eventually help their local social problem and bring assistance to the sick, deformed, defective, aged etc." (quoted on p. 25).

One of the principles of JDC was aid to help oneself. Kahn believed that the Jews should be helped where they lived — the Jewish problem in Russia should be solved in Russia, the Palestine problem in Palestine, the German-Jewish problem in Germany (p. 25).

Joint worked for the revival of the OSE health service founded in 1912 and for the Jewish school system but, above all else, Kahn was an enthusiastic supporter of economic reconstruction, from 1924 on in cooperation with ICA (Jewish Colonization Association) as the American Jewish Reconstruction Foundation. In 1926 he began to establish credit institutions in Poland which granted loans of smaller amounts with very low interest rates or none at all. In 1930 there were 545 such loan societies with 100,000 members in Poland. They were given the traditional name, Gemilluth chessed (p. 36—37). These loan societies made life much easier for the Jews of Poland. However, Kahn was well aware of the fact that the poorest, those who made up a third of the Jewish population in Poland, could not take advantage of this. At a conference held by the Jewish Agency in Zurich in 1929, he submitted a plan to the leadership of JDC for the industrialization of Polish Jewry. This was to be financed by American-Jewish contributions of about 1.1 million dollars yearly for five years. Kahn did not consider emigration to be a solution. Neither did he believe that the Polish Jews themselves would be able to participate in the planning or administration of the industrialization. Kahn proposed the guidelines for his plan in an address which is reproduced in Bauer's book, pp. 38—40.

Kahn believed that the Jews undoubtedly were going to engage in commerce, industry, craftsmanship and the free professions also

in the future, but that it was necessary to "regenerate" Jewish commerce and industry and to find employment for the workman in the mechanized industries. A start had been made by purchasing a rather small factory in Lodz where young Jews were trained as weavers so that, after a training period, they could transfer to the Jewish factories. Kahn was of the opinion that the products of these factories easily could be marketed in the United States. He did not consider, however, that the times were bad, not only in Eastern Europe which suffered a bad harvest in 1929 — this was also the beginning of the great depression in USA which spread all over the world (p. 40). At the same time that the needs among the Eastern European Jews grew, JDC's income from collections in the United States diminished. The relationship between the Zionists and non-Zionists had improved and the Jewish Agency, with representatives from both sides, had been established. A joint "United Jewish Appeal" was started, a fund-raising drive estimated to bring in six million dollars, of which JDC would receive 3.5 million. However, less than half that sum was collected, which necessitated a drastic cut in all Joint projects. There were those who wanted JDC to disband its activity almost completely but Kahn and others wanted to continue. Their opinion prevailed. The Reconstruction Foundation as well as the loan societies kept on functioning, and on an increased scale.

In the years 1930 to 1932, however, a schism developed between the Reconstruction Foundation and the leadership of the loan societies. The bank which had been established by the latter had been so badly managed that Kahn was forced to let it be liquidated. This led to a crisis of confidence between the leaders of Polish Jewry and the Joint. The Zionist and Bundist press in Poland attacked Kahn and some of their articles were reprinted in the United States. He was described as a rigid bureaucrat, contemptuous of Polish Jews, and said not to have attempted to save the bank in time nor to have cared about the fate of the loan societies after its bankruptcy. The newspaper *Hajnt* stated that Kahn was legally justified, but that it could be questioned whether he was morally justified in his actions. Yet he did as much as he could with the insufficient financial resources at his disposal. The Bundist leader, Victor Alter, sent a memorandum con-

cerning the Reconstruction Foundation to Kahn. He was of the opinion that the loan societies were not the proper means for improving the economic conditions of Polish Jewish shopkeepers and craftsmen. The reform he proposed did not, however, receive the support he had expected from his friends in the United States, the Zionists and Bundists, who supported Kahn instead. Alter was, therefore, compelled to pull himself out of the conflict. Actually, the plan he had proposed was exactly the same plan that Kahn had proposed a few years earlier but which had to be discontinued due to the lack of JDC financial resources caused by the depression (p. 49).

Bauer's account can be supplemented from other sources. Kahn's name is often mentioned in Ernst Feder's diaries from 1930. On March 7, 1930, he wrote: "Abends bei Kahn, draussen in Grunewald (Paucker, Arnold, "Searchlight on the Decline of the Weimar Republic — The Diaries of Ernst Feder", Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book* XIII, London 1968, pp. 161—234, quotation on p. 181). Apparently they were together with the famous painter and graphic artist, Lesser Ury, who was "resigniert und bisig". Feder met Kahn, Ernst Toller, Karl Liebknecht's Jewish wife and others on the 11th of March. After a meeting in Hilfsverein, it was noted that "Bernhard Kahn macht treffende Bemerkungen" (*Ibid.*, p. 209).

After the controversy with Alter, Kahn concentrated JDC's activity on work for children and young people, school meals, summer camps, vocational training and commercial schools. An average of 32,000 children in Poland, over 12,000 in the Máramaros district (Rumania) etc. were fed during the winter of 1931 to 1932. Aside from the general depression and anti-semitic persecutions, serious natural catastrophes occurred — a fire destroyed a large part of Jewish district of Salonica in 1931; floods in Vilna; and antisemitic farmers who set fire to a little town in Transylvania. Half of the Jews in Poland fit for work were unemployed, a hundred thousand families with 75,000 children suffered from starvation, and 70,000 Jewish businessmen and 12,000 industrialists were forced to close down. The situation was even worse in Rumania (Bauer p. 50 f). Kahn reported that "the need in Eastern and Central Europe is acute, overwhelming, desperate, hope is dying" (p. 52). He believed that it would take at least one generation to

correct the distorted economic situation of the Jews. However, in spite of this, Kahn was optimistic.

Bauer points out that Kahn was a keen and intelligent man. He perceived at an early date that Hitlerism would not be as innocuous as the German antisemitism of the 1890s. Many Jews hoped that this would be the case. He stated in December 1930 that "anti-Semitism in Germany today is more dangerous than the former outbreaks of this Jew-hatered" (p. 55). He did not, however, believe that there would be any pogroms in Germany if Hitler came to power; instead, all foreign Jews would be expelled from the country and all Jews removed from political and administrative posts. The situation of German Jewry was very critical and help from JDC would soon be needed.

Feder describes a Saturday evening at Kahn's one year later, January 9, 1932:

"Bei Kahns sind wir ganz allein. Er wollte wohl hauptsächlich mit mir über die Möglichkeit sprechen, ob jüdische Organisationen des Auslandes gegen die nationalsozialistische Gefahr in Deutschland etwas tun können. Danach wird er im Ausland immer wieder gefragt. In der nächsten Woche fährt er nach Paris" (Paucker, *op. cit.*, p. 220).

Shortly afterwards Feder notes that James Simon died and that "Kahn sagt, dass ein Stück seines Lebens mit ihm verloren geht..." (*Ibid.*, p. 221). Simon (born in 1851) was one of the founders of Hilfsverein, a large art collector, patron of the arts and board member of ICA. Neither he nor Feder are mentioned in Bauer's book.

As previously mentioned, Kahn predicted that Hitler would come to power. It was pointed out in a paper written by Margaret T. Edelman-Muehsam that Kahn, "director of the European Reconstruction Programme of the AJDC and a member of the Executive of the Jewish Agency", confirmed that the elections which eventually put Hitler in power exposed rather than created the troublesome political and economic situation of German Jewry ("Reactions of the Jewish Press to Nazi Challenge", Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book* V, London 1960, p. 315). He demanded:

"a planned social and economic programme to preserve, strengthen and extend the Jewish economic position. This is what is sorely lacking in Germany

whereas the political defence is well organised."

It was now discussed within JDC how the German Jews should be helped. Such constructive help as trying to find work for those fired from their jobs was not sufficient. The only solution was emigration, preferably to Palestine (p. 106).

Kahn perceived that his position as JDC's European director was untenable as long as he remained in Berlin. His connections with the hated American Jewish community were unpopular in Berlin. In the end of March 1933 he prepared his departure and telegraphed on April 1 from Paris that he had to move his office there.

He never stood on German soil again, all according to Bauer (p. 107).

Kahn in Paris

Kahn had up until then opposed the organization of anti-Nazi demonstrations by Zionists and other Jews but already on the 2nd of April he began to encourage such actions but not, however, actions organized only by Jews. JDC could not participate since it was an unpolitical organization. Kahn considered sending money to Germany, to Hilfsverein or Central-Verein. On April 3, 1933, a Zentral-Ausschuss (ZA) für Hilfe und Aufbau was founded.

As the European administrator of JDC's funds, Kahn was convinced that vocational training was essential, for two reasons: (1) manual labor was the only alternative open to them after the Jews of Germany were excluded from trade and the professions; (2) only manual workers could be expected to be accepted as immigrants in other countries.

The newly-founded ZA started vocational training in agriculture, gardening, housekeeping (for girls), craftsmanship, in particular carpentry and metal work. Some of these courses were organized by Hechalutz, the Zionist organization training pioneers (p. 119).

Kahn wanted to increase the number of students at the Jewish schools in Germany but the British Jews, most of whom were Zionists, were opposed to this since it was impossible for children to stay in the country. Whenever possible, smaller groups of children were sent to the United States, England, and Switzerland. After 1935, parents began to realize that it

was safest to let their children, their most precious possession, emigrate. In the beginning of 1935 only 6,000 of 50,000 children studied at the Jewish schools but the numbers grew by leaps and bounds (p. 124). Bauer believes that this increase was not only brought about by the spiteful attitude of the teachers and fellow classmates which drove the students from the general schools but was also influenced by the educational and cultural work accomplished by Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Ernst Simon and others. Only rarely in German-Jewish history had Jewish culture flourished as it did during the few years before the holocaust (cf. my article, "Den judiska litteraturen i Hitlertidens Tyskland", *Judisk Tidskrift* 27, 1947, pp. 154—163). "Kahn especially was a convinced believer in the value of spiritual resistance, and he encouraged the German leaders to use the funds they had for purposes such as these" (Bauer, p. 124).

Kahn was full of admiration for the Quakers' self-sacrificing work for the Jews of Germany (p. 127). An account of Kahn's laborious work to assist the German Jews and simplify their emigration would be inappropriately long for this article. Neither the French government nor the French Jews offered sufficient help. It was reported in 1938 that many Jewish refugees, of whom 1,200 were children, were starving in France. The League of Nations' high commissioner for refugees, James G. MacDonald, with whom Kahn had cooperated, resigned in 1935 when he found it impossible to carry out his assignment. As early as 1936, Kahn wrote that "nobody cares about the German refugees in France, neither ICA, the Jewish community, the British [Jews], nor any other organization." And yet, Bauer remarks in this context, Kahn's opinions usually were quite conservative (p. 153).

On the other hand, cooperation between Kahn and the JDC leadership in New York and the Dutch committee for refugee aid which was lead by the German-born Gertrude van Tijn, was excellent (p. 171). Kahn found it necessary to assist the Hechalutz in France, Poland, Holland and Austria. This money, which had earlier caused a bit of worry, proved to be well founded and spent (pp. 156, 165). However, due to the Arab disturbances in Palestine, the situation changed after 1935. Kahn, therefore, negotiated with the French colonial department on the possibility of letting Jews

emigrate to Madagascar or to other French possessions (p. 193). Kahn participated, of course, in the 1938 Evian conference which tried in vain to solve the German refugee problem. The Zionist leader, Schalom Adler-Rudel, who organized the Hechalutz's "Auslands-Hachscharah," related that Kahn accompanied him from Paris to Evian (Adler-Rudel, S, "The Evian Conference on the Refugee Question", Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book* XIII, London 1968, p. 240).

The situation in Poland did not give Kahn less work or cause him less worry than the problems in Germany. JDC appealed to many Polish-Jewish organizations in the United States, Landsmannschaften, to send help to their respective home districts in Poland. Not least British Jews supported the Hechalutz which trained young people for future work in Palestine. But since the chances were slight that these young people would be able to go there, Kahn was of the opinion that they should be trained for work in Poland. There was, however, severe unemployment problems in Poland — and later Hitler initiated the "final solution" of the Jewish problem (p. 193, 202 f). In JDC it was discussed whether the organization should carry on relief actions for children. Kahn believed that this was a very constructive enterprise and he proposed that a third of the budget for Poland should be devoted to supporting work for children. This was enthusiastically approved of in Eastern Europe. The grants, just as in previous relief actions, were devoted to schools, summer camps and, not least, meals, since a very large proportion of the Jewish children were forced to go to school on empty stomachs. When some of the JDC bureaucrats wanted to cut down on these costs, Kahn lost his usual calm composure and exclaimed: "Try to be hard and do not give any money for feeding and clothing and see what will happen. I hear so much about your wanting to be drastic — try it!" They did not (p. 206). The Polish authorities tried on various pretexts — e.g. too small rooms or other deficiencies — to close schools where Jewish children were excused from writing on Shabbes, and also the Jewish private schools. Kahn tried to stop this. As early as 1934 he said: "The schools, once closed, will never be allowed to reopen" by the Poles (p. 207).

The situation for the Jews of Rumania as

well as Latvia deteriorated and it was little better in Lithuania. When Austria was annexed to Nazi Germany, Kahn sent aid to Vienna where soup kitchens for the starving were set up (p. 227). Everyone who could tried to escape from the country. The French government opposed the idea of foreign Jewish refugees settling in France and wanted to force those who had escaped to France to return to Germany (1938). Kahn and others strongly opposed this (p. 237).

In August 1938 the Swiss Jews announced that they needed a million Swiss francs for the thousands of refugees who came there and that they could only raise one third of this amount. JDC explained that they could not grant them the support but Kahn told the head office in New York that he had given emergency aid not only to Switzerland but also to Luxemburg, Belgium and Czechoslovakia. The leadership found this action amazing but Kahn maintained that many such actions could be found in the history of JDC. Switzerland had received help "in order to avoid a catastrophe". Due to Kahn's action, the aid committee in Switzerland, VSIA, became one of Europe's main recipients of financial aid.

In Januari 1937, a European JDC committee had been formed with Kahn as chairman and Nathan Katz as secretary. The reason was that Kahn was getting old and was overworked. Morris C. Troper, who visited the Paris office in the beginning of 1938, reported that Kahn seemed incapable of running the whole JDC effort. Others had different opinions but, at a meeting of the executive committee, it was recommended that Kahn should be transferred. The main reason for this was that Kahn as a non-American was unable to move freely in German-occupied countries; therefore he should be replaced by an American citizen. Kahn moved to New York and became American citizen. His successor in Paris was Morris C. Troper who was the head of a firm of accountants which audited JDC's accounts (p. 251).

After having mentioned Kahn's emigration from Europe, Bauer writes:

"This is perhaps the place to evaluate the contribution of Dr. Bernhard Kahn to Jewish history in the interwar period. For most of the period between the wars, Kahn was the arbiter of many Jewish economic endeavors in the field of reconstruction and

relief. Behind his cold and remote exterior there was a warm heart and an immensely fertile mind. None of his peers, certainly none of his successors in JDC or elsewhere, could equal his knowledge of Judaism, Zionism, economics, history, social work, philosophy, art — or indeed his achievements and interest in a dozen or more fields. His departure in 1938 was, one suspects, inevitable; but with him disappeared one of the great figures of Jewish life — a man whose name rarely if ever appeared on the pages of the press, and whose preoccupation with practical matters never allowed him to devote his time to creative scholarship.

... In many ways Troper was Kahn's opposite. A simple man with simple tastes, an efficient administrator, ebullient, he was quite unlike Kahn, the aesthete and polyglot. Troper had a warm heart and — again, unlike Kahn — could express himself publicly much more effectively than the shy German Jew with his foreign accent. The difference lay, among other things, in Kahn's knowing Europe, and that was his strength; Troper's strength lay in his knowledge of America and American Jewry" (pp. 251—252).

In another context, Bauer writes: "There have been few Jewish leaders and thinkers who judged their time with more perspicacity and lucidity than Bernhard Kahn, or with more human warmth than Felix M. Warburg" (p. 303).

Apparently, Kahn did not leave Europe until the fall of 1938. In February, he was requested by JDC to look into the situation of the many refugees who had streamed to Shanghai (p. 290). In July 1938, Kahn attended a meeting in Warsaw and afterwards wrote, on August 11, that it would have to be decided if the loan societies should remain under direct JDC control or if they should become independent organizations. Both Kahn and his successor, Troper, wanted JDC's work in Poland to be transferred to an entirely Polish committee of leading Jewish figures within the fields of commerce, banking, industry and the crafts (p. 294 f). Kahn greatly admired the work of the Bund in Poland (p. 297).

According to Roman Slobodin ("Kahn, Bernhard", *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, pp. 286—287), there were, in 1938, Kahn's last active year in Europe, 687 loan societies with 191,000 members, small businessmen, farmers and craftsmen. JDC's Reconstruction Foundation, with Kahn as its executive

director, was not only active among the Jews in Poland but also in Belgium, Esthonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Turkey. According to the same source, during the entire time Kahn lead the Foundation, a total of 5,052,000 loans were granted, equalling 581 million dollars.

It was in connection with his transfer to the United States that Kahn requested and received the Stockholm birth certificate. It was confirmed by C. Ludv. Hasselgren, notary public in Stockholm, on the 22nd of February 1939 and bears the signature of the French legation in Stockholm, dated the 24th of February, and the signature of the Swedish consul general in Paris, dated the 28th of February.

In the United States 1930—1955. Obituary

The transfer to America did not in any way signify Bernhard Kahn's retirement. On the contrary, he functioned during "the rest of his extremely active life" (Bauer's words, p. 251) mainly as the vice chairman of JDC's executive committee. The sources of information on this space of time are, unfortunately, very few. The article on JDC in the extensive *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel* (1971) does not mention Kahn's name. He had, however, been active in the Zionist organization for a long time. As mentioned previously, he participated in the 6th Zionist congress held in 1903, the year before Herzl's death. He was, among other things, a member of the board of the Central Bank for Cooperative Investment in Erez from 1924 to 1949.

In 1939, he became the honorary chairman of JDC's European executive council and held the same post from 1952 in the American and European Friends of ORT. He was, furthermore, a board member of Keren Hayesod and also performed many other duties in American and Palestinian organizations, including chairman of the Advisory Council of OSE from 1945, board member of the Palestine Economic Corporation and the Haffkine Foundation.

He died on April 26, 1955 in White Plains, New York after having just celebrated his eightieth birthday. Funeral services were held on the 28th of April in Riverside Memorial Chapel.

Bernhard Kahn did not make much noise

in the world and did not appear publicly unless obliged. He did not become a well-known person and he did not, to my knowledge, write his memoirs. It was, therefore, necessary to search for information on his family circumstances and private life in the memoirs of others.

In 1908 he entered into a marriage with Dora (Deborah) Frischberg who was a student at the University of Berlin. Her family lived in Volhynia. The Kahns had two sons, Marcel, who was born in 1909 and who became a doctor in the United States and died in 1974, and Ludwig, who was born in 1910 and who gave me this information in a letter dated the 19th of January 1976. In 1961 Ludwig became a professor of Comparative Literature and German at Columbia University. He still lives in the house where his father lived, 9, Atherstone Road, Scarsdale, New York. Bernhard Kahn left behind his wife, his sons and four grandchildren.

Jacob Teitel's autobiography, *Aus meiner Lebensarbeit. Erinnerungen eines jüdischen Richters im alten Russland* (Berlin 1929), offers some insight into Kahn's marriage and home life. In the last chapter of his book, Teitel writes: "In 1908 or 1909 I became personally acquainted with Doctor Bernhard Kahn who gave me continual support in interessions on behalf of the Jewish students of Saratow. My wife and I became very good friends with Dr. Kahn and his wife, Dora Israilewna, a former Russian student who was still interested in everything having to do with Jews in Russia — literature, science and public life (öffentliches Leben). In Kahn's home we were in a good, pleasant, intelligent family atmosphere. When I visited Berlin I usually also visited Dr. Paul Nathan at his spacious house with a gigantic library" (p. 191). Most assuredly, Kahn also took advantage of the "gigantic library". I do not know where Nathan lived in Berlin. As mentioned above, Kahn, in 1930, lived in the fashionable residential area, Grünewald, southwest of the city center.

Adler-Rudel ends his memorial sketch with the following words:

"In spite of the large amount of work that Kahn had to perform, and the heavy responsibility which rested on his shoulders, he was always ready to devote himself to the fate of individual people. There must be a tremendous number of Jewish intellec-

tuals, literary men and artists, whom this distinguished and noble man helped in times of need, and who did not even know where the help came from.

The last years of his life were more quiet . . . But in spite of his advanced age he refused to enjoy a well-earned retirement. He was elected vice chairman of the Joint and contributed, under the new conditions created by the war and the post-war period, when the Jewish tragedy overshadowed everything that he until then had experienced, to the solution of the new problems.

The untiring champion and grand old man of Jewish social work has finished his work. A rich and full life devoted to the relief of Jewish distress has come to its end. That life coincided with the rise and fall of German Jewry, but it was also crowned with the experience of the foundation of the Jewish state, the realization of his dream as a young man.

Those who were lucky enough to know him, as well as those innumerable strangers who made up his life's work, will always remember him with love and respect.