



Program printed in Hebrew and Yiddish of a play (1917) by the pupils of "Am HaSefer" school, under the management of Rabbi Yonah-Baruch Kac of blessed memory

## MY COMING TO KUTNO

by Rabbi Yonah Baruch KAC, of blessed memory.

translated from the Hebrew by Thia Persoff z"l

After Poland was conquered by the Germans in 1915, I established a modern school called *Torah v'Dat*<sup>1</sup> in my hometown, Gostynin. One day Mr. Yaakov Zerchin, who was the principal of the modern *cheder*<sup>2</sup> in Kutno, offered me the job of principal in the Kutno School, since he had been accepted for a permanent position at the two high schools in Gostynin.

I accepted the offer and, about two months before the Passover holiday of that year, I moved to Kutno. Unfortunately, at that time a contagious disease had started in the town, and the German authorities had ordered the closing of all the schools. Therefore, for two months I was forced to teach the pupils in private homes. After the epidemic was over, the schools were reopened. Full of energy, I started to work and saw that my efforts were blessed; more pupils had joined. I organized trips during the vacations, pupils marched with their flags through the streets of the town, singing Hebrew songs, and the town's people, who were unaccustomed to such sights, were impressed by their fine appearance, and greeted them enthusiastically. Sometime later, I organized three evening classes for girls. All went well!

### First Hebrew theater in Kutno

After two years, the girls were sufficiently fluent in the Hebrew language, though it was not only the girls that were more or less fluent; everyone wanted to learn it – old and young, boy and girl, and the Hebrew language resounded from many lips. At that time, I started to organize a drama troupe. Together with Mr. Yaakov Wajslic – who was a director and actor in the current Vilna theatrical company – we decided to stage the Hebrew play "The Older Sister" by our town's famous writer Shalom Asz. Immediately, I turned to the German authorities with a request for a permit to perform the Hebrew play and to organize a flower day. Both requests were granted and I

enthusiastically started to work. But, apparently, our initiative displeased someone who had connections with the town council, and he acted secretly to cancel the permit, which was already in our possession. When I learned of the steps taken by the council, I asked for explanation, but instead of apologizing, they attacked me angrily: "Is this a way to behave?", "Is this a way to do things?" "You want to insult the honor of a Zionist institute? Why have you not approached us? Does a Zionist organization not exist at all?" I replied to them in the mother tongue, like the words of the mother in King Solomon's Judgment: take the child alive, rather than cut him up! After argument and discussion, they accepted my suggestion and renewed the permits. Mr. Wajslic continued to oversee the preparations for the play, which took two months. The premiere was opened in the town's theater building, and was a great success. All the actors, or to be exact, the actresses, did an excellent job. (one of them, Sara Bril, is in Israel now). My heart was overflowing with joy at the success of the play; the hall was completely full; there was an atmosphere of celebration, and it was highly satisfactory. I was very excited when I opened the play, so much so, that the words stuck in my mouth and tears of joy choked my throat. The loud cheers of the audience at the end of the show proved its great success. Afterwards, the play continued to "run", though not in the town's theater but in the school, mainly during vacations at Chanukah and Purim, and at the end of the school year.

### The establishment of Am-HaSefer<sup>3</sup> school

At about the same time, the local Polish authorities in Kutno had decreed that all Jewish students were required to attend school on the Sabbath and not be absent from classes on that day. All our efforts to cancel this decree were fruitless. During that time, our town's famous writer Shalom Asz had arrived for a visit. We thought that his personality and influence as a writer might work towards cancelling the

<sup>1</sup> TN: Law and Religion.

<sup>2</sup> TN: classes for infants in Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup> TN: Hebrew, "People of the Book".

