



Gustav Josephthal, Nuremberg

(8.9.1831 in Ansbach – 15.10.1914 in Nuremberg)



Memorial plaque for Gustav Josephthal's 80th birthday

(photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuernberg; inventory no. of the original MED 10833)

Gustav Josephthal, eminent lawyer, long-time chairman of Nuremberg's Jewish congregation and steadfast opponent of anti-Semitism, was the natural leader of any group to which he belonged.

Background

He was born in Ansbach, the county town of Middle Franconia, in 1831. His parents were Sigmund Josephthal (lottery lessee, 1799 - 1872) and his wife Elise, née Gerst (1807 - 1864). All his ancestors in the direct paternal line had lived in Ansbach at least as far back as 1675.

Lawyer

After a Gymnasium education he studied law and brilliantly passed his final examination. He then entered the Ansbach law practice of Privy Councillor Samuel Berlin (1807 - 1896), one of the first, if not the first, Jewish advocates in the Kingdom of Bavaria. Professional opportunities for Jews were, at the time, still severely limited.

Gustav Josephthal was first an employee and later a partner in the practice. In 1862 he married Samuel Berlin's daughter Jeanette (1842 - 1909). Gradually, Bavaria loosened its restrictions on the professional activities of Jews. At about the same time, the town of Nuremberg lifted its residential re-

strictions. In 1864 he was appointed Royal Bavarian Advocate in Nuremberg where he conducted a ever expanding law practice until his retirement in 1909, at the age of 78.

In 1879 his professional colleagues elected him to the committee of the Nuremberg Bar Association. In 1896 they made him chairman. He retained this position until his retirement.

Leader of the Jewish community

In addition to his law practice, Gustav Josephthal found the time to play a leading part in Nuremberg's new and growing Jewish congregation which in 1869 elected him chairman. He was to remain in this position for forty years, always a supporter of the progressive wing of the religious spectrum.

He presided over the building of the synagogue and the development of a religious service in which Lewandowski's specially composed music played an outstanding, and later deservedly famous, part. At the inauguration of the synagogue in 1874 he greeted Nuremberg's First Burgomaster Otto von Stromer in a harmonious ceremony. He also directed the development of the Jewish community's welfare and educational services.

Fighter against anti-Semitism

Gustav Josephthal's later years were overshadowed by the growth of anti-Semitism. When, in 1893, Germany's Jews founded their defensive organisation the "Centralverein" (Central Union), he was immediately elected to its main board in Berlin and became a leading member at both local and national level.

After his retirement this leadership position was taken up by successive senior partners of his law practice, viz. his son Emil Josephthal and his nephew Walter Berlin. The practice became the focal point of Nuremberg's Jews' fight against anti-Semitism.

Citizen

He served the town of Nuremberg as a member of the administrative board of Nuremberg's Schiller Foundation which, founded in 1859, was dedicated to promote young talents in fine arts, music and literature.

In politics, he was a leading member of the Nuremberg branch of the National Liberal Party which before the First World War represented the right wing of liberal opinion.

In 1887 the Kingdom of Bavaria awarded him the Knights Cross, First Class, of the Bavarian Order of Merit of St. Michael. In 1900 he was appointed Privy Concillor.

Death

Gustav Josephthal died on the 15th of October 1914, aged 83, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. Just before his death he had the experience of seeing his son Paul, who had volunteered at the age of 45 and been severely wounded and crippled. His grandson Anton had fallen in France in September.

Character

Gustav Josephthal combined remarkable qualities of intellect and character. He was recognised as an outstanding lawyer and as an able administrator of the Jewish community. To his work he brought objectivity, a conciliatory attitude, resourcefulness and great powers of persuasion.

He had a wide general culture, was tolerant in religion and politics, modest in manner and lifestyle and disciplined in his working habits.

Descendants

Gustav Josephthal and his wife Jeanette had five children and numerous grandchildren.

Son Emil (1863 - 1923) followed him as senior partner in the law practice and as a leading member of Nuremberg's Jewish community. Their grandson Fritz Josephthal (1890 - 1954) who was also a lawyer in the family practice, became wellknown when, in 1923, he waylaid Julius Streicher, who always carried a whip, in the street and chastised him with a whip specially bought for the purpose, in retribution for having insulted the memory of Fritz's recently deceased father Emil.

Another grandson, Georg (later Giora) Josephthal (1912 - 1962) became Minister of Labour in the young state of Israel.

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Ludwig C Berlin