

MAYER SULZBERGER—ALEXANDER MARX CORRESPONDENCE\*

In 1988 Herman Dicker published *Of Learning and Libraries*, an informative history of the Jewish Theological Seminary Library. Here he follows up on that volume with a sequel, opening up the remarkable correspondence between the two men who essentially built the Seminary Library: Judge Mayer Sulzberger, chairman of the Library Committee and chief patron, and Dr. Alexander Marx, librarian and professor of history. Their 393 letters (sadly, only one of Marx's letters prior to 1913 survives) span two decades (1904–1923), beginning shortly after Marx's arrival in the United States and ending with Sulzberger's death in April 1923. They contain a treasure trove of information.

For the most part the letters deal with library business: new acquisitions, collection standards and procedures, negotiations with book dealers, collectors and bibliophiles, efforts to acquire incunabula, other rare items and priceless European collections, and so forth. In a few letters the two men discuss their respective scholarly researches, Seminary matters and personal affairs. Once or twice Sulzberger and Marx also allude to the larger vision underlying their lifelong work: the desire to advance American Jewish culture and to create in the United States a "new center of Judaism."

Historians will rejoice in this volume for at least three reasons: First, it sheds important new light on Sulzberger and Marx, both of whom still await full-scale scholarly biographies. Second, it is, to my knowledge, the best available source in English about early twentieth-century Jewish book trade, a fascinating and surprisingly neglected subject. Finally, it contains a wealth of valuable detail concerning the formative years of the Seminary library, one of American Jewry's greatest cultural treasures and the basis for scholarly creativity down to the present day. Interestingly, this last point was already foreseen by Marx himself. "When American Jewish scholarship in time will take the rank it ought to," he wrote to Sulzberger wishing him a happy seventy-fifth birthday, "your name will always be connected with its advance as the one who furnished the tools at a time when no one else foresaw that they might ever be needed" (Letter M-92).

In editing this limited edition volume, Dicker has carefully transcribed letters found at the Jewish Theological Seminary and at the Annenberg Institute in Philadelphia, translated several German letters into English, and supplied helpful notes. Still, in a few cases he might have probed more deeply. Thus the "*Am-ha-aretz*" referred to in Letter S-83 (May 31, 1909) refers not to "an uneducated person" but to Sulzberger's own study of the "*Am-ha-aretz*" that had just appeared. The local "cabala" student whom Sulzberger mentions in passing (Letter S-35) was almost certainly his friend Phineas Mordell. "Mr. Feinberg," praised in Marx's letter of May 10, 1916 (Letter M-55) was Rabbi Louis Feinberg, later of Cincinnati. Dicker might also have lavished more attention on the index, which is inadequate. For the most part, however, this is a well-edited and well-produced volume, a welcome addition to the still all too sparse literature on how American Jewish culture developed and grew.

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\* Herman Dicker, ed. and annot. *The Mayer Sulzberger Alexander Marx Correspondence, 1904-1923*. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1990. Bibliophile Edition of 300 copies. Pp. x + 206.

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