

Address of Acting President Alexander Marx, December 26, 1928

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ADDRESS OF ACTING PRESIDENT ALEXANDER MARX,
DECEMBER 26, 1928

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the absence of our honored president, Professor Louis Ginzberg, who is at present lecturing at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, I wish to bid you welcome in the name of the Academy for Jewish Research and thank you for your interest in our meeting. Before we take up the program of the evening, I may be permitted to say a few words about our Academy and its aims. Our undertaking rests upon recognition of the fact that the marvellous progress of research in all the humanities in the course of the last century is very largely due to the encouragement and support these studies have found in the various great European academies. The most extensive work in the field of mediaeval literary history, for example, is undoubtedly the *Histoire littéraire de la France*, which, though started by the Benedictine monks, has been and is being carried on by the French *Académie des inscriptions*. In the numerous large volumes of this series Jewish subjects also have been taken into account and there are large portions of two volumes entirely devoted to Judaeo-French scholars of the fourteenth century.

Another undertaking of the same Academy which is of particular interest to us is the *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*, a collection of all old Semitic inscriptions, a number of volumes of which already have appeared. In this undertaking the Paris Academy followed the example of the Berlin Academy, which long before had begun a similar collection of Greek and later on of Latin inscriptions. Such undertakings naturally involve large expenditures for the collection of material, for scientific expeditions, etc. Moreover, various academies in co-operation are issuing a Thesaurus of the Latin language, are planning a new edition of Du Cange's great glossary of mediaeval Latin, and for many years have been engaged in the preparation of a dictionary of Egyptian. For seventy years the Vienna Academy has been publishing critical editions forming part of a corpus of the Latin Church Fathers; the Berlin Academy, two

decades later, started a similar undertaking for the Greek Church Fathers. These examples selected at random will be sufficient to give an idea of the work that can be accomplished in this way.

Aside from these great series the various academies have published hundreds of volumes of proceedings and other series, containing most important contributions to all branches of human learning, history, philosophy, mathematics and science. In addition, the academies have supported far-reaching researches of individual scholars, enabling them to travel for geographical or archaeological investigations or for the examination of manuscripts, and have assisted them to procure photographs for their work. By all these means classical, historical and other studies have been revolutionized and the unrivaled progress of the last hundred years made possible.

No adequate body of this kind has Jewish literature as its province. There each scholar shifts for himself, procures his material as best he can and carries out his plans in his own way and according to his personal whims. There is very little organized production of series. A striking example of the lack of harmony in our publications, is the fact that Dr. Schechter published the first volume of the *Midrash Ha-Gadol* in large quarto, while another great scholar started volume II in an ordinary octavo. No principles have been established for editors of Hebrew texts to follow, as has been done for classical and mediaeval texts, and the unsatisfactory practices of previous generations are continued by their modern successors.

Aside from such scientific anomalies there are even more serious difficulties of a practical nature. The troubles of Jewish scholarship may be illustrated by two facts: last year the widow of Dr. S. Mendelsohn of Wilmington turned over to the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary a MS. of her late husband, containing a complete index of the Biblical verses quoted in over forty Rabbinical works. This book, which is a supplement to the indispensable *Bet Aharon* and would be as useful a tool in the hands of a Jewish scholar as the latter book, could not be published for lack of means. The late Raphael N. Rabinovicz, who in 1867 started the publication of his invaluable *Variae lectiones* to the Babylonian Talmud, was able to publish fifteen volumes by 1886. In order to publish his book he devoted a few months every year to preparing a volume

and then had to travel around to sell it and incidentally to become a book dealer, so as to gain the wherewithal to publish the next volume. To such humiliating and unworthy means of gaining a livelihood was this great scholar reduced for twenty years. When he died on one of his business trips, he left the readings of all the Talmudic MSS. for the parts not covered by his work in the hands of a friend where they are slumbering peacefully.

Things have somewhat improved in recent years; one need only refer to the Schiff Classics which make available in attractive uniform garb and in scientifically constructed texts some of the classics of our literature, or to the Foundations established in memory of his father by Dr. George Alexander Kohut, who is saving many a scholar from such suffering as his father had to endure. Various younger scholars have been engaged by the Berlin *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which is doing very important work in different branches. I might also refer to the various undertakings of the German *Gesellschaft zur Foerderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the French *Société des études juives*, etc., but we need more comprehensive undertakings if we are to put Jewish research in its right place in the republic of learning.

In many respects there prevails in our field a state of things similar to that which obtained in the field of classical scholarship in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The texts of our most important works are still based on those which the early printers, with their inadequate facilities, could produce at that period by using such MSS. as happened to be on hand. For the Bible itself, this is pointed out in Dr. Margolis' paper, which is to be read this evening. We need series of editions of the texts of Talmudic and Midrashic literature as well as of all the branches of science and literature which have come down to us from our rich past. These ought to be published uniformly, according to modern principles, without over-estimation of the earlier editions, to which far too much regard is shown by most of the modern editors. Moreover, we need a comprehensive dictionary on the lines laid down by Ben Yehuda, whose most valuable work naturally is not sufficient, useful as it is, since such a task far transcends the powers of any individual.

I cannot in these few remarks give a sketch of all the needs of Jewish learning in the various departments and I leave, e. g., entirely

aside the work required in my own field of Jewish history. What I have said will be sufficient to point out the great problems ahead of us. It is evident that such work can only be carried on under the auspices of an Academy, such as those bodies to which I referred in the beginning. Unfortunately we cannot count on the support of governments, such as the European Academies can draw upon, and therefore it is not possible for us to start with the large projects which ought to be undertaken. A serious beginning ought to be made, however. The Jewish public which has shown such a remarkable readiness to relieve the physical needs of our people ought to realize its obligations towards our spiritual inheritance.

Some years ago a small number of American Jewish scholars, recognizing the great need of such co-operative work, banded together and founded the Academy for Jewish Research. While fully aware of the fact that it is a task requiring the co-operation of Jewish scholars all over the world, they felt that a start would have to be made in our country with the hope that future developments would make possible co-operation with the leading Jewish scholars abroad. So far we have kept too much within our own circle and have in general refrained from appearing in public. We feel now that in order to begin to carry out our plans we must appeal to the public and try to strengthen our organization by adding to it a large number of members and patrons who can appreciate the work in which it is engaged. It is our earnest hope that we may be able to do so, and that this evening will mark the beginning of a period of fruitful activity in the history of our organization.