

M a g d a l e n e S c h o c h

A B I T A B O U T M Y C A R E E R

aus: Zum Gedenken an Magdalene Schoch (1897–1987).

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Magdalene Schoch

A BIT ABOUT MY CAREER*

I had always intended to study medicine. But when I found out that this would take too many years before I could support myself, I switched over to law. The University had a pleasant custom of permitting new students to “taste” any lectures they might be interested in at the beginning of the semester. The first lecture on which I sat in was on Roman law, taught by an outstanding expert in the field. I’ll never forget the expression on his face when he saw a girl sitting there. He was about to open the lecture with the traditional formal “meine Herren”, but when he saw me he was speechless for a few minutes until he managed to say “meine Herren und meine Dame” with an ironic intonation. But I was so fascinated with the subject that I registered for his course and learned a lot, beside, naturally, attending other legal courses.

After an extra semester at the University of Munich I acquired a doctorate in law from the Würzburg faculty in 1920. Soon thereafter I was hired as an assistant by Profes-

sor Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, who had been invited to help organize the newly founded University of Hamburg. A.M.B., as we always called him, was a grandson of the composer, and had wanted to become a musician himself. But when his father died, his uncle, a famous professor of law in Leipzig, insisted that he studied law because, he said, "If you become a musician, you will always be compared with your famous grandfather, and never judged on your own merits." A.M.B. made a brilliant career in the law. As a very young man he became a full professor in the law faculty of Würzburg. When he accepted the call to Hamburg, he asked me to become his assistant. This opened an entirely new world to me.

The widespread city along the banks of the Alster River, which formed a beautiful lake, the harbour with its coming and going of ships, the beautiful surroundings, the wide horizon, and the nice people: it did not take long before Hamburg became my second home. My work started with the organization of a library of foreign law and lecturing on conflict of laws and comparative law. When A.M.B. organized the Institute of Foreign Policy, which played an important role in the international relations of Hamburg, I worked there part-time, helped edit the magazine *Europäische Gespräche* and was

editor of the *Amerika-Post*. A fellowship gave me an opportunity to acquaint myself with the judicial system of England – a wonderful experience.

After a while I persuaded my Mother [Margarete Schoch (1868–1945); d. H.] to come and live with me, after Liselotte [Magdalene Schochs Schwester Liselotte, später Elisabeth Cujé (1907–2000); d. H.] had married. It was not an easy decision to leave Würzburg, but Mutter soon found new roots in the nice apartment I had found for us (there was still a housing shortage), and she made a comfortable home for me. Then after a few years, I had the good fortune of receiving a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation for a year of study and research in the United States – an opportunity I could not decline. During that time (1934–1935) Mother stayed with Liselotte and her family in Gießen. This is not the place to report on the interesting and fruitful year I spent travelling all over the United States and visiting a number of law schools. When I had to return to Germany I had great misgivings about the progress which Nazism had made in the meantime, and my fears were fully justified. The universities had completely surrendered to the Nazis, just like the entire population (Professor Mendelssohn had already moved to England with his family at the time I went to the

United States). I felt I could not stay in this atmosphere, and I had to disappoint my poor Mother's hope that we might start a joint household again. I cut off my connection with the Institut für Auswärtige Politik and restricted myself to teaching "non-political" subjects. My office was a small annex to the University, where I could avoid contact to the Nazi administration. But one day we received a notice from headquarters "permitting" every teacher and employee to apply for membership in the Party. The professor who was my superior at that time called me into his office in great agitation. He was not a Nazi but a remnant of the conservative party, and he was quite upset. "My God, what shall I do? What are you doing, Dr. Schoch?" "Me," I said, "I've thrown the notice in my waste basket." "But what about our future? I cannot live if I'm not permitted to teach!" "Well, Professor, that's your problem." So he signed on the dotted line. I, of course, did not, and strange to say, nothing happened to me.

Lennie has asked me to record the following, because it reveals the moral corruption which Hitler brought out in the so-called intellectuals. One Friday morning in 1936 I received a wire notifying me that Professor Mendelssohn had suddenly died in Oxford. I'm not going to dwell on my feelings at this blow. I called the head of the Faculty, told him the fact

and that I could not attend the Faculty meeting next day because I was going to England for the funeral. He was practically speechless. "Do you think this is wise? I'll have to notify headquarters of the University." Which he did, and was told that this trip might have serious consequences for me. I told him I was not interested and asked him to cancel my lectures for the following week. I rushed to England by the night boat and caught a train in time to attend the funeral and spend a day with A.M.B.'s family. I found out that not one of his German colleagues nor his former university had sent even a token of sympathy. When I was back in my office in Hamburg, one or two of his former friends and colleagues would sneak to my office and ask me questions. I could not help showing them my contempt. Soon thereafter I resigned and left for the United States in 1937. My Mother and Trudel [Magdalene Schochs Schwester Gertrud Heinrichs (1898–1977); d. H.] saw me off on the boat, and the courage which Mother showed almost broke my heart. This was the last time I saw her...

I had good friends receiving me in the U.S.A. who made it possible for me to start on a new career.

After the collapse of Germany I received a letter from Hamburg offering me a teaching position in the revived

University. I replied I would never set foot into that institution...

* Teil der unveröffentlichten Textsammlung „Fragments of a Family History“, undatiert (nach 1945); Nachlass Magdalene Schoch im Privatarchiv Lennie Cujé, Arlington, Virginia, USA.