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Refugee Scholars

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Mrs Pennsylvania
Meyerhof

INTERVIEWS: RAL

Saturday,
October 26, 1940.

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Dr. Otto Meyerhof

The Meyerhofs decided not to go to Philadelphia direct from Jersey City where their steamer docked today, preferring to remain in New York for the week-end. M. wanted to see some friends, including his former pupil, David Nachmansohn. The Meyerhofs stayed at the Seymour Hotel where I could more easily look after them.

Having understood that M.'s case was hopeless, I asked him who helped him get out of France. He gave all credit to the Unitarian Mission, particularly Mr. Charles Joy and Mr. Waitstill H. Sharp, who encouraged him to try to cross the frontier without an exit permit. He followed their advice and was successful. The United States Consul at Marseilles, who came out at the same time, was helpful at the frontier. It appears that though the Vichy government may ~~have to~~ refuse an exit permit in a case like M's, when they would really be relieved to have the person go, one may be allowed to cross the border without the permit. The Spanish authorities are also inclined to relax their restrictions in the case of an émigré bound for America, but the way is becoming steadily more difficult and the barrier may become insurmountable at any time.

I asked M. about the Quakers who have an office in Marseilles. He says they are not helpful because they will have no "secrets"; that is, they insist on doing everything open and above board. The Unitarians, on the other hand, do not look upon a subterfuge under present conditions as an unpardonable sin.

In my first talk with M. he had reservations about bringing French scientists to America. If men like F. Joliot and C. Fromageot left their laboratories all might be lost. At least M. thought this was the way Joliot and some others felt, and he doubted if they would readily accept invitations to leave on a two-year (or one-year) appointment. But after talking with Laugier and Rapkine, M. modified his position. He assumed that Laugier had more recent information than he had about the dangers. He said conditions could and did change from day to day and that escape later might be impossible. Anyway, M. would like to see an effort made to bring out a small number of the most valuable men in France. He did not urge that Jews be taken first. It may be that he hesitated to make an appeal on behalf of racial groups. He did refer repeatedly, however, to the political affiliations of various men whose names came up in the discussion, and I gather that he would favor inviting first those whose known political views might endanger their freedom to work - or even their lives.

Meyerhof urged that aid be given those French scientists who were trying to keep their laboratories going. If money could not be sent, perhaps needed apparatus and chemicals might be supplied from America.

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