

## LESSING JULIUS ROSENWALD

Lessing J. Rosenwald was born in Chicago on February 10, 1891, the son of Julius and Augusta (Nusbaum) Rosenwald. He died on June 24, 1979, in his home at Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, in his eighty-ninth year. His end came quickly, as he wished it, with his devoted wife, Edith, at his bedside. His last illness was mercifully short; he suffered a fractured hip after a fall in Alverthorpe Gallery several weeks before his death. After a brief hospitalization he was taken home, vowing he would never again return to the hospital. He was making a fine recovery and was even planning to attend the XIth Congress of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie in Brussels in September, at which time he was to receive a decoration from the Belgian government. Such was not to be. A few days before his death he developed bronchitis, which proved to be fatal. He was survived by his widow, Edith Goodkin Rosenwald, whom he married in November 1913, and five children; Julius Rosenwald II; Helen R. Snellenberg; Mrs. Isadore M. Scott; Robert Rosenwald; and Mrs. Bernard Becker; nineteen grandchildren, and twenty great-grandchildren. The happiest memory I have of him was the sight of him at his sixty-fifth wedding anniversary last November, when he and Edith invited a few close friends to join them at Alverthorpe for this important celebration.

Lessing was educated in Chicago and attended Cornell University but did not graduate with his class of 1912. His father tried to interest him in the study of Egyptology, but he would have none of it. Instead he went to work in 1911 for Sears, Roebuck and Company, the great merchandising firm that his father had purchased and developed into the greatest mail-order house in this country. Lessing learned the business from the ground up, interrupting his career to serve briefly as a seaman second class in the United States navy in World War I despite his blindness in one eye. After returning to Sears he

played a part in establishing regional stores which today are located all over this country and indeed the world. Lessing moved with his family to Philadelphia in the 1920s to head up the large regional branch of the parent company, and this was to remain his home for the rest of his life. In 1917 the then-president of Sears died, and Lessing sought the office. His mother persuaded him to abandon the idea since he had established himself in Philadelphia and would be happier to remain there with his growing family. He acquiesced and Gen. Robert E. Wood succeeded to the presidency. He did, however, become chairman of the board of directors in 1932 and served in that capacity until his retirement seven years later.

Meanwhile Lessing had become a collector of fine prints, stimulated by the purchase of an etching of the Royal Scottish Academy by D. Y. Cameron. This was to become the cornerstone of the greatest collection of prints and drawings assembled by any collector in the present century and numbering at the time of his death some 25,000 items. As a sideline in the late 1920s he began also to form a collection of important illustrated books largely aided and abetted by his friend the late Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach. As the two collections grew in size he felt the need for a proper place for them (he had kept many of his prints in his office in Chicago). Accordingly he and Edith bought a sizable estate, called 'Alverthorpe,' outside of Philadelphia in the township of Jenkintown. Today the house is the property of the township, and Lessing and his wife gave additional acreage which has been developed as Alverthorpe Park, and is now extensively used by the community.

A separate wing of the main estate was specially designed to house Lessing's growing collections and became known as Alverthorpe Gallery. As a collector Lessing dominated his special fields of interest for over thirty years and thereby secured virtually first refusal through the cooperation of the many dealers who recognized his paramount position. Except for serving as director of the Bureau of Industrial Conservation

in the War Production Board during World War II, Lessing was able to devote most of his time to building his great collections. In 1943, in the middle of the war, he presented both collections to the nation, his prints and drawings going to the National Gallery of Art and his books and early manuscripts to the Library of Congress. Under the original terms of this gift to the people of the United States, he retained custody of his collections and reserved the right to make additions to them. This latter condition he observed with such enthusiasm that the collections became increasingly important, and Alverthorpe Gallery became a veritable mecca for scholars and others interested in visiting these matchless collections. Plans are now underway for their removal to Washington, and the Library of Congress is arranging to move the book room in toto to an appropriate new location in its main building.

Another generous provision of the original gifts provided that material in the Rosenwald collections should be made available for exhibition. This liberal provision has been widely exercised, and as a result the collections have been shown both in this country and in other parts of the world. Lessing believed, and so wrote in his *Recollections of a Collector*, published on his birthday in 1976, 'that a work of art that is never seen is little better off than one that has never been created.' This was part of the creed he lived by.

Americana was not one of the principal strengths of the Rosenwald collections, but it is well represented. Among the books there are some very fine early titles including the 1494 Columbus letter, a fine lot of early Ptolemys, three editions of the *Paesi Nouamente Retrouati* (1512, 1517, and 1519) of Franczano da Montalboddo, several extraordinary sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps, including Thomas Holme's map of Pennsylvania (ca. 1687), and a fine representation of DeBry's Great and Small Voyages, and a number of contemporary American bindings chiefly by Peter Franck. American artists are well represented in the print collection, among them

Winslow Homer, James A. M. Whistler, Stow Wengenroth, Mary Cassatt, Joseph Pennell, Antonio Frasconi, and Ben Shahn. Also present is an original copperplate by Paul Revere, engraved on both sides, as well as originals of *The Stamp Act* and *The Boston Massacre*. It was their mutual interest in Revere's engravings that led Clarence S. Brigham, this Society's director, to strike up a correspondence with Lessing in the 1940s.

At the time of Lessing's death, Andrew Robison, the curator of prints at the National Gallery, characterized the collection as 'probably the most extensive and finest single collection ever formed by one man in America.' Librarian of Congress Daniel J. Boorstin paid him this tribute: 'Lessing Rosenwald was a noble man who delighted in the delights of others. Born to a high station, he chose to use his talents for the nation and the world of books. He neither wanted nor expected the recognition he deserved. But he lives on in his benefactions and in his exhilarating example. Our nation needed Lessing Rosenwald. The Library of Congress and the library world will never forget him.'

Lessing lived with his books no less than his prints and drawings and loved them; he took special pleasure in showing and interpreting them to all who wished to see them; he was a fine teacher, and those who took advantage of this generosity took away the satisfying pleasure of an enriching experience.

His affiliations were many. He was elected to membership in this Society in April 1954. Because he was unwilling to spread too thin his energy and resources, he did not actively participate in Society affairs. He was elected an honorary member of the Grolier Club in 1969, thirty-nine years after he was first elected to membership. He served as president of the Philobiblon Club in Philadelphia, the Print Council of America, the Friends of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, and the Rosenbach Foundation. He was a trustee of The Free Library of Philadelphia and a member of the American Philo-

sophical Society. Strongly anti-Zionist, he was president of the American Council for Judaism (1943-55) and became chairman of the board in 1956. He was elected a trustee of the National Gallery in 1964 and served until his resignation in 1974. He took these assignments seriously and was diligent in attendance; he was known for his punctuality, the 'courtesy of kings.'

Many honors were bestowed upon him, including seven honorary degrees. The Philadelphia Award was given to him at a great banquet in 1967, and the \$25,000 that accompanied it he distributed among the Philadelphia institutions with which he was affiliated. The Friends of the Princeton University Library presented him the Donald F. Hyde Award in 1968. He received the Sir Thomas More Medal for Book Collecting from the Gleeson Library Associates of the University of San Francisco in 1971.

A memorial service for Lessing Rosenwald was held on September 10, 1979, in the Van Pelt Auditorium in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The numerous and diverse speakers on this occasion suggested not only Lessing's wide range of interests but also the many contributions he made to society during a long and ennobling life.

Frederick R. Goff

#### MAXWELL H. SAVELLE

To those of us who studied under him, Maxwell H. Savelle was regarded as the quintessential liberal humanist. Men were masters of their own fates and captains of their souls—this was his creed. He totally rejected the doctrine of supernatural causation in history. These lines of Shakespeare embodied his philosophy of life: 'What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!'

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