

In Memoriam

ABRAHAM SIMON WOLF ROSENBACH

1876-1952

Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, known the world over as "Doctor R," was one of the greatest bookmen this country has known. After a brief career as a Fellow in English at the University of Pennsylvania, where he had obtained his doctorate in 1901, he entered the rare book business. Dr. Rosenbach was the ideal dealer, a happy combination of scholar and salesman, a convivial host and an enthusiastic conversationalist, and above all a real lover and connoisseur of books. Great sellers and buyers of books there had been before him—and will be again—but the golden era of collecting, the age of giants like Huntington and Folger, which he helped make and which colored his career, may never be repeated. He was as much a creative part of that period and as typical of it as Walpole was of his stratum of eighteenth-century England.

Although his chosen field at the University under the influence of Professor Schelling was Elizabethan literature, Dr. Rosenbach's book background and his family traditions were deep in American history. The first scholarly work he published, in collaboration with his mother, was an article on his great-uncle Aaron Levy, the founder of Aaronsburg, which appeared in the second volume of the *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society* in 1894. Significantly, he served from 1921 to 1948 as president of that society, and compiled the standard bibliography of early American Judaica.

To his maternal uncle, Moses Pollock, the first antiquarian bookseller to specialize in Americana, Dr. Rosenbach attributed his early interest in and unbelievably precocious knowledge of old books. From Pollock he inherited many of those delightful early American children's books which form part of the great collection now in the Free Library of Philadelphia, and at the sale of his uncle's books at Henkels in 1904 he bought several of the important volumes—among

them Washington's copy of a bound volume of excessively rare Virginia pamphlets—which became part of his own private collection.

It was this collection, now on the shelves at 2010 DeLancey Place, which reflected more of the inner man. His two volumes of bookselling anecdotes, *Books and Bidders* and *A Book Hunter's Holiday*, tell the story of his career. The books at home tell the story of the bibliophile. Unbelievable books there are—a Bay Psalm Book, a Don Quixote in its original vellum, the manuscript of Joyce's *Ulysses*, as well as unica in many fields—but the early Pennsylvania imprints were Dr. Rosenbach's greatest joys. He was thrilled to get the Leiter copy of the Bradford 1685 *Kalendarium*, the first book printed in Philadelphia, and the unique first *Poor Richard* of 1733 stood almost at the top of his affection. Interestingly enough, the very last books which he added to his own collection were unique copies of Bradford's German almanacs for 1731 and 1733, and he was working on an article on German printing in Pennsylvania until his last illness stopped him.

It was only natural that Dr. Rosenbach should have been interested in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. He became a member in 1907, was made a trustee by Simon Gratz of the manuscript collection which he left the Society, served as a Councillor and as Corresponding Secretary from 1939 until his death. American libraries owe much to the enthusiasm for collecting which he generated and to the sound advice he gave them and their patrons. In addition to The Historical Society, the American Philosophical Society, the University of Pennsylvania Library, the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Antiquarian Society, and the John Carter Brown Library, among others, benefited greatly from his services to them and his long association with them. The book world will miss his knowledge, his uncanny memory, his fascinating stories, and perhaps even more, the twinkle that always came into his eye at the sight of a really fine book. He was a true bibliophile.

Philadelphia

EDWIN WOLF, 2ND