



Cartel, clan, or dynasty? The Olschkis and the Rosenthals, 1859-1976

Citation

Rosenthal, Bernard M. 1977. Cartel, clan, or dynasty? The Olschkis and the Rosenthals, 1859-1976. Harvard Library Bulletin XXV (4), October 1977: 381-398.

Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364335>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Cartel, Clan, or Dynasty? The Olschkis and the Rosenthals

1859-1976*

Bernard M. Rosenthal

AFTER ACCEPTING THE INVITATION to deliver this lecture, I noticed that I would be the first of the speakers in the series to come from the book trade. To some this may sound a somewhat strident note which interrupts a succession of distinguished librarians, collectors, and bibliographers. But it is not really all that inappropriate for an antiquarian bookseller to be represented in a series named in memory of George Parker Winship: when he published the first *Census of Incunabula in American Libraries* in 1919, my grandfathers lost no time publishing catalogues of incunabula *not* to be found in Winship, and his name was often blessed by them — cursed, too, of course, when an “exceedingly rare” incunable turned out to be in at least three American libraries. Furthermore, the history

* This lecture, a light-hearted view of three generations of antiquarian bookselling by a slightly bemused member of the third generation, is the result of persistent but friendly persuasion by the Reverend William J. Monihan, S.J., Director of Library Relations at the University of San Francisco. It was delivered on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Gleeson Library Associates at the University of San Francisco on 2 November 1975. It was repeated, in slightly changed form, as the seventh George Parker Winship Lecture at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, 8 April 1976. On both occasions a genealogical table was distributed. This has now been corrected and — to my own amazement — augmented by a further branch of which I had been unaware at the time.

I am grateful to Mrs. Lilian Randall, Keeper of Manuscripts at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, for calling my attention to the Olschki-Walters correspondence and for placing it at my disposal. Mr. Herbert Cahoon of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, has been equally generous in allowing me to use the Library's files. I am also indebted to Mr. Hans Koch, owner of the Antiquariat Jacques Rosenthal, for searching his files and his astonishing memory, and to Dr. Adalbert Bauer, archivist of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, who provided the missing link in the added branch of the genealogical table.

I could not have pieced together this story without the help of many members of my family, particularly my parents, Margherita and Erwin Rosenthal.

of my family is, to a large extent, the history of the antiquarian book trade, and it illustrates strikingly the impact which the emigration of Austrian and German Jewish booksellers had on the world of books as a result of the Nazi persecutions. This impact was greatest here in the United States, where more than twenty former Austrian and German colleagues of my father's generation and of my own now make their home. Members of my immediate family are at this moment busy selling rare books in Argentina, England, Holland, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States; so perhaps my appearance before you can be justified on what might be described as historical grounds and Mr. Bond need not then be judged too harshly for opening the ranks of the speakers to a member of the merchant class.

A word should be said about the genealogical tree which serves to illustrate these remarks: the line had to be drawn somewhere (Joseph Rosenthal, for instance, had fourteen children) and so, as the title suggests, the tree gives only the names of those family members engaged in bookselling and publishing. Thus, alas, it does not include the name, for example, of Leo Olschki's first-born, Leonardo, who, after being awarded his Ph.D. in romance philology at the University of Heidelberg, was approached by his professor: "Well, young man, I suppose now that you have completed your studies, you will enter your father's business." Leonardo's reply was thoughtful: "No, Herr Professor, I don't think I am smart enough for that, and I have decided to devote my life to scholarship." Accordingly, Leonardo went on to write standard works on French medieval literature, on Dante, Marco Polo, and Galileo, and, at the age of sixty, took up the study of Chinese; some twelve years after that, he published a volume of Chinese lyrics and epigrams.

Another category excluded from the genealogical tree is comprised of those whose relationship may be too distant, but this is probably a big mistake. My aunt, Elvira Olschki, for instance, the mother of the Argentine cousin Pablo Keins, married twice. Her second husband had a son by *his* first marriage and this son is my cousin Axel Rosin, who, it happens, is chairman of the board of the Book of the Month Club.

I wish I could tell you that my ancestors had to claw their way to social acceptance, bourgeois respectability, and financial security against the almost insurmountable odds of poverty, antisemitism, and lack of educational opportunities. But the more I dig into things, the

more I find that this isn't so at all. To be sure, all my ancestors must have suffered under the restrictions imposed by an antisemitism that was endemic to their time. But other than that, I almost get the impression that matters have gone steadily downhill with us since the 1800s.

Let us begin, then, with my great-grandfather, Joseph Rosenthal, in the small German town of Fellheim in Bavaria, not far from Munich. By the late eighteenth century, Fellheim had a very large Jewish community which, though subjected to all sorts of humiliating restrictions, had acquired enough financial clout to rescue the municipality from some fiscal troubles. In 1777, in return for these services, the Jewish financiers petitioned the local lord for fairer treatment of their people. His lordship granted most of their requests but pointedly added that he, in turn, would now expect his Jewish subjects to show a little more respect and obedience towards the constituted authorities.

Thus, when Joseph Rosenthal was born in Fellheim in 1805, he was born into a relatively prosperous, enlightened, and, I suspect, rather "gemütlich" community, a community able to take in its stride the constant harassment, the requisitions, the plundering and turmoil, caused by all the armies that ebbed and flowed through the town during the Napoleonic wars. Documents show that by the age of 26, Joseph was a skilled tailor who had received a tidy sum of money from his father, plus a house in which he could live and do business. He may have followed this trade for some time, or he may have used it as a kind of insurance, or perhaps he got his papers in order to satisfy some legal requirement. Be that as it may, Joseph was also an antique dealer, and a good one at that. He was well-liked and trusted by the local gentry, and often made his rounds with a horse and buggy, going from castle to castle, buying here and selling there. In other words, his clients were also his source of supply, an ideal arrangement and, indeed, one I wish I had.

Antiques, of course, included books, and it may even be that in later years books made up the major portion of the business. One supposes that Joseph must have taken some of his children along on his trips, just to help him load the furniture, if nothing else, and certainly antiques, paintings, and books were an integral part of his own household. Thus, at least on the Rosenthal side, I might claim with some justification to be the fourth, not the third, generation of antiquarians and, if so, I could once and for all settle the score with Maggs of London.

Ludwig Rosenthal, born in 1840, is, however, considered the "real" founder of the dynasty. No tailoring for him! He was barely fifteen when he began his apprenticeship in a bookshop, and by the time he was nineteen he had received a license to open his own shop in Fellheim — this fact alone is proof of the young man's extraordinary abilities. His first catalogue dates from that same year, 1859, and consisted of about 3,000 titles. These were mainly in a field which, it must be said, although with respectful apologies, is something of a drug on the market today: Catholic theology. In the century and a quarter of its existence, incidentally, the firm of Ludwig Rosenthal has continued to specialize in this field, but with admirable even-handedness they have also issued massive catalogues in the field of Protestant theology and the Reformation and, around 1910, they produced the finest catalogue of Hebrew incunabula ever published by a dealer.

Fellheim soon became too narrow a base for this ambitious and, one might perhaps say, voracious young bookseller. So, in 1867, having been able to satisfy the authorities that he owned property worth more than 5,000 gulden (one of the conditions Jews had to meet if they intended to move to Munich), he moved the firm to Munich. The family went along, including Joseph, the father, who, from then on, spent much time helping his sons but also continued with his own antique business. Five years afterwards, in 1872, Ludwig took in two of his brothers as partners and the boom was on. Soon the stock was measured not in thousands, but hundreds of thousands of books. The three brothers, Ludwig, Nathan, and Jakob, must have been very different. For one thing, the age spread between them was considerable. Ludwig, fourteen years older than Jakob, was the undisputed boss, and probably quite an authoritarian one. Nathan, who had a speech defect and who was not nearly so handsome as his brothers, was shy and retiring and avoided contact with the public. Jakob was the man of the world: gregarious, multilingual, possessed of a big sense of humor, international in his outlook. It was also Jakob who, alone among the brothers, had the benefit of a higher education (albeit not a formal one, but more about this later). None of the three could be described as scholarly; they were, first and foremost, merchants, but if among them were any scholarly traits in the real sense of the word, Jakob probably had them.

In an interview published in the *Daily Mail* in 1907, Ludwig was asked to mention some of the famous book-collectors he had met. To a

San Franciscan it is gratifying to read that "among my oldest customers was Mr. Sutro, the American railway king who often came to see me, and who habitually wore a grey top hat." Among the booksellers, Ludwig Rosenthal singled out Quaritch: "The first time he came to see me he looked carefully over the rare books I showed him and from time to time he would put one aside and say: 'That must be rare, I have never seen it, I must have it.' He then had the books packed in a case in his presence and, loading the case up on his shoulder, carried it off himself to his hotel." I suspect this was not because Quaritch enjoyed lugging crates to his hotel through the streets of Munich; my interpretation of the incident is that, among the books Quaritch had selected, there must have been some extraordinary bargains which he was eager to carry off before Rosenthal had a chance to re-examine the "I-must-have-it" pile and change his mind.

Let me close this account of Ludwig by presenting, in a pale and abbreviated translation, the powerful portrait sketched of him by the German poet and bibliophile Karl Wolfskehl in an obituary published in 1929:

I carry with me the unforgettable picture of Ludwig Rosenthal at the Munich Flea Market, now held in this city twice a year. Yes, the Flea Market! There too, he searched, and there, too, he found. There he stood, the head of a world-renowned firm, before the bookstalls at 8 AM on opening day, his gaze searching, powerful, grasping, darting over the disorderly piled-up masses and over row upon haphazard row of books, while his alert and industrious hands were feverishly digging into freshly opened crates — selecting here a volume, there a print, here again a manuscript, all finding their way to the ever-growing pile of his booty . . .

It is difficult to see how such a man could fail to be a success.

And now to my grandfather, Jakob, the junior of the three. In 1878 he was sent to Paris. There, the twenty-four-year-old partner was to acquaint himself with the French market, meet the collectors, the booksellers, and the librarians; he was to represent the firm and was to be, so to speak, "their man in France." He found for himself a small furnished flat near the Théâtre de l'Odéon and, according to one of the few autobiographical notes of his which I have, this apartment was "in a strictly respectable *hôtel meublé*, where visits from women students or, God forbid, from 'lady friends' were absolutely forbidden, and where only gentlemen of the most solid reputation, or certified married couples, could gain admittance. And our concierge was incorruptible."

I detect an unmistakably plaintive note here, and I wonder just how grandfather found out that the concierge was incorruptible.

Jakob Rosenthal fell in love with Paris and with France, and one of the first people he met was Léopold Delisle, who took this young German under his wing and invited him to attend the informal seminars about medieval manuscripts which he held in his home on Sunday afternoons. That is how Jakob was introduced into the real world of the medieval book and that is what I meant when I referred earlier to his higher education. Léopold Delisle was, after all, perhaps the greatest and most encyclopedic connoisseur of medieval manuscripts who ever lived.

Jakob became, and remained throughout his life, an ardent Francophile, and before his first year in Paris was over, he had changed his name to Jacques. His connections with the French book world were many, and enduring. He became a close friend, for instance, of Anatole Claudin, and was frequently a guest in Claudin's country home in Charenton, where Claudin kept all of the early French printed books which he needed to write his masterly history of early printing in France. Claudin was a bookseller, but until he had squeezed every drop of historical and bibliographical blood out of a book, it was not to be bought for all the money in the world. Once his research was completed, however, the book he had worked on was for sale, and in this way his friend Jacques Rosenthal was able to acquire some of the greatest early books printed in France.

During this eventful year in Paris, in that impregnable *hôtel meublé*, Jacques was ordered by the Munich firm to buy everything he could lay his hands on concerning Louis XIV, particularly architectural books. He supplied them *en masse*, and they all found their way into the library of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who was in the midst of a building spree and sought inspiration from his French namesake of some 170 years before. I must therefore admit that our family must bear at least some of the responsibility for those nineteenth-century equivalents of Disneyland, the castles of Herrenchiemsee and Neuschwanstein in Bavaria.

Among the books His Majesty urgently needed there was one which simply could not be found. Jacques, bombarded by telegrams, having exhausted every possibility, finally managed to wangle an introduction to the most renowned French bookman of the time, Paul Lacroix or, as he is better known to us, "Le Bibliophile Jacob." It was diffi-

cult to arrange to see this eminent gentleman, but the young German bookseller had made it clear that he came on the king's business, and therefore was admitted. He explained his predicament, to which Lacroix replied that if King Ludwig said the book existed, then it must exist. "I was rather surprised by this statement," my grandfather noted, "and the old gentleman must have noticed this. He excused himself for a few minutes and then returned to the room, holding a bundle of letters. 'You see, sir,' he said, 'all these are letters in your king's own hand, addressed to me personally. They reveal him to be a man of great culture, of wide learning — a real scholar — indeed, an admirable man.'" Within a few days, Lacroix had found a reference to this elusive book in the literature dealing with the building of the Palace of Versailles; hence, he said, the book *must* exist. It was never found, however, and my feelings in this matter are far less royalist: if the combined brains of Jacques Rosenthal and Paul Lacroix could not locate a book, it is, by definition, a bibliographical ghost.

In 1895 the three Rosenthal brothers separated, and each took one third of the stock. Just how one goes about dividing such awesome masses of books I have no idea, but it is no wonder that a marked coolness developed among the three. The firms all stayed in Munich, and confusion in the world of books has reigned ever since as to which Rosenthal was which.

Nathan, the retiring one, lived pretty much the life of a recluse among his books. He never married but, lo and behold, he fathered two children whom he adopted; they inherited the business and Nathan's grandson, Arthur, carries on the business, still in Munich.

The firms of Ludwig and Jacques Rosenthal grew and flourished and, indeed, became the symbols of Munich as the undisputed capital of the antiquarian book world in Germany. At this point, perhaps I should tell you that the Rosenthals were not the *only* booksellers in Munich. Many factors account for Munich's primacy, but chiefly the fact that Bavaria and close-by Austria are Catholic regions teeming with ancient monasteries. Most of them were dissolved in the early 1800s and their libraries either scattered or taken to governmental libraries such as the Staatsbibliothek in Munich. If it hadn't been for these monastic libraries, Ludwig Hain could never have laid his hands on 16,000-odd incunabula! Librarians will readily appreciate what space and duplication problems resulted, and any bookseller can sense that such a situation might provide the makings of a bonanza. Then

there was always the monastery that still had a large library but a building that was in need of extensive repairs, perhaps a roof that was leaking, and inevitably the question would arise: why not raise the necessary funds by selling the library, full as it was of what some may have said was useless old stuff, to one of those Munich booksellers?

In the days before jet travel — and to some extent even now — it was axiomatic that booksellers would settle where they could *buy* books, at the source, so to speak, rather than where they could sell them. And Munich was, indeed, the ideal spot, culturally, politically, and geographically, for those willing and able to take advantage of the breathtaking opportunities which today sound like fairy tales.

The measure of Jacques Rosenthal's financial success is the princely house he built in 1911 on the Briennerstrasse — a building in the rather severe Louis XVI style which fitted well into that beautiful part of Munich. The house may have been princely, but it was built on sound and thrifty principles: the top floor was for Jacques and his wife, Emma, the next floor down for their son Erwin when he married and settled down, the floor below that was rented out, and the ground floor housed the business, with a basement large enough to accommodate one of those monastic libraries.

But to leave the Rosenthals for a while and turn to another part of Germany, some 650 miles to the northeast. There, in a city called Johannisburg, in what was then the German province of East Prussia (now it is in Poland), there had existed for several generations a house of scholarly printers, the Olschkis, who were adept at printing the difficult and esoteric texts needed by rabbis and by Talmudic scholars. The Jewish communities of eastern Germany were not nearly so emancipated as their western counterparts, and surely the Olschkis must have worn the black frocks, the broad-brimmed hats, the long locks, and the beards of the Orthodox at the time when Joseph Rosenthal was making the rounds of the Bavarian castles, clean-shaven and, no doubt, dressed in the latest fashion.

Samuel Olschki learned to read and write long before he went to school, and at the age of four recited the Kaddish, the Hebrew prayer for the dead, over the grave of his father. He relates, in an autobiographical sketch, how, as a child, he enjoyed browsing through his father's vast scholarly library, and also how he loved rummaging through the printing shop, picking up loose sheets and making them into complete volumes. (This, by the way, is unmistakable evidence of

true bookseller's blood.) Though the community into which he was born was an orthodox one, his father must have had some liberal ideas — printers are often known to be on the radical side — because the boy did not go to the ghetto school (the term "ghetto school" is certainly not a disparaging one in this context) but received the education open to any middle-class child in Germany: regular grammar school, followed by the *Gymnasium*, which he completed in Berlin, in an excellent school where the Latin classics were still taught *in* Latin. At home he had learned German, Yiddish, and Hebrew, as well as Polish; in school he had learned French and he had loved Greek and Latin so much that his mother had hired a private tutor for him. As soon as young Samuel got his high-school degree, he applied for a job at the bookstore of Calvary in Berlin. The first question they asked the young man who spoke seven languages was: "Do you know English?" The reply was "No, not yet, but by the time my job starts here, I'll know it." And indeed, he acquired an amazing fluency in English, self-taught, in a matter of weeks.

After his apprenticeship, since his health was frail, Samuel Olschki was advised to seek a milder climate and so in 1883, at the age of twenty-two, he packed his bags and went to northern Italy, to Verona, where he had obtained a job managing the antiquarian department of a bookstore. He did not know any Italian then, and his earliest contacts were with the clergy — with whom he found he could converse in Latin. But Italian, of course, came easily to him and by now the young man, who already knew by heart a vast amount of Greek and Latin classical literature, eagerly soaked up this new culture, steeped himself in Dante and the Italian Renaissance, and made Italian humanism his own. Within a few years, there was no one more expert than he in the history of early printing in Italy. It was then, too, that he took his middle name, Lev, Italianized it to Leo, and used it thenceforth as his first name.

Three years after his arrival in Verona, Olschki opened his own business there, and the story of how he acquired his stock is worth telling. The auction sale of a library had been announced and, when Olschki went to the appointed place, he found to his great surprise that he was the only one there. The books were bundled up in sacks and there was not the slightest chance of examining any of them individually. So, the court-appointed auctioneer and Olschki agreed on a price of something like 500 lire. A few days — yes, *days* later,

Olschki issued his first catalogue describing about 340 fifteenth- and sixteenth-century books. It is a measure of Olschki's inexhaustible energies, and perhaps also a measure of the cubic content of those sacks, that in the same year ten more catalogues followed in succession.

It was during his stay in Verona that Leo married. His bride came from Lodz, in Poland. Her parents were, it would appear, rather apprehensive about their daughter's marriage to this daring and emancipated young fellow who had emigrated to Italy, and in my family we still have a letter which young Leo wrote to his future parents-in-law, gently telling them not to be so narrow-minded, and reassuring them that there was, after all, a flourishing Jewish community of several hundred souls in Verona.

Olschki had barely started as a bookseller when he also began publishing. He was, no doubt, shocked at how casually Italians treated their own cultural heritage and, like so many other Germans, he decided to do something about it. Publishing began as a sideline but decades later absorbed perhaps the greater part of his energies and ultimately I think it was the source of his greatest pride. It is in his activities as a publisher that one perceives most clearly the complete and, indeed, amazing Italianization of this young German immigrant: in 1889, barely three years after starting in business, he founded the first Italian periodical entirely devoted to Dante, the *Giornale Dantesco*. Some ten years later, he began publishing *La Bibliofilia*, which is to this day the only scholarly Italian periodical entirely devoted to the history and arts of the book; and several massive Italian scholarly publishing enterprises which were on the point of failing for lack of editorial leadership were taken in hand by him, revived, and are still going strong.

Verona soon became too small for this enormously imaginative and industrious man (it's the same story as Fellheim twenty years before) and in 1890 the family and firm moved to Venice. The bookshop in Piazza San Marco is described by Olschki in his own words (and in one of his few slightly self-mocking asides) as resembling a "coquettish bibliophile boudoir." And then Venice, in its turn, became too confining. In 1897, by then a widower with six children, Leo S. Olschki moved to Florence. There is recorded the mournful remark of his carpenter, who had built the many shelves of that "bibliophile boudoir," when he came to bid goodby to Leo Olschki: "Padrón," he said in Venetian dialect, "now that I have finally learned how to spell your name, you have to move!"

The Florence of that time was the turn-of-the-century Florence which Valéry Larbaud so deliciously, and maliciously, described as "an American city, built in the style of the Italian Renaissance, where there are too many Germans." But it was also the Italian city where everybody, including all the world's bibliophiles, stopped on their grand tour. It was here that Olschki rented large and sumptuous quarters near the Ponte Vecchio, on the Lungarno degli Acciaiuoli, and one of his frequent visitors, the Italian poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, took his purple pen in hand and described him thus (the reference to Wendelin is to Wendelin von Speyer, a German printer who settled in Venice in the 1470s and achieved great fame for designing a beautiful Italian typeface):

Prince of booksellers, first in erudition, first in fortune; softened and ennobled — like Wendelin — in Venice, and now, on this sun-drenched Lungarno degli Acciaiuoli, filled with the wisdom and scholarship of Vespasiano da Bisticci.

Sun-drenched? I wonder whether the great poet had ever spent a winter in Florence when he wrote that.

It was inevitable that Olschki, undoubtedly the "prince of booksellers" in Italy, should meet his counterparts in Munich. As we have seen, in Munich or, indeed, in the rest of Germany, the question of who was Number One was not settled quite so easily, and to my knowledge no German poet ever dared try his hand at it. Olschki met Jacques Rosenthal in the 1890s and they developed a deep and abiding friendship. Whether the following anecdote, which is probably apocryphal, accurately reflects their early relations, I don't know, but there is some truth in it, I'm sure.

Rosenthal and Olschki were seated next to each other at Sotheby's once in the days when Sotheby's still had lots for which the catalogue entry would end with the electrifying words: ". . . and others." Rosenthal, having looked through one of these lots before the sale, discovered a fabulous sleeper and perhaps was already dreaming of a great coup when bidding started at a shilling. Thereafter the price went up with alarming speed and obviously there was a keen competitor somewhere in the room. As the bidding went up and up, Rosenthal looked around sharply to see who was bidding against him and soon found out; it was his friend Olschki, sitting next to him, his arm affectionately draped over Rosenthal's shoulder and using the hand of that arm to signal the auctioneer.

Leo Olschki's assets consisted not only of his books; his fairest assets ("my most beautiful editions," he called them) were his three daughters, Adele, Elvira, and Margherita. When the youngest, Margherita, was on a trip to Germany in 1908, a stopover in Munich was included, and Papa Olschki suggested that since the son of his colleague Jacques Rosenthal was a Ph.D. candidate in art history, he might take the sixteen-year-old Margherita on a tour of the museums and give the girl some "Kultur." And that's how it all began.

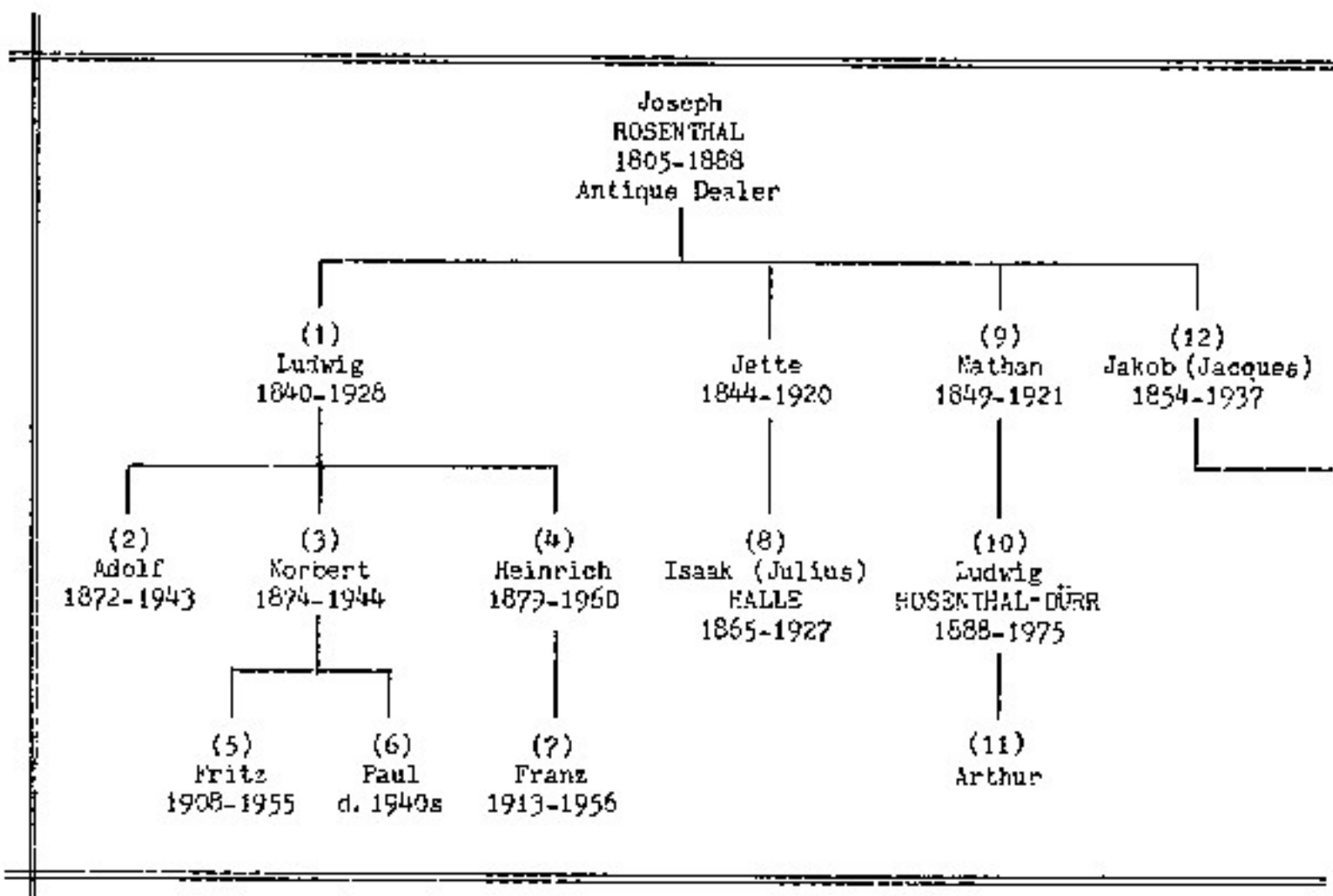
The shy, crew-cut, stiff-necked, and scholarly student of art history, Erwin Rosenthal, was a far cry from the tall, dashing, and, of course, penniless and starving revolutionary whom Margherita had once dreamed of rescuing from his chains. But four years later, in 1912, Erwin Rosenthal and Margherita Olschki were married in Florence. They settled in Munich, in the big house which had been finished the year before and where, it will be recalled, a floor had been provided for just this event. It was then that my father, Erwin, joined the firm Jacques Rosenthal full-time. He did not come with a certificate of apprenticeship; the first of the family to obtain a college education, he came with a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Halle. And it was Erwin who, in the ensuing years, gave the firm an added dimension by introducing that tone of erudition and professional scholarship which was to become its trademark and to find its fullest expression in the periodical *Beiträge zur Forschung*, which he edited.

World War I came and Leo Olschki, who had never bothered to take out Italian citizenship, found himself an "enemy alien" and spent the war years in Geneva. Part of his family was living in Germany and the two sons who had joined his firm in Florence were officers in the Italian army. While in temporary exile in Geneva, the irrepressible Leo Olschki soon managed to assemble a fine stock of books and, in 1917, in the midst of one of Europe's greatest moments of madness, he founded, with the help of his son Leonardo, an international journal of romance philology, the *Archivum Romanicum*. He returned to Florence in 1920, but the Geneva branch was kept alive for many years.

In Munich, my parents picked the worst possible time to have their five children. All of us were born immediately before, during, and after World War I, between 1913 and 1920, the author of this family history being the last of the lot. We grew up in an atmosphere which was not super-patriotic (mother had seen to that, and had taught us all Italian, and insisted that to her we must speak only Italian) but still,



PLATE I
LEO S. OLSCHKI AND JACQUES ROSENTHAL
IN FUGGI, ITALY, 1914



A GENEALOGY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE OLSCHKI AND ROSENTHAL FAMILIES
ACTIVE IN THE ANTIQUARIAN BOOK BUSINESS AND PUBLISHING

(1) Founded *Ludwig Rosenthal's Antiquariat* in Fellheim, Bavaria, in 1859. Moved the firm to Munich in 1867. Two of his brothers, Nathan and Jacques, were taken in as partners in 1872.

The three brothers separated in 1895 and thereafter each had his own firm, in Munich.

(2) Adolf soon retired.

(3) Norbert continued as head of *Ludwig Rosenthal's Antiquariat*.

(4) Heinrich founded his own firm, *Heinrich Rosenthal*, in Munich c. 1911; in 1931 he moved it to Lucerne, Switzerland.

(5) (6) Norbert's sons, Fritz and Paul, moved the firm to the Netherlands in 1937 and established *Ludwig Rosenthal's Antiquariat* in The Hague; the firm was moved to Hilversum in 1945; since 1955 it has been headed by Fritz's widow, Hilde Rosenthal, née Wolf.

(7) Franz, Heinrich's only son, was associated with his father and was to succeed him. But he pre-deceased his father and the firm ceased with Heinrich's death in 1960.

(8) Founded *Antiquariat Julius Halle* in Munich in 1889. His widow, Ida, née Fichtelberger, continued the firm until it was closed in 1935.

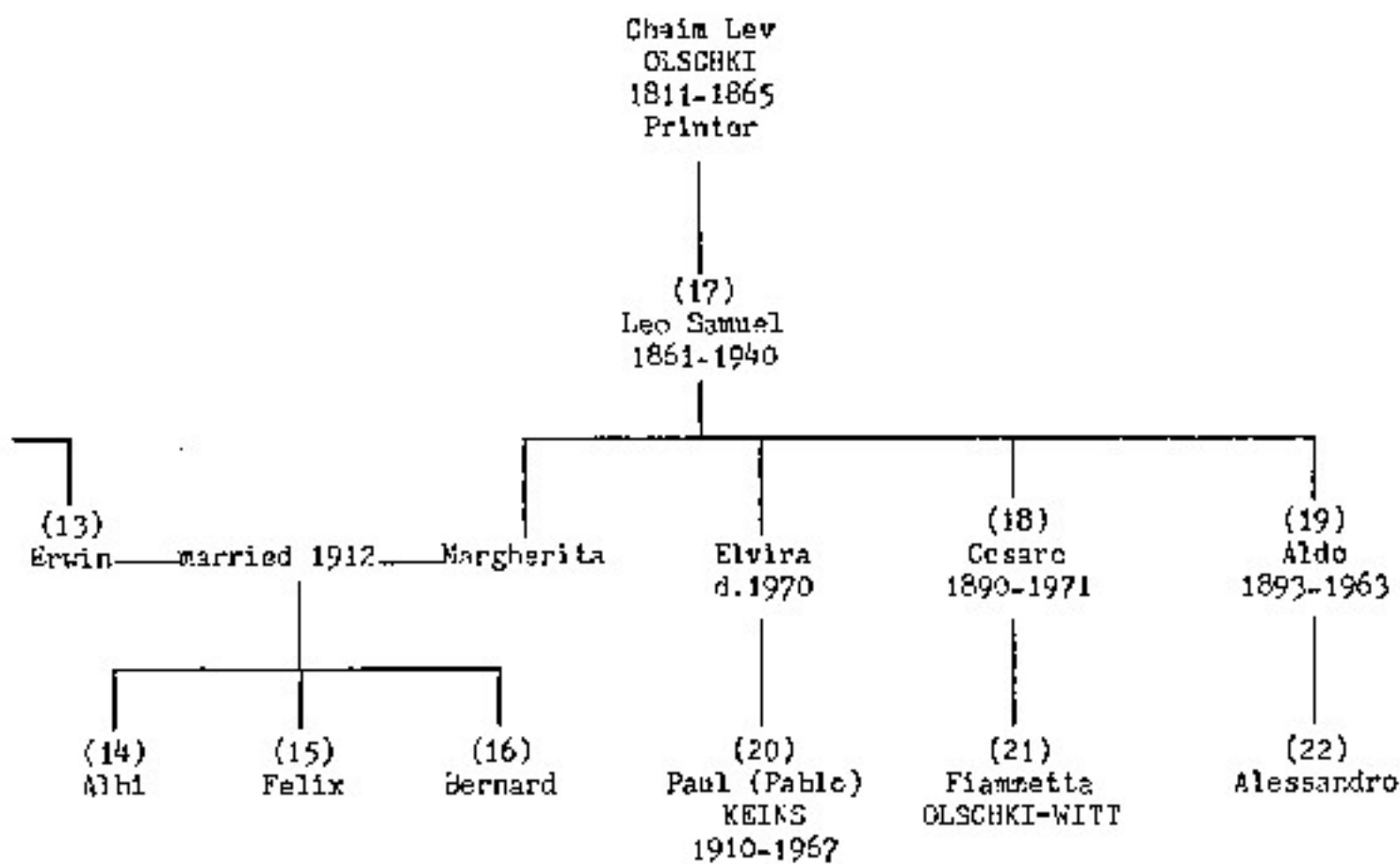
(9) (10) (11) The firm *Nathan Rosenthal*, founded in Munich in 1895, has always remained in that city. Nathan was succeeded in 1921 by his adopted son, *Ludwig Rosenthal-Dürr*, and the latter, in turn, was succeeded by his son, Arthur, in 1975.

(12) Founded *Antiquariat Jacques Rosenthal* in Munich, in 1895.

(13) Jacques Rosenthal's only son, Erwin, entered the firm in 1912 and headed it beginning in 1932; in 1935 the firm was ceded to Hans Koch, who continued it under its name, *Antiquariat Jacques Rosenthal*; in 1961 he moved it to Eching, a suburb of Munich.

Erwin Rosenthal founded the following firms:

Dr. Erwin Rosenthal, Berlin; a branch of the Munich house, 1919-1926.



L'Art Ancien SA, Lugano, Switzerland; established 1920; moved to Zürich in 1929.

Emil Offenbacher, Inc., New York City, 1941-1944.

Dr. Erwin Rosenthal, Berkeley, California, 1944-1958.

(14) In 1936 established *A. Rosenthal, Ltd.* in London, England; moved the firm to Oxford in 1941.

In 1955 purchased the firm *Otto Haas* in London. In 1976, Albi's youngest daughter, Julia, became an assistant in the antiquarian bookselling firm of Sims and Reed, London.

(15) Since 1972, director of *L'Art Ancien SA*, Zürich.

(16) Founded *Bernard M. Rosenthal, Inc.* in New York City in 1953; moved the firm to San Francisco, California, in 1970.

(17) Founded the *Libreria Leo S. Olschki* and the *Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki* in Verona, Italy, in 1886. Moved to Venice in 1890 and to Florence in 1897; the firm remained in Florence until 1974 (from 1938 to 1945 its name was changed to *Bibliopolis*).

The *Libreria Leo S. Olschki* had two branches: one in Rome, from 1915 to 1954, and one in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1917 to 1940.

(18) (19) Of Leo S. Olschki's three sons, two, Aldo and Cesare, entered the firm. After World War II, Aldo took over the publishing part, *Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki*, and Cesare the antiquarian bookselling part, *Libreria Antiquaria Leo S. Olschki*.

(20) Started the *Libreria J. Pablo Keins* in Madrid, Spain, in 1934. Moved it to Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1937.

Since his death in 1967, the firm has been continued by his widow, Gertrudis L. de Keins, née Lebermann.

(21) Cesare was succeeded, after his retirement c. 1960, by his daughter Fiammetta and her husband, Mario Witt.

In late 1974 they moved the firm from Florence to Lucignano (near Arezzo) and renamed it *Leo S. Olschki, Studio Bibliografico*.

(22) In 1963, Alessandro succeeded his father as head of the *Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki* in Florence. Alessandro's son, Daniele, is now associated with his father and will succeed him.

it was an atmosphere of strong attachment to Germany. To be sure, Grandfather Jacques was proud of the awards and recognitions he had received from the Académie Française and from the French government for the many services he had rendered them and for the many gifts he had given them. He was deeply attached to Italy by bonds of family. But he was also proud, and rightly so, of the title of Antiquarian Bookseller by Appointment to His Majesty the King of Bavaria and, later, to His Imperial Majesty the Kaiser. I remember well how, long after their combined majesties had been toppled, grandfather was still addressed by many people as "Herr Hofantiquar." Thus, Germany was home and had been home for many centuries.

Jacques represented the culmination of that remarkable drive to assimilate, to blend into the surrounding society, to draw from it and to contribute to it, the culmination of that almost euphoric flight from the memories of the pogroms and the millennial humiliations which brought the German Jews to such intellectual and social prominence. Yet, despite all this, my father Erwin had early felt the desire to emigrate, long before the Nazis came on the scene. Jacques, of course, would not hear of so absurd an idea, but a compromise was reached; Erwin received permission from both his father, Jacques, and from the even more unbending Swiss authorities to open a shop in Lugano. He called it "L'Art Ancien" and it opened its doors in 1920. By the time the Nazis came to power in Germany thirteen years later, the existence of the Swiss branch proved to be a godsend and provided all sorts of ways whereby a good portion of the Munich shop's stock could be shipped out and saved.

Now that I have related the origins of the German, Italian, and Swiss firms, I can only sketch in the rest. One childhood memory of my own illustrates well enough what happened next in the history of the firms. In January 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany and 1 April of that year was proclaimed by the Nazis as "Boycott the Jews Day." On that day, I saw two huge swastika banners hung on the façade of my grandfather's house, and the word "Jew" scrawled in red paint on the walls. During these very days, Sotheby's had sent to our firm in Munich the Chester Beatty manuscripts for exhibition prior to the auction, not, as it turned out, an auspicious time. Yet, despite the brown-shirts stationed at the entrance, visitors came into the shop, and a number of them came not to see the manuscripts at all, but to pay their respects and to express their shame.

The signs of the deluge were unmistakable, yet most people in our

circle thought it would blow over in a few weeks. My father, by then head of the firm, did not share this view at all, and by mid-1933 most of us were out of Germany. The firm, declared by the Reichs-Minister of "Culture" to be unworthy of handling German cultural materials, was ordered disbanded or turned over to non-Jewish ownership. The Nazi legal term for this sort of theft on a grand scale was "Aryanization." But we were lucky. Hans Koch, senior employee of the firm Jacques Rosenthal, became its new owner. A thoroughly upright man, he considered his role to be more that of a preserver than a liquidator. Despite immense personal hardships, he kept the name Jacques Rosenthal alive throughout the entire war, and managed to save part of the stock. In 1948 we reached an amicable settlement which included his right to keep the name — and that is why there is still a firm Jacques Rosenthal in Germany today.

My brother Albi emigrated to England and, in 1936, barely twenty-one, he started the firm A. Rosenthal Ltd. in London. By the 1940s my parents, my brother Felix, and I had made our home in Berkeley, California, and there is the American branch. In 1934, my cousin, Paul Kcins, had established himself as a bookseller in Madrid. When Franco's troops laid siege to Madrid in 1936, Paul (by then Pablo), who had been born in Germany and had spent several years in Italy, could not face the prospect of living under yet another Fascist regime, and made his way to Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Fate was more cruel to the successors of Ludwig Rosenthal: three of them perished in concentration camps, and the grandson Fritz, who had emigrated to Holland in 1937 with his wife Hilde, barely survived the German occupation. By a well-deserved stroke of luck, the American occupation authorities in southern Germany located the leftover stock of the firm, and soon 550 crates of books were on their way to Holland; that was *some* leftovers. The firm again flourishes and one of its specialties is still — yes, Catholic theology.

Leo Olschki emigrated once more to Geneva and died there in 1940, in exile, but not a bitter man. The word "bitter" had never been in his vocabulary. The highest awards he had received from the King of Italy, the special blessings bestowed upon him by two Popes in private audience, the many splendid encomia he had received from the Italian cultural establishment, all these were to no avail once Mussolini had become, to borrow the contemptuous Churchillian phrase, "Hitler's lackey." The firm in Florence limped along under the name "Bibliop-

olis," until restored in 1945. Shortly thereafter, two Olschki sons, Aldo and Cesare, divided it into two independent parts, the bookselling firm and the publishing house, and both are still going strong today.

Every one of us, whether bookseller, librarian, or collector, must be awed and admiring when we read of the achievements of my two grandfathers and their contemporaries. By good fortune, some of Leo Olschki's and the Rosenthals' correspondence with those two giants of American bibliophily, J. Pierpont Morgan and Henry J. Walters, is preserved. A random sampling gives a glimpse at least of how they conducted business.

In the early 1900s, Henry Walters visited the shop in Florence, the one on the "sun-drenched Lungarno," and purchased *en bloc* a wallful of incunabula for which Olschki had just completed the catalogue, which was still in proofs. This, then, became the handsome catalogue of the Walters Collection (1,100 editions, and during those same years Jacques Rosenthal published a catalogue of 3,500 incunabula!). Here is a letter from Olschki to Walters written in the self-taught English of the nineteen-year-old apprentice. It is dated 1905, shortly after this sale was consummated.

Permit me, dear Sir, that I congratulate you again and again for having acquired my incunabula collection at a ridiculously cheap price. After having got the payment for it, my book keeper registered the single volumes and stated that the difference between the cost and the sale price is not even 4%! And in this difference are not included the considerable expenses I had for the work of the binder, nor the interests of the capital for many years . . .

Apropos of the relations between Jacques Rosenthal and Leo Olschki, there is a letter of 1906, again to Walters, but please remember that it was written long before their children had met:

. . . I reported to you a wonderful 14th century illuminated manuscript upon vellum which had belonged to Didot, and requested your goodness of cabling me your decision about, as the manuscript had been required from different quarters. The Munich bookseller Jacques Rosenthal came expressly to Florence to buy it: I told him to have reported the manuscript to you, and that I am awaiting your reply; although he assured me that you don't buy anything at all in this moment. [Ah — the two giants fencing!] I said I must await at least until the 20th of this month, and as I did not receive your reply, I sold him the manuscript, which he brought into the trade at a price which will overpass by many thousands that [which] I asked for . . .

Olschki also acted as Walters' agent at European auctions. Here is a sample of that, dated Vienna, October 1905:

Dear Sir, I hasten to inform you that I bought the 19 leaves of the famous *Biblia pauperum* for 6100 florins against other booksellers, and I mean to have made a splendid acquisition, so more as the *Biblia pauperum* is much scarcer and valuable than the *Apocalypsis*. A few minutes after the sale, the auctioneer had a telegram from a German Library with a bid of tenthousand florins and he tried to re-buy it of me, but without success, as I purchased it for you and should not have accepted a million profit! As I am sure that my person offers an interest to you, I permit to inform you that, according to a telegram I had just now from the Italian government, the king of Italy decorated me with the title and order of 'Commendatore di San Maurizio e Lazzaro,' the highest decoration existing in Italy.

The excellence and high level of scholarship of Olschki's periodical, *La Bibliofilia*, was not a bit impaired by the use which Olschki occasionally made of it for what we might call high-level advertising. In 1904, he offers Walters a fifteenth-century manuscript and tempts him, thus:

. . . Léopold Delisle, the chief librarian of the Paris National Library, compiled an article on this first rate choice piece, which will be published shortly in *La Bibliofilia* . . . I am sure that this volume will be required from many quarters after issue of the article written by the most eminent librarian of the world . . .

Olschki's relations with Mr. Morgan were, it seems, cordial most of the time but his relations with Morgan's legendary librarian, Miss Belle da Costa Greene, were atrocious; it is quite clear she simply did not like him. She managed to elude him during his two visits to New York in 1909 and 1939 (as is evident, the grudge lasted a long time!) and, what was a far ruder snub, she never went to see him on her visits to Florence. Nevertheless, business is business, and some of Olschki's finest books found their way into the Morgan Library; but most of them, I think, indirectly, through other dealers, towards whom the choleric but brilliant Miss Greene was more kindly disposed. On many offers sent by Olschki to the Morgan Library we find, in Belle Greene's large and bold hand, the words, "No — too high," or the shattering, "No, already have copy, much taller, on vellum," or that sort of thing. Once she wrote to Olschki that his price on a book — 8,000 gold francs for a 1468 edition of Cicero — was "absurd," but I am glad to report that Olschki stood his ground. In our business, it should be noted, the customer is *not* always right:

Dear Miss Greene, [he replies] I thank you very much for your kind letter of the 26th of October, which procured me, I confess, great displeasure [What Olschki actually wanted to say was something like "regret," for which the Italian word is "dispiacere." But Miss Greene, who must have been infuriated by such insolence, could not possibly have known that.] as I learned from it that you doubt of my communications. I repeat them word by word and can prove the rightness of them. The Incunabula being my speciality since over twenty years, I can say that nobody is superior to me in the valuation of them. The bibliographer Claudin said that I was the first who called the attention of bibliophiles to the study of incunabula, and that I have done very much to inculcate in amateurs a love for the subject. [And here Olschki is, of course, quite right; a friend of mine once remarked that Olschki and Rosenthal *invented* incunabula.] You will therefore understand how mortified I feel by your words that the price asked for the Cicero is absurd . . .

It turned out that Belle Greene thought that this particular copy was the same as the one which Ludwig Rosenthal had had in a catalogue shortly before for 750 marks, but Olschki was able to prove her wrong and that exchange of letters is worth publishing in full.

Mr. Morgan frequently visited Europe and *he* certainly did not snub Olschki. With evident relish Olschki wrote to Miss Greene that

. . . Mr. Morgan, immediately after having arrived in Florence, honored me with a long visit . . . and was very much surprised to hear of your irritated correspondence with me . . .

The following was written after one of Mr. Morgan's more spectacular purchases:

Dear Miss Greene, Mr. Pierpont Morgan, with whom I met at Aix-les-Bains, where he bought of me other marvellous manuscripts, charged me kindly to send you a copy of the invoice . . . The books and manuscripts have been duly delivered to Mr. Morgan himself, who gave them all, carefully packed in a trunk, to the captain of his yacht . . .

Now there is style! The invoice, written in Leo Olschki's own hand (when it came to writing invoices to Morgan, the prince of booksellers was in no mood to delegate), came to a total of 515,000 gold francs. And that, too, is style!

As can be seen, Olschki was never cursed by a false sense of modesty, and here is another sample, dated 1909, again to Miss Greene, and written in a fit of pique because he had just found out that he had been in Paris while she, too, was there, and yet she had made no effort to meet him.

I looked through all the important bookshops in the fortnight I was being in Paris and stated [again a somewhat unfortunate adaptation of the Italian word "constatato," which actually means "I noted" or "I found"] that all together don't possess even a small portion of the very rare Mss and books of my Emporium . . .

In contrast to that "sun-drenched" Olschkian prose, the letters issued from the shops of Jacques and Ludwig Rosenthal sound very matter-of-fact, like this one, written in 1912 by Ludwig Rosenthal's assistant, Maurice Ettinghausen, the same legendary Ettinghausen who, three decades after this letter was written, was to become an associate of my brother Albi in Oxford:

Sir, [this is addressed to Morgan] You asked me about a year ago in London to let you hear of any special books in your line. [Referring to Mr. Morgan as having a collecting "line" is, by the way, a splendid example of Ettinghausen matter-of-factness.] My firm has just bought from a German prince a fine, complete copy . . . of the *Biblia pauperum*, the famous *blockbook* [this is underscored twice, and rightly so] . . . of which there is no copy in your collection. [He then gives several descriptive details and concludes] . . . Price is 2,250 pounds *net* ["net" is underscored once]. Should you wish me to show you the volume, I shall be glad if you would make an appointment . . . PS I might add that there is *no* ["no" is underscored twice] copy of this book in the famous collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, whose librarian is most desirous that I should submit it to the Baron on his return from Egypt.

Those were heady days when antiquarian booksellers could pit a Rothschild against a Morgan! Miss Greene recommended purchase in a letter to Morgan, but added:

I would suggest an offer of 2000 pounds as, from my own experience, I find this firm expects one to make a lower offer than the price they name. However, if they are unwilling to sell it for that price, perhaps it would be better to pay the price rather than let the item go, as I doubt that we will be able to obtain another copy soon . . .

That is about as close as Belle Greene *ever* came to admitting that a bookseller was offering a really rare book. It is too bad that Ludwig Rosenthal did not know of this bit of internal communication because, despite the clearly underlined word "net" in the original letter, they sold the book for 2,000 pounds.

The motto of our booksellers' association is, "We are united by the love of books." In the case of my family, we might adopt a slightly altered version: "We are united by love *and* books."

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

WILLIS J. BUCKINGHAM, Assistant Professor of English at Arizona State University, earned his Ph.D. at Indiana University; his dissertation, *Emily Dickinson: an Annotated Bibliography*, was published by the Indiana University Press in 1970.

LUTHER S. LUEDTKE is the author of a Brown University dissertation, "German Criticism and Reception of Ralph Waldo Emerson" (1971), and co-author and editor of *The Study of American Culture: Contemporary Conflicts* (DeLand, Florida: Everett-Edwards, 1977); he is now Associate Professor of English and Associate Director of American Studies at the University of Southern California.

DAVID G. RENAKER, Associate Professor of English at San Francisco State University, earned his doctorate at Harvard in 1967; his dissertation was "Robert Burton on Human Knowledge."

BERNARD ROSENTHAL heads a San Francisco firm; as listed in the *International Directory of Antiquarian Booksellers*, the specialties of Bernard M. Rosenthal, Inc., include manuscripts and early printed books before *circa* 1700, scholarly books on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, bibliography, and paleography.

WINFRIED SCHLEINER is Assistant Professor of English at the University of California, Davis; his Brown University dissertation, *The Imagery of John Donne's Sermons*, was published by the Brown University Press in 1970.

DOUGLAS C. STANGE was Charles Atwood Kofoid Fellow at the University of California School of Library and Information Studies, Berkeley, during 1976-1977; his Harvard dissertation, *Patterns of Antislavery Among American Unitarians, 1831-1860*, was published by the Fairleigh Dickinson University Press in 1976, and his other writings include contributions to the October 1968 and January 1976 issues of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN.

PURELY BY COINCIDENCE, this turns out to be the Great Southwest Issue of the BULLETIN — five of the contributors are resident in California and the sixth is reaching in Arizona.