

MOSES JACOB EZEKIEL

BY SAMSON D. OPPENHEIM

On October 28, 1844, there was born to Jacob and Catherine Ezekiel, of Richmond, Virginia, a son who was duly named Moses Jacob, and who was destined to become one of the greatest of Jewish sculptors. He grew up a sturdy lad, whose talents were not slow in manifesting themselves. The child of ten years was found amusing himself by cutting out paper silhouettes; on the eve of the great civil conflict the youth of fourteen was already seeking recreation in painting and versifying. The war broke in upon the artist's development, but only for a time. He took up arms for his state, distinguishing himself especially at the battle of New Market; but when the four years' strife had ceased, he returned to his interrupted studies, anatomy especially, and after a brief excursion into business life, again resumed the pursuit of his chosen art. For a time he wavered between the brush and the chisel as the means of self-expression; but shortly after the close of the war, a handsome, stocky young man came to Cincinnati for the purpose of applying himself to the art of modelling.

Almost from the beginning, the career of this favored son of Fortune was one of uninterrupted advancement. The apprentice quickly outgrew his limited provincial surroundings, and, preceded by the reputation gained through his promising "Industry," the student of twenty-four travelled to Berlin, placing himself at the feet of the celebrated Siemer-

ing. Only a little later, under the tutelage of Wolff, he produced his "Washington," which was to win him admission into the exclusive Berlin Society of Artists. Establishing a studio of his own, he executed his "Israel" and his "Adam and Eve" which were to gain for him, in 1873, the much coveted Michael-Beer Prix de Rome,—the first time that prize had ever been attained by an American.

The youthful artist had been in Italy only a year when he received a flattering call to return to his own country. A hundredth anniversary World's Fair was to be held in commemoration of the establishment of Liberty in the New World. All sects and all sections combined to do honor to the great Democracy, and Ezekiel was nominated by the Independent Order of B'nai Brith to make a typical contribution to the world-celebrated "Centennial." His offering was "Religious Liberty," and at its unveiling in 1876, two continents greeted a new master of marble. Thenceforth, for more than twoscore years, until his death on March 27, 1917, this brilliant son of American Israel was to enjoy an almost unmarred career of acclaim, success piling upon success, as medals, decorations, titles, were showered upon him from cardinal, from court, from king, and from kaiser. The Berlin Prix de Rome has already been mentioned. Other high honors which followed were the Gold Medal, Royal Art Association, Palermo; Raphael Medal, Urbino; Silver Medal, St. Louis Exposition; Knighthood by the king of Italy; Order of Merit in Art from the duke of Saxe-Meiningen; and Knighthood by the emperor of Germany with Cross of Merit in Art.

The exigencies of his art made it necessary for Moses Ezekiel to reside far from his native land, but he never forgot that he was a Virginian, an American, a Jew. In reality he was a

cosmopolite in the best sense of the designation. When his state needed a seer to depict her sorrows, he sent her "Virginia Mourning her Dead"; the South called for a fitting symbol of her revised outreach, and he gave her his "Outlook." To enrich his country's Capital, he executed a whole galaxy of stone pictures for her art galleries. He exalted his own people and faith with his "Esther," while to the adopted land of his career he contributed his exquisite Nettuno fountain. Neither was ancient Greece neglected. In the Ezekiel gallery, "Homer" sings to "Pan and Amor," and "Phidias" faces "Neptune." By his "Christ" he showed his ability to transcend even the restricting bounds of creed.

Here we have the explanation of Ezekiel's art. He was essentially a Jew at heart, in mode of thought, in feeling, in imagination; so vitally a Jew that he could not help projecting his own nature into the creations of his brain and his hand, so much a Jew that he could not but praise right and mourn injustice, that he could be at once a thinker and a technician. Here was a man who was able to be a friend to the lofty as well as to the lowly, a poet, a musician, and not the less a man of the world because he adhered to his own strong convictions. He demonstrated once again that the modeller could charm with his culture; he showed that the Jew could win with his manner. In him the American commoner is seen ranking with peers and princes, proving at the same time that it is possible to be a patriot though an expatriate.

In his art Ezekiel evinced the typical Jewish eclecticism. He modified the older canons of Greek classicism with the vigor of the new Teutonic thought and the virility he had learned from long study of the mighty models of Michelangelo. As in

the case of that master, his originality and unconventionality only served to emphasize his technical eminence. But above all else there shone forth in Ezekiel's work always the governing thought. Hence his statues are not mere lifeless effigies of stone; into the plastic children of his imagination he breathed his own soul until they almost cried out with their creator's vehemence.

Perhaps the most characteristic of his creations was the celebrated studio which he constructed in the Tower of Belisarius. Here in the vaulted thermæ built in the days of Diocletian he had gathered together treasures from many lands and ages. Ancient marbles and alabasters, bronzes, costly metals and relics beautified with precious stones, medieval parchments and church ornaments, oriental ivories, velvets and silks hung on all sides, in alluring contrast to the latter-day furniture and the twentieth century grand piano, proclaiming the broad sympathies and the catholic tastes of this citizen of the world.

Much might be written of his beautiful home and of the rich artistry of his workroom, of his historical curios and art treasures, of his hospitable salon, of his versatility, of his patrons, of his personal attraction, his captivating personality, his exquisite diction, his extraordinary skill at portrait-making, his companionships with those who sat in the seats of the mighty, his friendships with the truly great such as Franz Liszt and Robert E. Lee. These are but ephemeralities. Worthier to be noted are the affection which all who knew him felt for him, the regard for the man equalling the esteem for the sculptor, and above all the love of the many poor whom he so often and so generously aided.

Moses Ezekiel was not a man ever to rest upon past laurels. Almost to the day of his death he continued to put forth new creations. The list of his works would almost suffice to form a small catalogue, the more so as he was always in demand as a portrait maker. His principal works are: Industry; Cain, or the Offering Rejected; the Sailor Boy; Israel; Adam and Eve; Monument to Massarani, in the Jewish cemetery at Rome; Fountain of Neptune, Nettuno, Italy; Statue of Mrs. Andrew D. White, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.; Hauserek Monument, Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati; Christ in the Tomb, in the Chapel of La Charité, Rue Jean Goujon, Paris; David; Beethoven; Portia; Eve, now in the palace Sans Souci, near Berlin; Queen Esther; Anthony J. Drexel, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia; Homer Group; Thomas Jefferson, Louisville, Ky.; Confederate Monument, Arlington Cemetery, Washington, D. C.; Washington; Liszt; Queen Margarita of Italy; Grand Duke of Saxe-Meiningen; Cardinal Hohenlohe; Religious Liberty, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia; Virginia Mourning her Dead, Lexington, Va.; Lord Sherbrooke, St. Margaret's, Westminster, London; Stonewall Jackson, State House, Charleston, W. Va.; Robert E. Lee Monument, Piedmont, Va.; The Prisoner's Wife (painting); Grace Darling, Cincinnati Art Museum; Mercury, owned by Mrs. Hannah E. Workam of Cincinnati; Phidias, Raphael, Durer, Michelangelo, Titian, Murillo, Da Vinci, Corregio, Van Dyke, and Canova, in the Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington, D. C.; Thomas Crawford; bronze bust of H. C. Ezekiel; bas-reliefs of Pan and Amor, for Mrs. Charles Fleischmann of Cincinnati; torso of Judith, for Mrs. Bellamy Storer; bust of Christ, for J. N. McKay of Baltimore; bronze bust of General Hotchkins in the Navy Yard at Washington; Lee a

Boy, for the village of Westmoreland, Va. ; monument to Jesse Seligman, at the Jewish Orphan Asylum, New York ; statue of Columbus, Columbus Memorial Building, Chicago, Ill. ; heroic bronze monument of Thomas Jefferson, at Louisville ; The Outlook, for the Confederate Cemetery at Johnson's Island, Ohio ; Napoleon ; and Edgar Allan Poe, his last work.