



By E. Milton Altfeld

FEW Americans—or Jews for that matter—realize that in the person of Louis Rosenthal of Baltimore, is represented the most brilliant miniature sculptor the world has ever known. "The most supreme master this world has ever produced in his particular field," is the encomium accorded him by Sir Alyn Williams, president of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters and Sculptors of England. Sir Alyn is one of the first internationally known artists to appreciate the grandeur and immensity of the artistry of the American Jew. Sensing the pinnacle of fame that some day Mr. Rosenthal would attain, Sir Alyn, but a decade ago, proposed membership in the Royal Society. This was long before Baltimore realized that a genius lived in their midst. Since Rosenthal's election to this famous society, members of Europe and Asia have requested him to exhibit their respective countries. This fact is unknown to Rosenthal, his native city by reason of his modesty—Mussolini sent a message asking that

and poet, Michelangelo. Without intending to cast the slightest disparagement upon the celebrated work of the Italian goldsmith, who created marvelously chased productions, modern technicians are agreed that these creations cannot be compared in execution, harmony and design to the incomparable sculpture of Rosenthal. His work is so unusual in that he manages to produce a composition in a space of a scant five-eighths of an inch to perhaps two or three inches and includes therein a dozen or more fascinating characters. And in placing them in these Lilliputian limits, he does not thereby sacrifice a jot of style or breadth of plastic concept. Revealed to the scrutinizing eye of the critic is a rare coloring and an unbelievably faithful adherence to anatomical lines.

Rosenthal, unlike other sculptors, who work in moist clay, uses black wax for his building material. His only tool is an ordinary pearl-handled knife. After modeling his miniature figures comes the delicate and secret work of casting it into bronze, silver or gold. Considerable ink has been wasted by critics and artists in the discussion of the methods used by Rosenthal in his method of casing. How he is able to obtain a perfect smoothness and complete conception has up to now perplexed them. And when one considers the diminutiveness of the figurines and the stories they managed to portray one is carried

away by the beauty of it all. Only Rosenthal, himself, knows the answer and this esoteric knowledge is not to be told the world except through his work.

The Hebraic Spirit

Observing recently with enraptured sense, some of the magnificent pieces of bronze that Louis Rosenthal has given to the world, I could not help but be profoundly and sensitively impressed with the Jewish spirit of the artist. The soul of a thinking and feeling Jew is behind the man's work. The racial strain of the artist threads in and out of his superb work. A composition appears based upon a Jewish tradition and a moral to all who care to stop long enough to look. Now and then the artist escapes the Jewish bounds. There appears an enchanting figure dramatically and symbolically depicting an event in Greek and Roman mythology; a composition depicting sharply the struggles and efforts of a sweating humanity through the ages; a surrender to the joys of woodland, the scurrying and hurrying of dancing elves, gnomes, sprites and dryads. Again, the artist with his inspired brain conceives a figure showing the grotesque antics of some babbling prince, who struts ridiculously before a cowering and enslaved populace. Comes a devastating figure displaying a historic movement in contemporary period. But standing out in bold relief against these sensuous portrayals of history and legend are those figures with a true Hebraic note. Not looking for them one is suddenly caught up and carried off to an enchanted realm. The artistic wizardry with its throbbing beauty and rhythmic appeal stir the senses as the moral that is unfolded stirs the reason.

Let me here illustrate:

Recently, Mr. Rosenthal created a composition depicting Joseph dancing while Potiphar's wife lies gracefully near in a bewitching pose. Looking

down at Joseph are the outlines of Ammon and other Egyptian gods. Potiphar's wife coquettishly touches gently the arm and leg of Joseph, who sensing the physical danger to himself, glances upward. He sees in the offing the "face of his father." The Jew in Joseph takes alarm and the patriarchal countenance of Jacob reminds him that he must not succumb to the whirling pagan sensualism of contamination. Here is, peradventure, to my mind, the complete story of assimilation. Joseph, having long lived in the land of Pharaoh, looks, of course, like a native Egyptian. His dress, bearing and speech completely envelop his personality. But inwardly, there is that island within, of which Ludwig Lewisohn speaks, and it moves him sufficiently to remember that his soul and body must remain pure and that he is not to prove faithless to the teachings of his fathers.

Oh, what a lesson to the Jews of this swift moving twentieth century in that diminutive piece of bronze! The rabbis and elders of Israel who are stirred by reason of the lassitude and indifference of the younger generation to the ethics and traditions of their fathers would do well to visit the studio of this Baltimore artist, who, in the words of a famous European critic, has already reached, despite his comparatively early life, the ne plus ultra rung.

It is plainly discernible that Louis Rosenthal must have had in his younger days a thorough grounding in Talmudic lore. His work breathes the eternal wisdom and philosophy of that book. Possessing such a well of inspiration and coupling it with a God-given artistry, it is not altogether difficult to understand the Hebraic flavor of his encompassing themes.

I don't know how many people living in the different cities of these United States where this column appears happen to own a piece of Rosenthal's work. If they are fortunate enough to enjoy such a rare posses-

June 28, 1929

sion, fifteen or twenty-five years hence, they bid fair to be as priceless as the work of Cellini, Rembrandt and other immortals. Their children and children's children will glance envious eyes in the direction of their discriminating ancestry and pronounce a blessing upon their souls for their business sagacity and esthetic discernment. One does not have to possess the gift of prophecy to realize that Louis Rosenthal's work will live in the hearts of men long after governments have crumbled and memories of pseudo artists, warriors and statesmen have vanished. It can be said of him, as was once said of Michelangelo, "that he did not write his name in sand."