

On a certain extent the American public measures the merit of a sculptor by the number of public statues in parks and public ways to which he can point as evidence of his ability. They may be ever so bad—as the majority of them are—and yet the mere fact that by hook or by crook they have been accepted and have got a place in bronze where the passers-by may see appears to be proof sufficient to most people that the sculptor is great. "He designed a statue now in Central Park" seems to be the final blow in every argument.

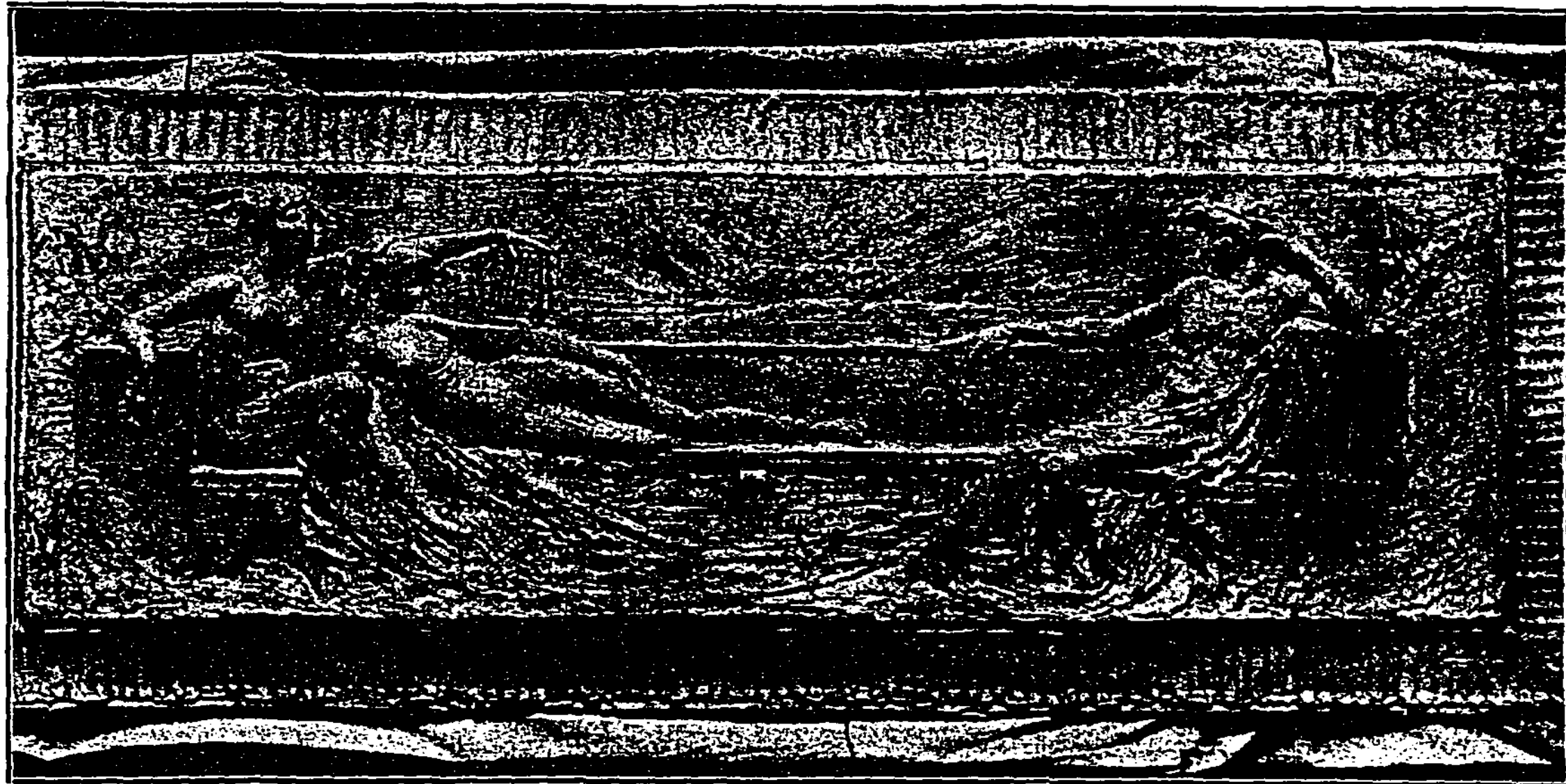
There are great sculptors who do fine things that are not calculated to ornament public parks and streets, and I might go further, and say that, of their very nature, the best things in sculptural art are not good to adorn a public way. Delicate, poetic fancies in stone, all the rare decorative sculptural compositions, and, indeed, everything that does not pertain to some great public event, looks best indoors. Not even the sanctuaries of public institutions are reserved enough for the delicacy of some sculptural compositions, and for these only the home will do—the private mansion of the family. An instance of this is the work of Bessie Potter, which is of the first order of merit, and yet of such a nature as to be in place only in the home. It is too delicate to relate to the private phases and emotions of the home life to appear beautiful anywhere outside the home.

Still another instance of this is the decorative work of Karl Bitter, a man whose ideas of what constitutes art are most distinguished. Herbert Adams is another, and yet both of these men have very little to point to in a public way—very little.

The subject of this sketch is one of these, an American, who with less public recognition has done more quiet artistic work than many another. He is Frank Edwin Elwell, and he has what Prof. Davidson would describe as "the ability to do quiet, effective labor without thought of applause." He is a sculptor-poet, just as much as Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a painter-poet, and his most careless compositions challenge the heart with a fine poetic word. They are fair and delicate, lightened with spirit and grace, and in every way beautiful as things to look at and to think about. They are done not primarily for money, not with an energy which is hankering after fame, but slowly and with a keen personal satisfaction in the doing.

Mr. Elwell has money, so that it is not for that he works. He has recognition from the most desired sources, so that it is not that which he craves overmuch. He has a fine studio, equipped with every convenience for perfect work, and yet he does not stand idle. Some men, with these things to clog the heart and imagination, would float around and do nothing at all, but Elwell is molded of finer stuff. His mind runs on the subject of the infinite, on what constitutes the meaning of life and wherefore it is beautiful, and, brooding so on these things, he labors to express himself. The result is a number of poetic sculptural compositions which are beautiful, in the sense that a great poem is beautiful, or a painting or an outdoor reality. In short, Mr. Elwell is a poet.

One day I entered his studio and found him busily tinkering away at some metal thing, with a forge, which is a part of the equipment of the studio, in full blast. There were a number of partially completed objects in the room, splendid sculptural compositions. One was a large work of clay, representing the spirit waking into life out of death, and another was a beautiful representation of an Egyptian goddess. Neither was completed, and one naturally supposed that he was about the



"SONG," BY F. EDWIN ELWELL.
Bas-Relief in the House of George Alfred Townsend.

labor of finishing them up. I suggested as much, but the question went without answer. Instead, he came forward, holding between his thumb and finger a most exquisitely wrought representation of a flower in metal. "See what I have been about to-day," he said.

"I never knew that you worked in metals," I said. "What is it?"

"A lotus, of course. I like to do it for a change."

"Then you have been neglecting these things"—waving toward the works in clay.

"Not at all; thinking about them and filling in the time for my hands."

"It's genius," I said.

"It's rest," he answered.

Such metal-wrought objects as he can conjure up at his modest forge are art objects of the first order of merit, which the great dealers are only too anxious to secure. The trick of forging, shaping, and coloring them is at his fingers' ends, and he loves to do it. They are decorative pieces which sell for encouraging prices, but with him it is a pleasurable diversion, and it is only when tired of other things that the sculptor turns smith, and the forge fire blazes anew.

If his "iron flowers" are poetic compositions, his sculptural works are inspirations. Last year (1897) his "Egypt Awakening" was the subject of enthusiastic comment among the sculptors, for he had

sent it to the sculpture exhibition, where it had been given the place of honor. The sculptor Kelly was one of those who first brought it to my ears.

"Have you seen Elwell's 'Egypt'?" he said.

"No."

"A most poetic thing. Do you know Elwell?"

"Only by reputation."

"If you want pleasure, call and get to see what his studio shows."

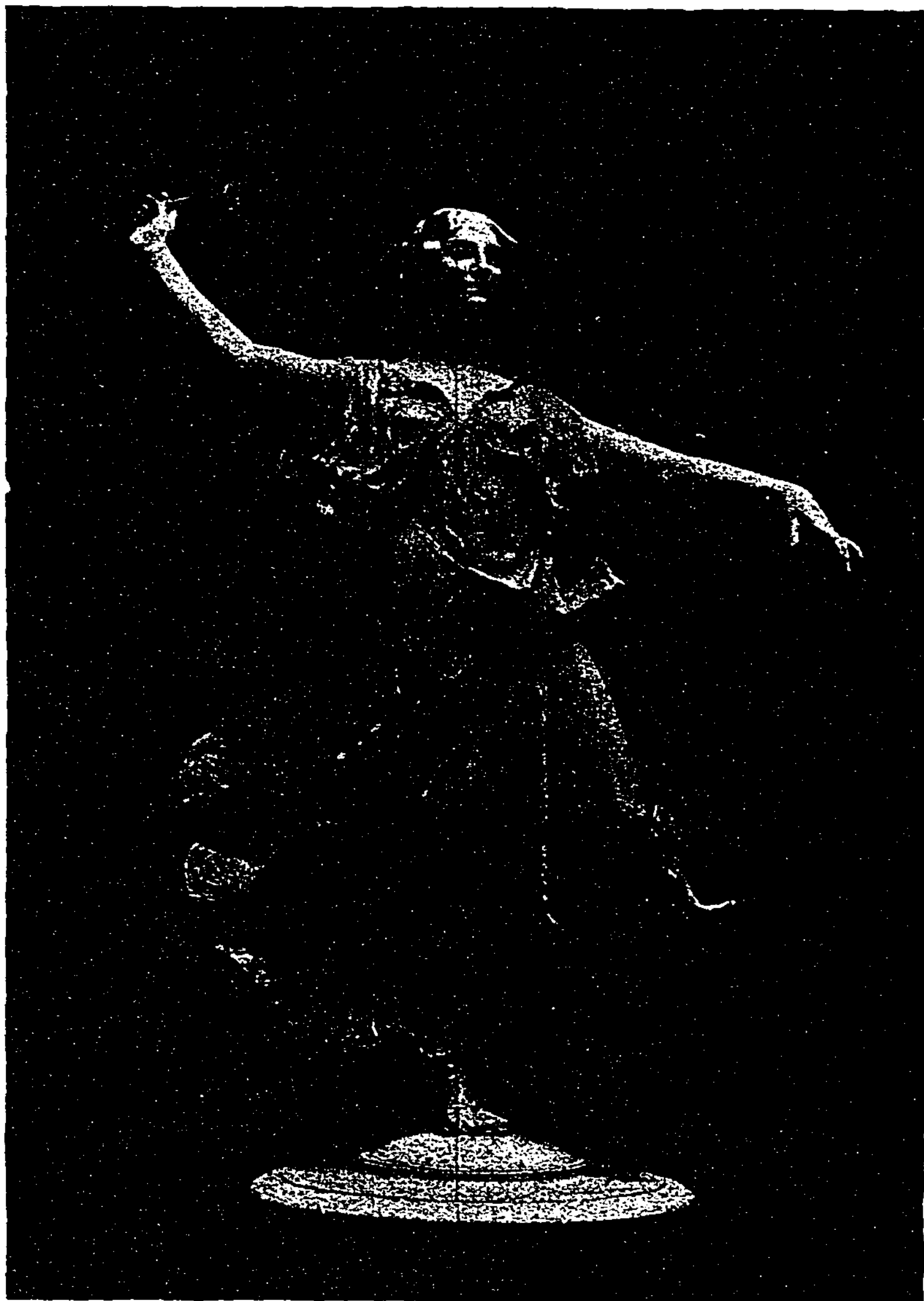
"With many others, I went to see the 'Egypt,' which is a symbolical work of rare beauty. It will be noticed that below the knees the legs are not formed, but are in a solid block, as if dead. They represent Egyptian art—the dead past. From the knees to the waist is symbolized the merging of Egyptian to Grecian art, showing beauty of form. As the artist proceeds toward the head, he adopts a modern realism under which Egypt is beginning to feel the thrill of a new life. This strengthening and awakening is prophesied by the eyes of the goddess, which look as though but newly opened to the light. What the reawakened Egypt will do is also shown. She offers the lotus flower to the world, commanding sincerity and truth from all who take it."

This work is intimately bound up with Elwell's ideas of art; his past system of art education, and what he desires to do

in the future. When he was completing his art education years ago he naturally looked about for a plan or an object, and to catch his drift. He realized that his work must stand for something, must be beautiful in a way that would make the world yearn more for beauty as time rolls on. Seeing that at that time some of the American artists had drifted toward the Renaissance and those showy forms which mean little, he saw the necessity of returning again to simple, strong ideas. He looked up the sources from which great art has sprung, and found that in the almost forgotten Egyptian works rested the spirit of real beauty and sincerity. He found himself believing that Egyptian art is of a grand, spiritual character, and in it he found room for his poetic labors. He would restore Egyptian art. He would revive the simplicity, the spiritual symbolism, the beauty. And he has done so.

This particular statue is the result of five attempts to model the same thing. The work covered a period of almost as many years. What seemed so simple to accomplish was really most subtle and difficult—to reach in any high degree the spiritual and intellectual character of the Egyptian work. Mr. Elwell made his statue in Paris, and it was exhibited in the Salon of 1896 and was favorably placed. It was then bought by a distinguished Frenchman, M. Gabriel Goupillat, who has now the statue in his beautiful home in the Avenue d'Jena. A plaster copy of this statue was exhibited at the Art Club, in Philadelphia, where it won the gold medal, and it was then sent to the Sculpture Society exhibition of New York, where it received such unqualified approval.

This is but one of Mr. Elwell's many compositions, however. He has done a bronze called "The Orchid," which for flowerlike suggestion is unrivaled in the history of sculpture. It is the figure of a slip of a maiden, dressed in a flowing tunic, dancing. The poise is a suggestion of almost fairy motion. There is a wavelike whirl to the hem which suggests the graceful cup of an inverted flower. The arms outstretched give one the sense of unspeakably beautiful branches, and in one hand, as well as in the folds of the hair, are caught metal flowers, the art of Mr. Elwell as a metalworker. It is wholly poetic, a mere thing of beauty, which has



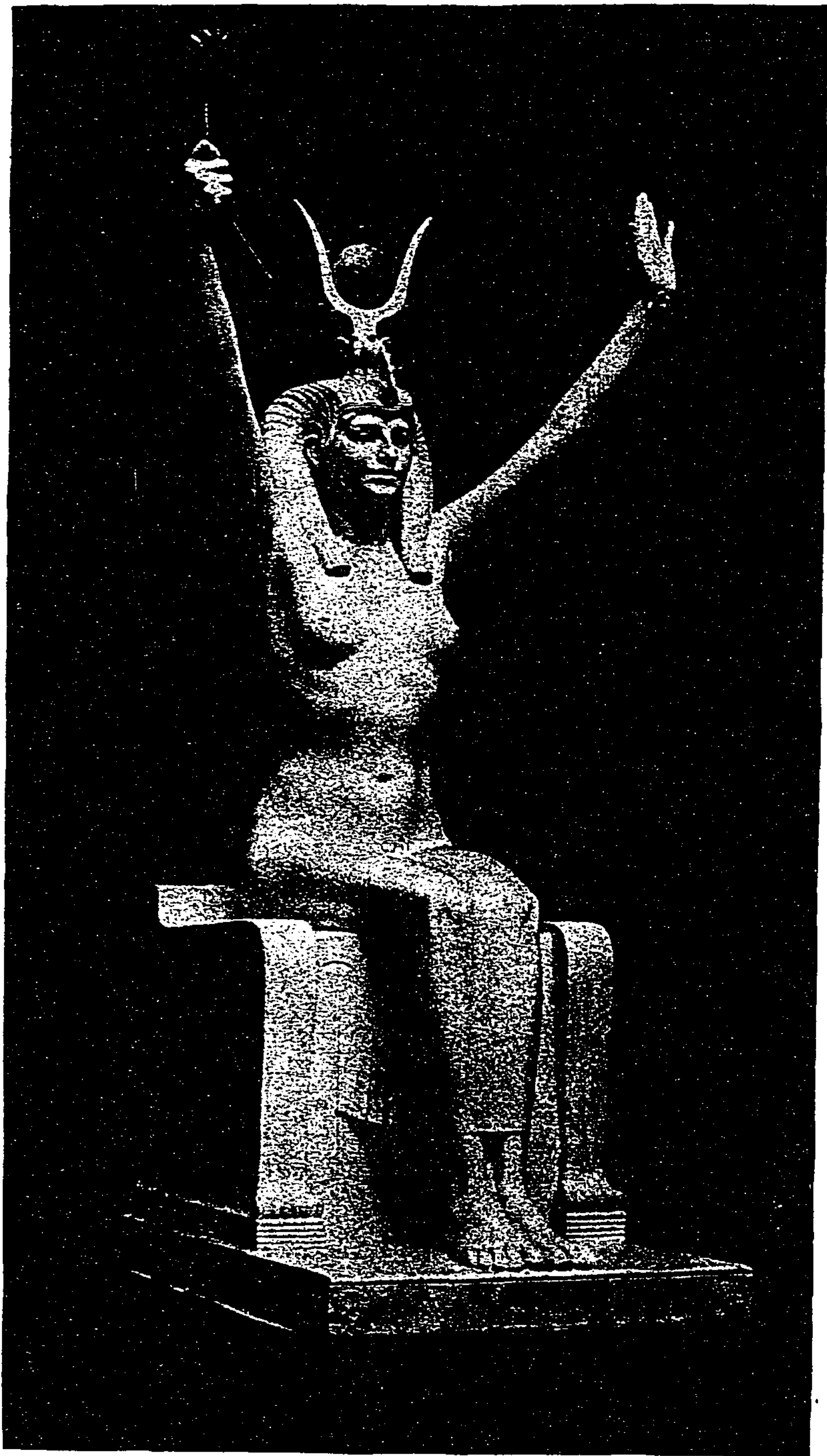
"THE ORCHID," BY F. EDWIN ELWELL.



"When Sleep Comes Down"



Nathan Hale



"EGYPT AWAKENING," BY F. EDWIN ELWELL.

right to eternal preservation as a permanent contribution to the joy of life.

One other of Mr. Elwell's delightful works is his "Nathan Hale," a small bronze which is now owned by some New Yorker. It is interesting to consider it, because MacMonnies has done the same subject, and the statue now graces City Hall Park. The first difference is favorable to Elwell, because his Hale is historically garbed—dressed exactly as Hale was—while the MacMonnies is not. This dress of the young patriot lends to the beauty of his fine defiance. MacMonnies's Hale has been accused of too much elation for the condition confronting him, but no such charge could be made against this work of Elwell's. It is a calm defiance—no elation, no enthusiasm, but neither any quavering. Strong, lithe, still, the young pa-

triot gazes out and seems to wait the inevitable with the real spirit of the hero shining through on every side.

Of all his work, none has evoked more admiration than his statue of Dickens's "Little Nell" which was once exhibited at the Art Club, Philadelphia, and bought by the Fairmount Park Association of that City. This also is a slip of a girl, simply clad, with a face which is innocence and sweetness personified. When the statue was in preparation, I am told, there came a period when it seemed almost impossible for the artist to continue his work. He had been unable to find a face from which to draw his inspiration—one that should convey the tenderness, patience, and love of the famous original. The sculptor calmly put the thing aside as a subject which might wait forever, if no inspiration offered, and went about other affairs. It was all solved for him by a concert, however, where in the face of one of the child singers he found the exact something—the all to be desired. He gazed steadily at the little girl, and then made his way quickly back to the studio, where the neglected work was hauled into light and rapidly completed.

"Did the child ever see it?" I once asked him.

"No; I invited the father," he answered, "and he was planning to come the Monday after it was done, but he died just the Saturday before."

"What luck," I said.

"Yes, that's the way. I have had plenty of things like that happen. The first model of 'Egypt Awakening,' which I had worked on for years, fell down just when I had completed it and went all to smash."

"What did you do," I ventured.

"Made it over."

The real drama of this incident is told better by those who know the artist better. When it fell, the man who had been assisting him for years broke down almost to the verge of tears as he beheld the many fragments. It merely brought the sculptor out of his introspective mood long enough to say, "There! Don't feel bad, John. Now we shall have a good statue."

This is but one instance out of many. The subtle genius once went to Harrisburg at the request of a committee of Generals who were selecting an artist to model a

statue of Gen. Hancock for the Gettysburg field. They had a test set of questions, beginning with "What do you know about an equestrian statue?" in answering which almost all the young artists had taken the opportunity to express their views on the subject. When the direct question was put to Elwell, he simply replied, "Absolutely nothing, Sirs."

The humor of the thing and his subsequent remarks led to his receiving the prize, and the work of the artist proved to be one of the most acceptable statues ever modeled in America.

The answer is characteristic of the man, however, for he has a fine artistic preference for work which expresses his own ideals rather than the set plans of some other individual. Everything remarkable he has done so far is exactly on this line—an original, unorthodox composition. His marble statue of "Intellect Dominating Brute Force," which is now in the gallery of the modern masters in the Art Institute in Chicago, is one of the best things of this order. It was one of the few statues that were placed in the rotunda of the Palace of Fine Arts at the Chicago Exhibition.

Similarly, his Aqua Viva, which is now the property of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in Central Park; his "When Sleep Comes Down," "The Death of Strength," "Dawn," "Strength and Love," and the decorative panel entitled "Song," now in the home of George Alfred Townsend, are of this entirely free, poetic order. They relate to no public affair, any more than Keats's "Endymion" relates to business.

For all his idealistic tendencies Mr. Elwell owes much to the atmosphere in which he was raised. He was born at Concord, Mass., in June, 1858, at a time when that village was the centre of intellectual America. His youthful days were spent with a grandfather, who was the friend of Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, and Channing, and it was the atmosphere created by these great minds which largely molded the youth. He came in contact with the best thoughts, and soon acquired a taste for the noblest and highest in art and life. To-day he cherishes tenderly the memory of Louisa M. Alcott, one of that excellent company, who became his friend long before he knew the meaning of the word, and remained so until her death. She it was who took the place of a mother, his own being taken from him when he was only four years old, and many traits of his character can be traced to the influence of this noble, helpful woman. Miss May Alcott presided over a little art class in

Concord, and young Elwell, being invited to join, learned from this talented teacher and artist the comprehensive view for which an artist should strive. This instruction was followed by work in the studio of Daniel C. French, the sculptor, who was then a Concord neighbor, and to these two teachers is due the grounding in art principles on which he built later on.

For five years or more Mr. Elwell tried to make his life entirely one of business, but, finding the attempt useless, began in earnest the life of an art student. He decided on Paris. The Hon. Levi P. Morton secured him admission to the Ecole des Beaux Arts, where he became a popular student, then Vice President of his class, and finally a private pupil of Jean Alexander Falguiere, the great sculptor, who liked him for his originality. During his student life he exhibited, sold some, began to get a reputation, fixed upon his ideal, and came home. To-day he is nearer than ever to true greatness. His art is better, richer, and more undefiled; his poetic aspirations and his individual technique are clearer. He is doing great things in an unobtrusive way, and American art is much the richer for him, whether the billboards announce it or not.

THEODORE DREISER.



"THE DEATH OF STRENGTH," BY F. EDWIN ELWELL.



The Hon. Simeon B. Chittenden, Founder of the Library at Yale University.