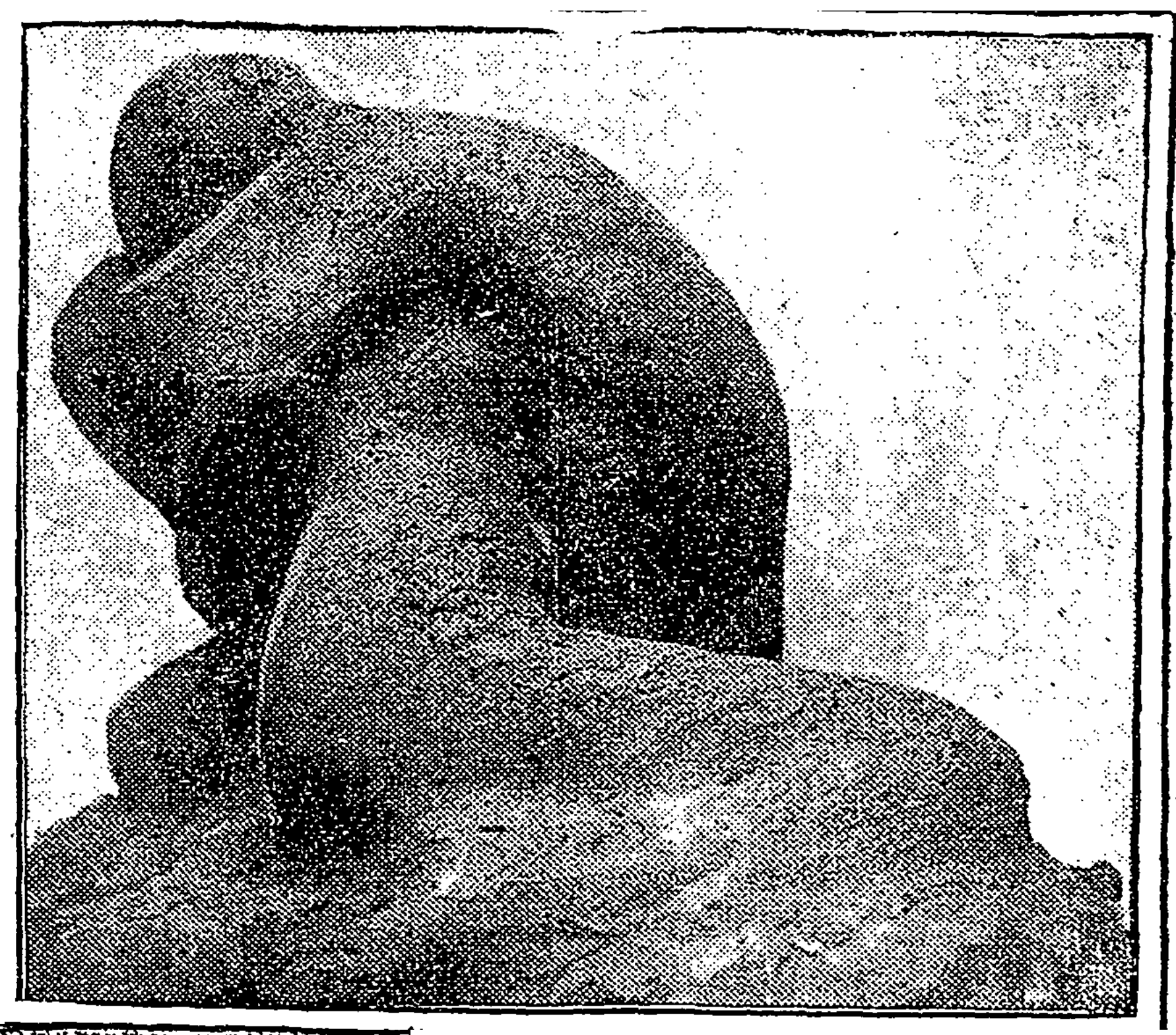


EAST SIDE MESSENGER BOY WINS FAME AS A SCULPTOR

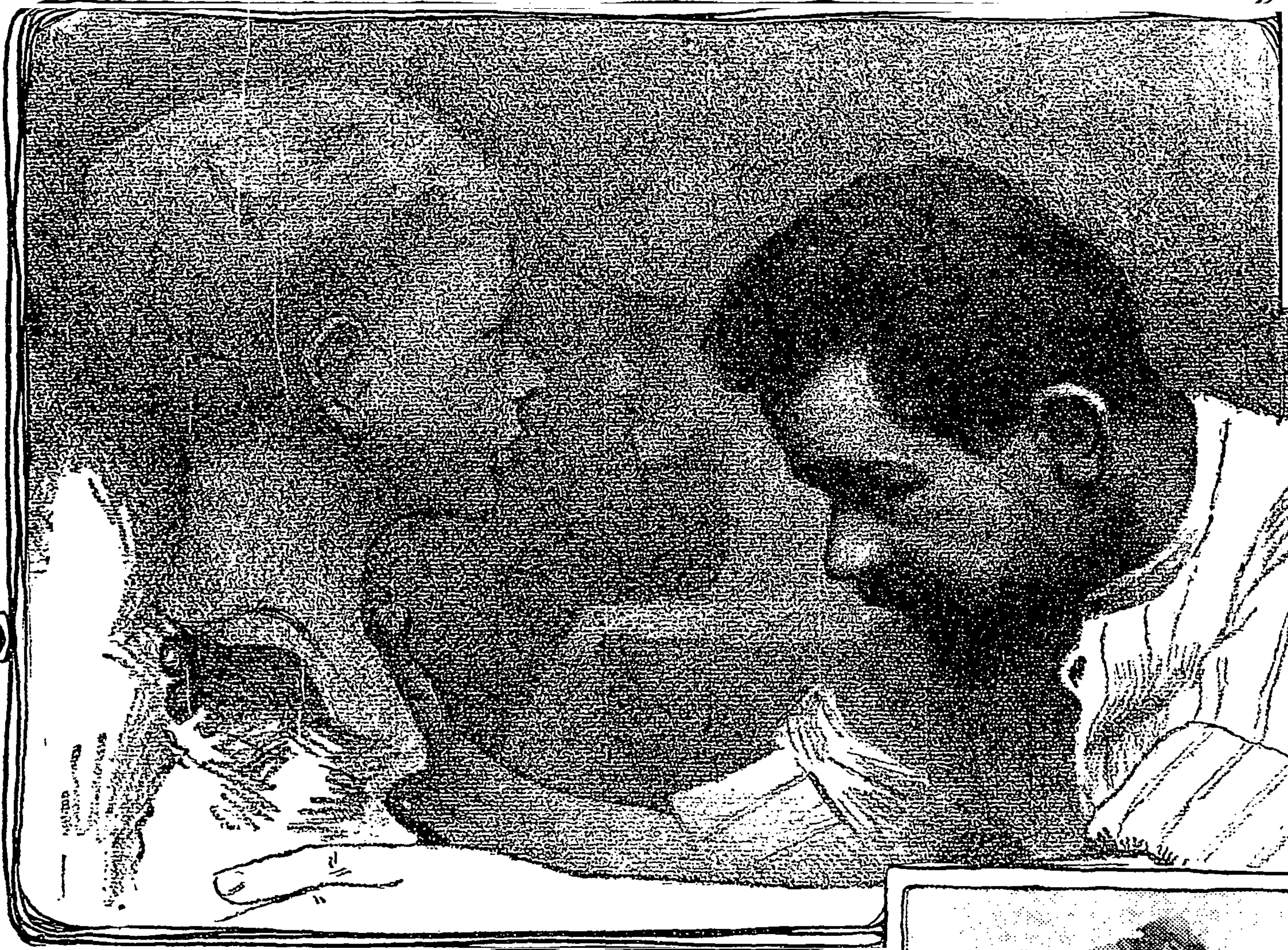
Undismayed by Poverty Joseph Davidson Fitted Himself for a Notable Career in Art--Unusual Success Here and Abroad.



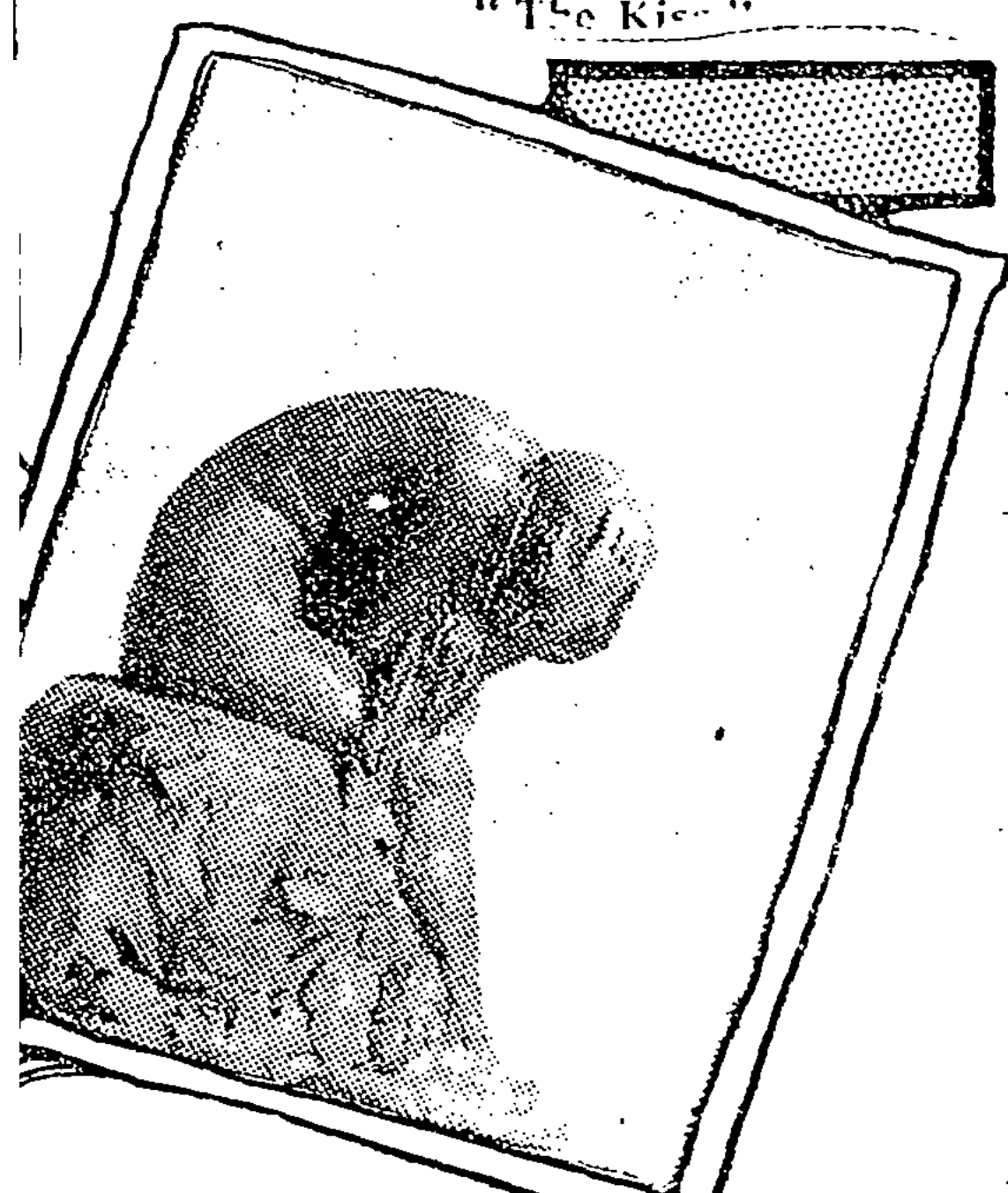
Portrait Bust of Dr. A. Jacobi.



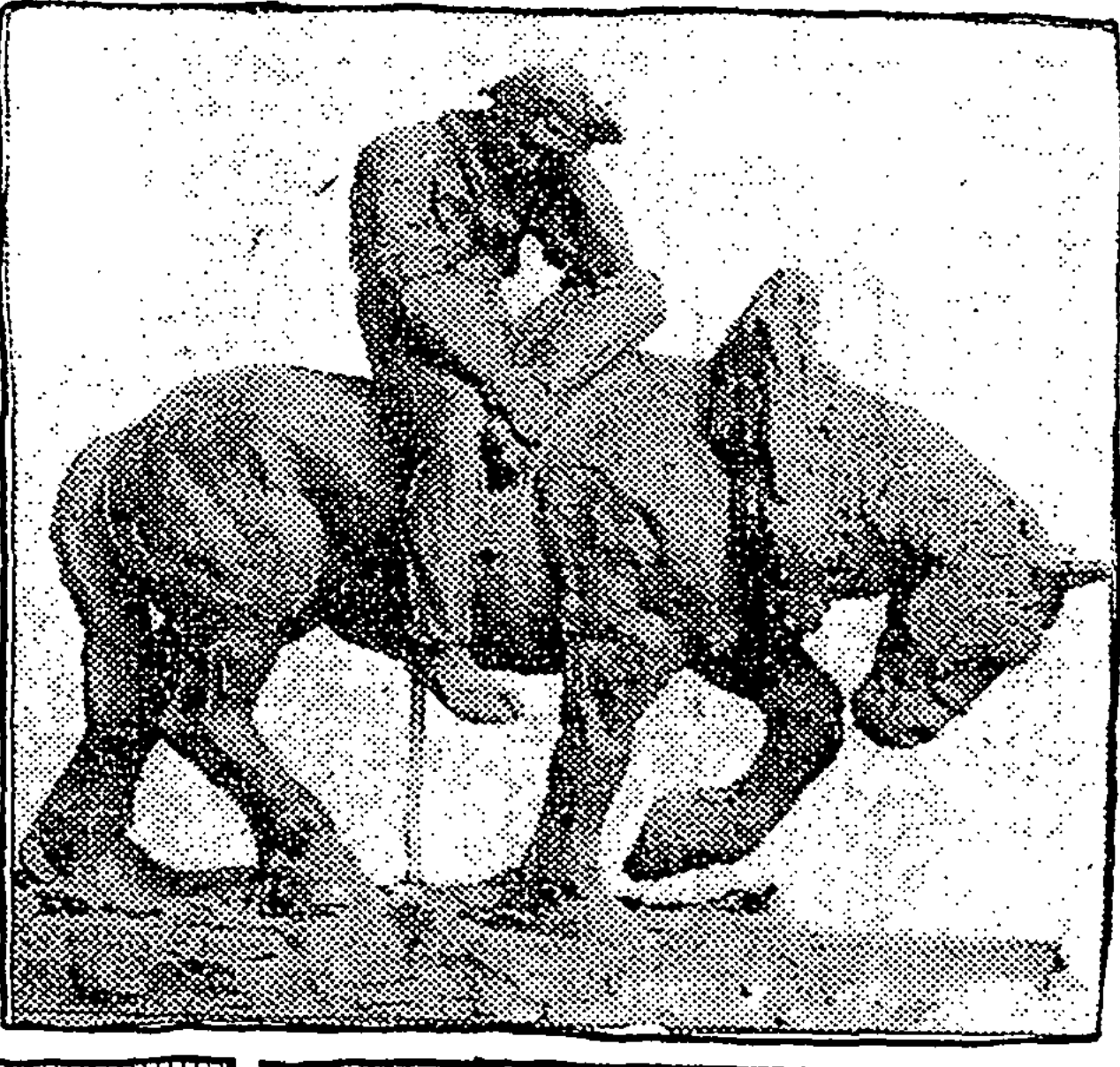
"The Kiss"



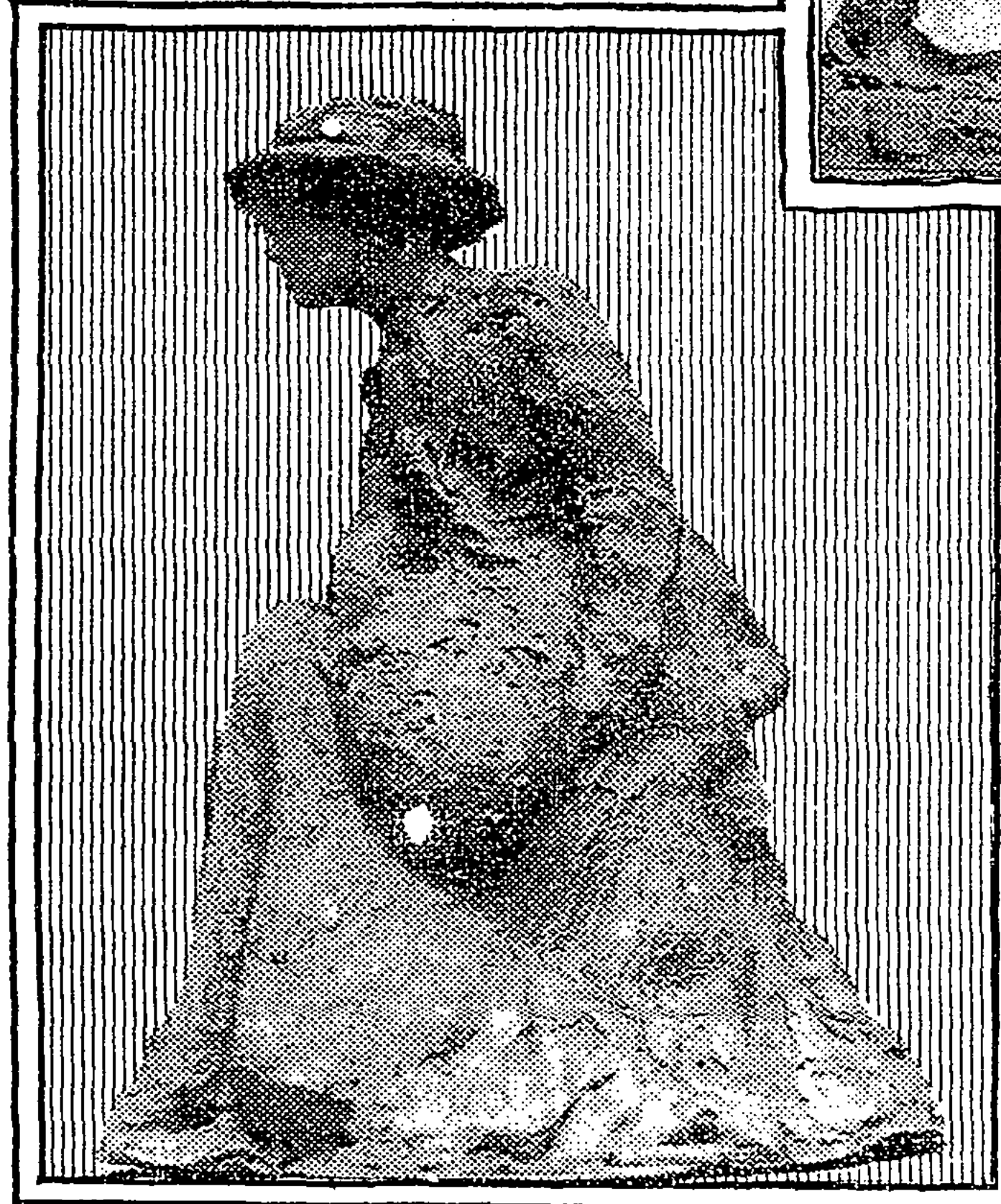
Joseph Davidson, Sculptor, at Work.



"Grief"



"The End of the Day"



Portrait.

WORK of art is an expression of an emotion.

This is the creed of the young sculptor Jo Davidson (the professor to Joseph, please) the boy who was brought up on New York's east side and is called now by a prominent English critic "the greatest of the younger sculptors."

Mr. Davidson has a life-story of the sort that is held up to point a moral to aspiring youth—except that those persons who are fond of pointing morals do not usually want aspiring youth to turn out quite so revolutionary as this young man proclaims himself to be both in his work and in his theories. Jo Davidson breaks with the past, calmly but definitely.

"Retrospection in art," he says, "is folly." He has had little teaching and no master, except such tutors as he met during a three years' course in the Art Students' League. He works according to Davidson and he declares "The only use of Old Masters is to teach us what to avoid."

For any artist to attain eminence at the age of twenty-six, which is all the years Mr. Davidson can muster even now when he has been prominently before the public for several years, is astonishing. It is much more astonishing when an artist has had to work his own way absolutely, to fight against poverty to earn his daily bread while he studied his art. Mr. Davidson's career goes to show that there are no mute inglorious Miltons. If a man is a real Milton he will be heard.

Born in Russia in 1884, young Jo was brought to this country when he was seven years old. His family were orthodox Jews and on his father's side he comes of a line of rabbis. They were comfortable in Russia when one of the great persecutions broke out and the family packed their belongings and came to seek freedom across the water, along with so many thousands of their co-religionists.

What befell them in this country is a common enough story. They had the learning of the Russian Jew, his idealism, his unbending perseverance, and that was all their capital. That does not go very far in this part of the world and they were poor, so poor that young Jo had to go to work at the earliest moment.

To work he went, therefore, and he tried many ways of earning money. For a time he was a messenger boy. He worked, in short, like any other boy in similar circumstances, always with the difference that he spent his leisure time in sketching people and things, sketching them in a few lines that made his friends stop and wonder.

The sketching habit dated from a long illness when he was twelve years old. For a long time he lay at the point of death and during the dreary convalescence that followed he amused himself by sketching his nurse, the other patients in the hospital, and pictures he saw in his brain. He found it easy and he kept it up when he had gone out again into a world of hard work.

One day a man of some prominence saw his sketches and asked him why he did not become an artist.

"I have no money," returned the boy. "I think," said the man, "they would be glad to teach you even if you can't pay."

The idea had been germinating in the back of Jo's brain for some time. Now it sprang up in a sturdy fashion. He began to earn a little money by doing burnt-wood work and similar creations of heart-wood. It all came easy—easier and easier.

One day Davidson presented himself at the Art Students' League. He had decided to become a painter, money or no money. The plan was to work at earning his living during the day and to spend the evenings in the night classes. It was all quite clear in his mind.

Then an odd thing happened. He got into the modeling room. He had not thought seriously of sculpture—his sketching had been the thing, but he happened into the room where the clay lay and he put his fingers on it.

He never got into the sketching department. The touch of the clay settled his life in two minutes. There was nothing in the world for him but work with the wonderful stuff and he knew it the moment his fingers fell on it.

Then began a lot of hard work and a series of adventures, some comic and some running very close to the tragic. He was eighteen years old at this time, and for a young man, penniless, without influential friends, to choose a profession that notoriously "doesn't pay" takes a deal of courage.

Perhaps that is not a correct statement to make in the case of Jo, for after all courage did not enter into it. He had to be an artist—fate had settled that for him and he had to follow her blindly. "The call of the heart," say the Germans, "is the Voice of God." When one hears the calling loudly there is nothing conceivable but to obey. Perforce, the boy obeyed.

Lord Rosebery made a speech not long ago in which he set forth the value of poverty to genius. Wealth, he says, kills ambition. Upton Sinclair, about the same time, was setting forth his conviction that poverty stifles genius and was seeking to endow poor boys of talent.

In the first case it is possible to suspect Lord Rosebery of seeking, probably unconsciously, to make his own apology, to explain in some way the pathetic failure of his own brilliant talents to produce anything really worth while.

Mr. Sinclair, on the other hand, takes the position that is natural to those who attack the present social order.

When one comes on a story like this of Mr. Davidson neither argument seems to weigh much. You are or you aren't a genius—and if you are it will come out whatever happens.

If young Davidson had been a millionaire he would have been a sculptor just the same, and with all the money in the world it is not likely that he would have reached fame any sooner.

To take up the story of his artistic development once more, Jo Davidson studied for nearly three years at the Art Students' League, and that is all the teaching he ever got. When he was twenty he exhibited at the Architectural League's exhibition. It was a small figure, intended as a design for a fountain. He called it "Primitive Music," and it showed a boy playing on a reed.

There was a charm, an originality, about the little piece that attracted attention. It was well placed and presently, when critics came, Jo found his work compared, not to its disadvantage, with that of the principal artists who exhibited, whether he was surprised or not he is not here to say. Probably not, for he was going calmly on his chosen career, sure he was on the right path.

He arranged about this time, or shortly before, that he should earn his living during the evening, so that he could study all day. This helped him a good deal, but pretty soon he had the conviction that he must go on to Paris. The fact that he had no money did not deter him. If he had considered details of that sort he would not have been Jo Davidson.

To Paris he went, then, when he was twenty-one years old, and he landed in that gay Mecca without a cent. How he earned his way there would be a long story. There is one tale, however, so good that it should be repeated.

Mr. Davidson's mind is original in other directions than that of art. He never does anything quite as another man would do it, and he sees things in a light of his

own. It was during the Summer and he went camping in Switzerland, in his usual inopportune condition.

One afternoon he entered a hostelry of moderate pretensions and asked for the proprietor.

"I would like," said the artist, "to spend a week at your hotel."

Salmagundi and welcomes from the innkeeper.

"Put," continued the new arrival with a pleasant smile, "I have no money."

The innkeeper raised himself and glared.

"Then, of course, you can't stay."

The artist looked reproachful.

"How unreasonable you are," he said. "If I had been dishonest I could have come here and stayed a week and gone away not paying. Because I am honest and tell you I have no money before you have lost a cent you fly into a rage and deprive me of shelter."

The innkeeper stared, then laughed.

"The eye is some truth in what you say," he admitted. And after a minute he suggested:

"Suppose you paint me a picture to pay for your board?"

"I should be charmed," said the artist, truthfully, and he received directions to paint the front porch of the hotel with the Jungfrau rising in the distance.

The next morning he took his paraphernalia and sought first the front porch and then the innkeeper.

"But one cannot see the Jungfrau from this hotel," he said.

The innkeeper glared again. Really, it was too much.

"Are you an impostor?" he asked, sternly. "Are you not an artist but a mere photographer?"

In haste, with a vision of his vanishing week's board, the artist assured the innkeeper that he was not of the realistic school and painted a beautiful picture, reassured by the knowledge that the two miles the guests would have to walk before they got that view of the Jungfrau would really be beneficial to their health.

Doubtless Mr. Davidson turned many a penny by sketching for innkeepers of an artistic turn of mind. In a restaurant in this city not long ago he began to sketch on the back of a menu card. One of the company asked him what he was doing, and he said, laughingly, that he was so used to sketching for his meals he mechanically took out a pencil whenever he went into a restaurant.

After two or three years of this work

ing quite alone, Mr. Davidson "arrived." He arrived first in the Salon, where his contribution was well placed and attracted much attention. Then he came over here and "arrived" at an exhibition which brought a flood of praise.

One prominent critic distinguished him from other sculptors "in that he is not a stonecutter." Everybody talked about the "virility," the "plasticity" of his work, and his power of imparting the sense of motion to the clay. Then there was what they called his flesh quality, and this is spoken of by almost all the critics as remarkable. He manages to transfer to the clay the sense of the softness of flesh.

Remarkable among his sculptures are his portraits. These he does as rapidly as possible. To take a long time over a portrait is, he thinks, to spoil it, since the impression of the personality varies from day to day. On this point he has several dictums that are striking, like all the clauses of his artistic creed.

"A portrait," he says, "is nothing but the artist's interpretation of a personality."

But then, is he not in this following the example of great artists? Have they not all been revolutionists, because they get the essence of things and cannot be bothered with the traditions that have grown up around the heart of the matter?

Mr. Davidson has already a long list of achievements. He has done a bust of Tchaikovsky; he has done a bust of the great Tolstoy; the brother of the Wagner for the Association of Musical Societies of Paris. Once more he has made a portrait of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney's daughter and of Miss May Morris, daughter of Mr. William Morris.

His more than life-size figure in the Salon, La Turie, created a vast amount of discussion. He had five sculptures in the Salon this year.

There is one point that might be brought out in Mr. Davidson's ancestry, for it has a certain interest for those who care to study the principles of heredity. The English papers spoke of the advantage of "mixed blood" in Mr. Davidson's case, and this is a rather dark saying, for there has been no mixture of blood in the Davidson family. They are straight Russian Jews. There might be, they claim, that a mixture of environment had helped him, but then he was brought over here at the age of seven, before the artistic ideals of Russia could have entered his young brain.

There is, however, one point. His grandfather was a very religious man, and the orthodox Jews are not permitted to "make any graven image or the likeness of anything." He could not, therefore, be an artist without violating the law he loved, but he did venture to give some slight expression to his artistic longings.

He illuminated the prayers of the Hebrew faith, and cut out of paper designs that he pasted around the printed letters. One such work gives the prayer that Jews say before death, and all around is a border of strange animals taken from Biblical lore, very quaintly and curiously done.

After a while he gave up even this attempt to "grave an image," but Mrs. Davidson's family have still the prayer, with its animal border, and they speak of it, sometimes, whether it is not the spirit of the grandfather and his ingratitude desire which work in the boy who has so early won such notable success.