EMMA LAZARUS

THE POEMS OF EMMA LAZARUS

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(Written for "The Century Magazine")

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Born July 22, 1849; Died November 19, 1887.

One hesitates to lift the veil and throw the light upon a life so hidden and a personality so withdrawn as that of Emma Lazarus; but while her memory is fresh, and the echo of her songs still lingers in these pages, we feel it a duty to call up her presence once more, and to note the traits that made it remarkable and worthy to shine out clearly before the world. Of dramatic episode or climax in her life there is none; outwardly all was placid and serene, like an untroubled stream whose depths alone hold the strong, quick tide. The story of her life is the story of a mind, of a spirit, ever seeking, ever striving, and pressing onward and upward to new truth and light. Her works are the mirror of this progress. In reviewing them, the first point that strikes us is the precocity, or rather the spontaneity, of her poetic gift. She was a born singer; poetry was her natural language, and to write was less effort than to speak, for she was a shy, sensitive child, with strange reserves and reticences, not easily putting herself "en rapport" with those around her. Books were her world from her earliest years; in them she literally lost and found herself. She was eleven years old when the War of Succession broke out, which inspired her first lyric outbursts. Her poems and translations written between the ages of fourteen and seventeen were collected, and constituted her first published volume. Crude and

immature as these productions naturally were, and utterly condemned by the writer's later judgment, they are, nevertheless, highly interesting and characteristic, giving, as they do, the keynote of much that afterwards unfolded itself in her life. One cannot fail to be rather painfully impressed by the profound melancholy pervading the book. The opening poem is "In Memoriam,"—on the death of a school friend and companion; and the two following poems also have death for theme. "On a Lock of my Mother's Hair" gives us reflections on growing old. These are the four poems written at the age of fourteen. There is not a wholly glad and joyous strain in the volume, and we might smile at the recurrence of broken vows, broken hearts, and broken lives in the experience of this maiden just entered upon her teens, were it not that the innocent child herself is in such deadly earnest. The two long narrative poems, "Bertha" and "Elfrida," are tragic in the extreme. Both are dashed off apparently at white heat: "Elfrida," over fifteen hundred lines of blank verse, in two weeks; "Bertha," in three and a half. We have said that Emma Lazarus was a born singer, but she did not sing, like a bird, for joy of being alive; and of being young, alas! there is no hint in these youthful effusions, except inasmuch as this unrelieved gloom, this ignorance of "values," so to speak, is a sign of youth, common especially among gifted persons of acute and premature sensibilities, whose imagination, not yet focused by reality, overreached the mark. With Emma Lazarus, however, this sombre streak has a deeper root; something of birth and temperament is in it—the stamp and heritage of a race born to suffer. But dominant and fundamental though it was, Hebraism was only latent thus far. It was classic and romantic art that first attracted and inspired her. She pictures Aphrodite the beautiful, arising from the waves, and

the beautiful Apollo and his loves—Daphne, pursued by the god, changing into the laurel, and the enamored Clytie into the faithful sunflower. Beauty, for its own sake, supreme and unconditional, charmed her primarily and to the end. Her restless spirit found repose in the pagan idea—the absolute unity and identity of man with nature, as symbolized in the Greek myths, where every natural force becomes a person, and where, in turn, persons pass with equal readiness and freedom back into nature again.

In this connection a name would suggest itself even if it did not appear—Heine, the Greek, Heine the Jew, Heine the Romanticist, as Emma Lazarus herself has styled him; and already in this early volume of hers we have trace of the kinship and affinity that afterwards so plainly declared itself. Foremost among the translations are a number of his songs, rendered with a finesse and a literalness that are rarely combined. Four years later, at the age of twenty-one, she published her second volume, "Admetus and Other Poems," which at once took rank as literature both in America and England, and challenged comparison with the work of established writers. Of classic themes we have "Admetus" and "Orpheus," and of romantic the legend of Tannhauser and of the saintly Lohengrin. All are treated with an artistic finish that shows perfect mastery of her craft, without detracting from the freshness and flow of her inspiration. While sounding no absolutely new note in the world, she yet makes us aware of a talent of unusual distinction, and a highly endowed nature—a sort of tact of sentiment and expression, an instinct of the true and beautiful, and that quick intuition which is like second-sight in its sensitiveness to apprehend and respond to external stimulus. But it is not the purely imaginative poems in this volume that most deeply interest us. We come upon experience of life in these

pages; not in the ordinary sense, however, of outward activity and movement, but in the hidden undercurrent of being. "The epochs of our life are not in the visible facts, but in the silent thoughts by the wayside as we walk." This is the motto, drawn from Emerson, which she chooses for her poem of "Epochs," which marks a pivotal moment in her life. Difficult to analyze, difficult above all to convey, if we would not encroach upon the domain of private and personal experience, is the drift of this poem, or rather cycle of poems, that ring throughout with a deeper accent and a more direct appeal than has yet made itself felt. It is the drama of the human soul—"the mystic winged and flickering butterfly," "flitting between earth and sky," in its passage from birth to death.

A golden morning of June! "Sweet empty sky without a stain." Sunlight and mist and "ripple of rain-fed rills." "A murmur and a singing manifold."

> "What simple things be these the soul to raise
> To bounding joy, and make young pulses beat
> With nameless pleasure, finding life so sweet!"

Such is youth, a June day, fair and fresh and tender with dreams and longing and vague desire. The morn lingers and passes, but the noon has not reached its height before the clouds begin to rise, the sunshine dies, the air grows thick and heavy, the lightnings flash, the thunder breaks among the hills, rolls and gathers and grows, until

> Behold, yon bolt struck home,
> And over ruined fields the storm hath come."

Now we have the phases of the soul—the shock and surprise of grief in the face of the world made desolate.

Loneliness and despair for a space, and then, like stars in the night, the new births of the spirit, the wonderful outcoming from sorrow: the mild light of patience at first; hope and faith kindled afresh in the very jaws of evil; the new meaning and worth of life beyond sorrow, beyond joy; and finally duty, the holiest word of all, that leads at last to victory and peace. The poem rounds and completes itself with the close of "the long, rich day," and the release of

> "The mystic winged and flickering butterfly,
> A human soul, that drifts at liberty,
> Ah! who can tell to what strange paradise,
> To what undreamed-of fields and lofty skies!"

We have dwelt at some length upon this poem, which seems to us, in a certain sense, subjective and biographical; but upon closer analysis there is still another conclusion to arrive at. In "Epochs" we have, doubtless, the impress of a calamity brought very near to the writer, and profoundly working upon her sensibilities; not however by direct, but reflex action, as it were, and through sympathetic emotion—the emotion of the deeply-stirred spectator, of the artist, the poet who lives in the lives of others, and makes their joys and their sorrows his own.

Before dismissing this volume we may point out another clue as to the shaping of mind and character. The poem of "Admetus" is dedicated "to my friend Ralph Waldo Emerson." Emma Lazarus was between seventeen and eighteen years of age when the writings of Emerson fell into her hands, and it would be difficult to over-estimate the impression produced upon her. As she afterwards wrote: "To how many thousand youthful hearts has not his word been the beacon—nay, more, the guiding star—that led them

safely through periods of mental storm and struggle!" Of no one is this more true than herself. Left, to a certain extent, without compass or guide, without any positive or effective religious training, this was the first great moral revelation of her life. We can easily realize the chaos and ferment of an over-stimulated brain, steeped in romantic literature, and given over to the wayward leadings of the imagination. Who can tell what is true, what is false, in a world where fantasy is as real as fact? Emerson's word fell like truth itself, "a shaft of light shot from the zenith," a golden rule of thought and action. His books were bread and wine to her, and she absorbed them into her very being. She felt herself invincibly drawn to the master, "that fount of wisdom and goodness," and it was her great privilege during these years to be brought into personal relations with him. From the first he showed her a marked interest and sympathy, which became for her one of the most valued possessions of her life. He criticised her work with the fine appreciation and discrimination that made him quick to discern the quality of her talent as well as of her personality, and he was no doubt attracted by her almost transparent sincerity and singleness of soul, as well as by the simplicity and modesty that would have been unusual even in a person not gifted. He constituted himself, in a way, her literary mentor, advised her as to the books she should read and the attitude of mind she should cultivate. For some years he corresponded with her very faithfully; his letters are full of noble and characteristic utterances, and give evidence of a warm regard that in itself was a stimulus and a high incentive. But encouragement even from so illustrious a source failed to elate the young poetess, or even to give her a due sense of the importance and value of her work, or the dignity of her vocation. We have already alluded to her modesty in her

unwillingness to assert herself or claim any prerogative—something even morbid and exaggerated, which we know not how to define, whether as over- sensitiveness or indifference. Once finished, the heat and glow of composition spent, her writings apparently ceased to interest her. She often resented any allusion to them on the part of intimate friends, and the public verdict as to their excellence could not reassure or satisfy her. The explanation is not far, perhaps, to seek. Was it not the "Ewig-Weibliche" that allows no prestige but its own? Emma Lazarus was a true woman, too distinctly feminine to wish to be exceptional, or to stand alone and apart, even by virtue of superiority.

A word now as to her life and surroundings. She was one of a family of seven, and her parents were both living. Her winters were passed in New York, and her summers by the sea. In both places her life was essentially quiet and retired. The success of her book had been mainly in the world of letters. In no wise tricked out to catch the public eye, her writings had not yet made her a conspicuous figure, but were destined slowly to take their proper place and give her the rank that she afterwards held.

For some years now almost everything that she wrote was published in "Lippincott's Magazine," then edited by John Foster Kirk, and we shall still find in her poems the method and movement of her life. Nature is still the fount and mirror, reflecting, and again reflected, in the soul. We have picture after picture, almost to satiety, until we grow conscious of a lack of substance and body and of vital play to the thought, as though the brain were spending itself in dreamings and reverie, the heart feeding upon itself, and the life choked by its own fullness without due outlet. Happily, however, the heavy cloud of sadness has lifted, and

we feel the subsidence of waves after a storm. She sings "Matins:"—

"Does not the morn break thus,
Swift, bright, victorious,
With new skies cleared for us
Over the soul storm-tost?
Her night was long and deep,
Strange visions vexed her sleep,
Strange sorrows bade her weep,
Her faith in dawn was lost.

"No halt, no rest for her,
The immortal wanderer
From sphere to higher sphere
Toward the pure source of day.
The new light shames her fears,
Her faithlessness and tears,
As the new sun appears
To light her god-like way."

Nature is the perpetual resource and consolation. "'T is good to be alive!" she says, and why? Simply,

"To see the light
That plays upon the grass, to feel (and sigh
With perfect pleasure) the mild breeze stir
Among the garden roses, red and white,
With whiffs of fragrancy."

She gives us the breath of the pines and of the cool, salt seas, "illimitably sparkling." Her ears drink the ripple of the tide, and she stops

"To gaze as one who is not satisfied
With gazing at the large, bright, breathing sea."

"Phantasies" (after Robert Schumann) is the most complete and perfect poem of this period. Like "Epochs," it is a cycle of poems, and the verse has caught the very trick of music—alluring, baffling, and evasive. This time we have the landscape of the night, the glamour of moon and stars—pictures half real and half unreal, mystic imaginings, fancies, dreams, and the enchantment of "faerie," and throughout the unanswered cry, the eternal "Wherefore" of destiny. Dawn ends the song with a fine clear note, the return of day, night's misty phantoms rolled away, and the world itself, again green, sparkling and breathing freshness.

In 1874 she published "Alide," a romance in prose drawn from Goethe's autobiography. It may be of interest to quote the letter she received from Tourgeneff on this occasion:—

"Although, generally speaking, I do not think it advisable
to take celebrated men, especially poets and artists, as a
subject for a novel, still I am truly glad to say that I
have read your book with the liveliest interest. It is
very sincere and very poetical at the same time; the life
and spirit of Germany have no secrets for you, and your
characters are drawn with a pencil as delicate as it is
strong. I feel very proud of the approbation you give to

> my works, and of the influence you kindly attribute to them
> on your own talent; an author who write as you do is not
> a pupil in art any more; he is not far from being himself
> a master."

Charming and graceful words, of which the young writer was justly proud.

About this time occurred the death of her mother, the first break in the home and family circle. In August of 1876 she made a visit to Concord, at the Emersons', memorable enough for her to keep a journal and note down every incident and detail. Very touching to read now, in its almost childlike simplicity, is this record of "persons that pass and shadows that remain." Mr. Emerson himself meets her at the station, and drives with her in his little one-horse wagon to his home, the gray square house, with dark green blinds, set amidst noble trees. A glimpse of the family—"the stately, white-haired Mrs. Emerson, and the beautiful, faithful Ellen, whose figure seems always to stand by the side of her august father." Then the picture of Concord itself, lovely and smiling, with its quiet meadows, quiet slopes, and quietest of rivers. She meets the little set of Concord people: Mr. Alcott, for whom she does not share Mr. Emerson's enthusiasm; and William Ellery Channing, whose figure stands out like a gnarled and twisted scrub-oak—a pathetic, impossible creature, whose cranks and oddities were submitted to on account of an innate nobility of character. "Generally crabbed and reticent with strangers, he took a liking to me," says Emma Lazarus. "The bond of our sympathy was my admiration for Thoreau, whose memory

he actually worships, having been his constant companion in his best days, and his daily attendant in the last years of illness and heroic suffering. I do not know whether I was most touched by the thought of the unique, lofty character that had inspired this depth and fervor of friendship, or by the pathetic constancy and pure affection of the poor, desolate old man before me, who tried to conceal his tenderness and sense of irremediable loss by a show of gruffness and philosophy. He never speaks of Thoreau's death," she says, "but always 'Thoreau's loss,' or 'when I lost Mr. Thoreau,' or 'when Mr. Thoreau went away from Concord;' nor would he confess that he missed him, for there was not a day, an hour, a moment, when he did not feel that his friend was still with him and had never left him. And yet a day or two after," she goes on to say, "when I sat with him in the sunlit wood, looking at the gorgeous blue and silver summer sky, he turned to me and said: 'Just half of the world died for me when I lost Mr. Thoreau. None of it looks the same as when I looked at it with him.'… He took me through the woods and pointed out to me every spot visited and described by his friend. Where the hut stood is a little pile of stones, and a sign, 'Site of Thoreau's Hut,' and a few steps beyond is the pond with thickly-wooded shore—everything exquisitely peaceful and beautiful in the afternoon light, and not a sound to be heard except the crickets or the 'z-ing' of the locusts which Thoreau has described. Farther on he pointed out to me, in the distant landscape, a low roof, the only one visible, which was the roof of Thoreau's birthplace. He had been over there many times, he said, since he lost Mr. Thoreau, but had never gone in—he was afraid it might look lonely! But he had often sat on a rock in front of the house and looked at it." On parting from his young friend, Mr. Channing gave her a

package, which proved to be a copy of his own book on Thoreau, and the pocket compass which Thoreau carried to the Maine woods and on all his excursions. Before leaving the Emersons she received the proof-sheets of her drama of "The Spagnoletto," which was being printed for private circulation. She showed them to Mr. Emerson, who had expressed a wish to see them, and, after reading them, he gave them back to her with the comment that they were "good." She playfully asked him if he would not give her a bigger word to take home to the family. He laughed, and said he did not know of any; but he went on to tell her that he had taken it up, not expecting to read it through, and had not been able to put it down. Every word and line told of richness in the poetry, he said, and as far as he could judge the play had great dramatic opportunities. Early in the autumn "The Spagnoletto" appeared—a tragedy in five acts, the scene laid in Italy, 1655.

Without a doubt, every one in these days will take up with misgiving, and like Mr. Emerson "not expecting to read it through," a five-act tragedy of the seventeenth century, so far removed apparently from the age and present actualities—so opposed to the "Modernite," which has come to be the last word of art. Moreover, great names at once appear; great shades arise to rebuke the presumptuous new-comer in this highest realm of expression. "The Spagnoletto" has grave defects that would probably preclude its ever being represented on the stage. The denoument especially is unfortunate, and sins against our moral and aesthetic instinct. The wretched, tiger-like father stabs himself in the presence of his crushed and erring daughter, so that she may forever be haunted by the horror and the retribution of his death. We are left suspended, as it were, over an abyss, our moral judgment thwarted, our

humanity outraged. But "The Spagnoletto" is, nevertheless, a remarkable production, and pitched in another key from anything the writer has yet given us. Heretofore we have only had quiet, reflective, passive emotion: now we have a storm and sweep of passion for which we were quite unprepared. Ribera's character is charged like a thunder-cloud with dramatic elements. Maria Rosa is the child of her father, fired at a flash, "deaf, dumb, and blind" at the touch of passion.

"Does love steal gently o'er our soul?"

she asks;

"What if he come,
A cloud, a fire, a whirlwind?"

and then the cry:

"O my God!
This awful joy in mine own heart is love."

Again:

"While you are here the one thing real to me
In all the universe is love."

Exquisitely tender and refined are the love scenes—at the ball and in the garden—between the dashing prince-lover in search of his pleasure and the devoted girl with her heart in her eyes, on her lips, in her hand. Behind them, always like a tragic fate, the somber figure of the Spagnoletto, and over all the glow and color and soul of Italy.

In 1881 appeared the translation of Heine's poems and ballads, which was generally accepted as the best version of that untranslatable poet. Very curious is the link between that bitter, mocking, cynic spirit and the refined, gentle spirit of Emma Lazarus. Charmed by the magic of his verse, the iridescent play of his fancy, and the sudden cry of the heart piercing through it all, she is as yet unaware or only vaguely conscious of the of the real bond between them: the sympathy in the blood, the deep, tragic, Judaic passion of eighteen hundred years that was smouldering in her own heart, soon to break out and change the whole current of thought and feeling.

Already, in 1879, the storm was gathering. In a distant province of Russia at first, then on the banks of the Volga, and finally in Moscow itself, the old cry was raised, the hideous mediaeval charge revived, and the standard of persecution unfurled against the Jews. Province after province took it up. In Bulgaria, Servia, and, above all, Roumania, where, we were told, the sword of the Czar had been drawn to protect the oppressed, Christian atrocities took the place of Moslem atrocities, and history turned a page backward into the dark annals of violence and crime. And not alone in despotic Russia, but in Germany, the seat of modern philosophic thought and culture, the rage of Anti-Semitism broke out and spread with fatal ease and potency. In Berlin itself tumults and riots were threatened. We in America could scarcely comprehend the situation or credit the reports, and for a while we shut our eyes and ears to the facts; but we were soon rudely awakened from our insensibility, and forced to face the truth. It was in England that the voice was first raised in behalf of justice and humanity. In January, 1881, there appeared in the "London Times" a series of articles, carefully compiled on the

testimony of eye-witnesses, and confirmed by official documents, records, etc., giving an account of events that had been taking place in southern and western Russia during a period of nine months, between April and December of 1880. We do not need to recall the sickening details. The headings will suffice: outrage, murder, arson, and pillage, and the result—100,000 Jewish families made homeless and destitute, and nearly $100,000,000 worth of property destroyed. Nor need we recall the generous outburst of sympathy and indignation from America. "It is not that it is the oppression of Jews by Russia," said Mr. Evarts in the meeting at Chickering Hall Wednesday evening, February 4; "it is that it is the oppression of men and women, and we are men and women." So spoke civilized Christendom, and for Judaism—who can describe that thrill of brotherhood, quickened anew, the immortal pledge of the race, made one again through sorrow? For Emma Lazarus it was a trumpet call that awoke slumbering and unguessed echoes. All this time she had been seeking heroic ideals in alien stock, soulless and far removed; in pagan mythology and mystic, mediaeval Christianity, ignoring her very birthright—the majestic vista of the past, down which, "high above flood and fire," had been conveyed the precious scroll of the Moral Law. Hitherto Judaism had been a dead letter to her. Of Portuguese descent, her family had always been members of the oldest and most orthodox congregation of New York, where strict adherence to custom and ceremonial was the watchword of faith; but it was only during her childhood and earliest years that she attended the synagogue, and conformed to the prescribed rites and usages which she had now long since abandoned as obsolete and having no bearing on modern life. Nor had she any great enthusiasm for her own people. As late as April,

1882, she published in "The Century Magazine" an article written probably some months before, entitled "Was the Earl of Beaconsfield a Representative Jew?" in which she is disposed to accept as the type of the modern Jew the brilliant, successful, but not over-scrupulous chevalier d'industrie. In view of subsequent, or rather contemporaneous events, the closing paragraph of the article in question is worthy of being cited:—

> "Thus far their religion [the Jewish], whose mere preservation
> under such adverse conditions seems little short of a miracle,
> has been deprived of the natural means of development and
> progress, and has remained a stationary force. The next
> hundred years will, in our opinion be the test of their
> vitality as a people; the phase of toleration upon which
> they are only now entering will prove whether or not they
> are capable of growth."

By a curious, almost fateful juxtaposition, in the same number of the magazine appeared Madame Ragozin's defense of Russian barbarity, and in the following (May) number Emma Lazarus's impassioned appeal and reply, "Russian Christianity versus Modern Judaism." From this time dated the crusade that she undertook in behalf of her race, and the consequent expansion of all her faculties, the growth of spiritual power which always ensues when a great

cause is espoused and a strong conviction enters the soul. Her verse rang out as it had never rung before—a clarion note, calling a people to heroic action and unity, to the consciousness and fulfillment of a grand destiny. When has Judaism been so stirred as by "The Crowing of the Red Cock" and

THE BANNER OF THE JEW.

Wake, Israel, wake! Recall to-day
The glorious Maccabean rage,
The sire heroic, hoary-gray,
His five-fold lion-lineage;
The Wise, the Elect, the Help-of-God,
The Burst-of-Spring, the Avenging Rod.

From Mizpeh's mountain ridge they saw
Jerusalem's empty streets; her shrine
Laid waste where Greeks profaned the Law
With idol and with pagan sign.
Mourners in tattered black were there
With ashes sprinkled on their hair.

Then from the stony peak there rang
A blast to ope the graves; down poured
The Maccabean clan, who sang
Their battle anthem to the Lord.
Five heroes lead, and following, see
Ten thousand rush to victory!

Oh for Jerusalem's trumpet now,
To blow a blast of shattering power,
To wake the sleeper high and low,
And rouse them to the urgent hour!

No hand for vengeance, but to save,
A million naked swords should wave.

Oh, deem not dead that martial fire,
Say not the mystic flame is spent!
With Moses' law and David's lyre,
Your ancient strength remains unbent.
Let but an Ezra rise anew,
To lift the BANNER OF THE JEW!

A rag, a mock at first—erelong
When men have bled and women wept,
To guard its precious folds from wrong,
Even they who shrunk, even they who slept,
Shall leap to bless it and to save.
Strike! for the brave revere the brave!

The dead forms burst their bonds and lived again. She sings "Rosh Hashanah" (the Jewish New Year) and "Hanuckah (the Feast of Lights):—

"Kindle the taper like the steadfast star
Ablaze on Evening's forehead o'er the earth,
And add each night a lustre till afar
An eight-fold splendor shine above thy hearth.
Clash, Israel, the cymbals, touch the lyre,
Blow the brass trumpet and the harsh-tongued horn;
Chant psalms of victory till the heart take fire,
The Maccabean spirit leap new-born."

And "The New Ezekiel:"—

"What! can these dead bones live, whose sap is dried
By twenty scorching centuries of wrong?
Is this the House of Israel whose pride
Is as a tale that's told, an ancient song?
Are these ignoble relics all that live
Of psalmist, priest, and prophet? Can the breath
Of very heaven bid these bones revive,
Open the graves, and clothe the ribs of death?
Yea, Prophesy, the Lord hath said again:
Say to the wind, come forth and breathe afresh,
Even that they may live, upon these slain,
And bone to bone shall leap, and flesh to flesh.
The spirit is not dead, proclaim the word.
Where lay dead bones a host of armed men stand!
I ope your graves, my people, saith the Lord,
And I shall place you living in your land."

Her whole being renewed and refreshed itself at its very source. She threw herself into the study of her race, its language, literature, and history.

Breaking the outward crust, she pierced to the heart of the faith and "the miracle" of its survival. What was it other than the ever-present, ever-vivifying spirit itself, which cannot die—the religious and ethical zeal which fires the whole history of the people, and of which she herself felt the living glow within her own soul? She had come upon the secret and the genius of Judaism—that absolute interpenetration and transfusion of spirit with body and substance which, taken literally, often reduces itself to a question of food and drink, a dietary regulation, and again, in proper splendor, incarnates itself and shines out before humanity in the prophets, teachers, and saviors of mankind.

Those were busy, fruitful years for Emma Lazarus, who worked, not with the pen alone, but in the field of practical and beneficent activity. For there was an immense task to accomplish. The tide of immigration had set in, and ship after ship came laden with hunted human beings flying from their fellow-men, while all the time, like a tocsin, rang the terrible story of cruelty and persecution—horrors that the pen refuses to dwell upon. By the hundreds and thousands they flocked upon our shores—helpless, innocent victims of injustice and oppression, panic-stricken in the midst of strange and utterly new surroundings.

Emma Lazarus came into personal contact with these people, and visited them in their refuge on Ward Island. While under the influence of all the emotions aroused by this great crisis in the history of her race, she wrote the "Dance of Death," a drama of persecution of the twelfth century, founded upon the authentic records—unquestionably her finest work in grasp and scope, and, above all, in moral elevation and purport. The scene is laid in Nordhausen, a free city in Thuringia, where the Jews, living, as the deemed, in absolute security and peace, were caught up in the wave of persecution that swept over Europe at that time. Accused of poisoning the wells and causing the pestilence, or black death, as it was called, they were condemned to be burned.

We do not here intend to enter upon a critical or literary analysis of the play, or to point out dramatic merits or defects, but we should like to make its readers feel with us the holy ardor and impulse of the writer and the spiritual import of the work. The action is without surprise, the doom fixed from the first; but so glowing is the canvas with local and historic color, so vital and intense the movement, so resistless, the "internal evidence," if we may call it thus,

penetrating its very substance and form, that we are swept along as by a wave of human sympathy and grief. In contrast with "The Spagnoletto," how large is the theme and how all-embracing the catastrophe! In place of the personal we have the drama of the universal. Love is only a flash now—a dream caught sight of and at once renounced at a higher claim.

> "Have you no smile to welcome love with, Liebhaid?
> Why should you tremble?
> Prince, I am afraid!
> Afraid of my own heart, my unfathomed joy,
> A blasphemy against my father's grief,
> My people's agony!
>
> "What good shall come, forswearing kith and God,
> To follow the allurements of the heart?"

asks the distracted maiden, torn between her love for he princely wooer and her devotion to the people among whom her lot has been cast.

> "O God!
> How shall I pray for strength to love him less
> Than mine own soul!
> No more of that,
> I am all Israel's now. Till this cloud pass,
> I have no thought, no passion, no desire,
> Save for my people."

Individuals perish, but great ideas survive—fortitude and courage, and that exalted loyalty and devotion to principle which alone are worth living and dying for.

The Jews pass by in procession—men, women, and children—on their way to the flames, to the sound of music, and in festal array, carrying the gold and silver vessels, the roll of the law, the perpetual lamp and the seven branched silver candle-stick of the synagogue. The crowd hoot and jeer at them.

"The misers! they will take their gems and gold
Down to the grave!"

"Let us rejoice"

sing the Jewish youths in chorus; and the maidens:—

"Our feet stand within thy gates, O Zion!
Within thy portals, O Jerusalem!"

The flames rise and dart among them; their garments wave, their jewels flash, as they dance and sing in the crimson blaze. The music ceases, a sound of crashing boards is heard and a great cry—"Hallelujah!" What a glory and consecration of the martyrdom! Where shall we find a more triumphant vindication and supreme victory of spirit over matter?

"I see, I see,
How Israel's ever-crescent glory makes
These flames that would eclipse it dark as blots
Of candle-light against the blazing sun.
We die a thousand deaths—drown, bleed, and burn.
Our ashes are dispersed unto the winds.
Yet the wild winds cherish the sacred seed,
The fire refuseth to consume.

... ...

Even as we die in honor, from our death
Shall bloom a myriad heroic lives,
Brave through our bright example, virtuous
Lest our great memory fall in disrepute."

The "Dance to Death" was published, along with other poems and translations from the Hebrew poets of mediaeval Spain, in a small column entitled "Songs of a Semite." The tragedy was dedicated, "In profound veneration and respect to the memory of George Eliot, the illustrious writer who did most among the artists of our day towards elevating and ennobling the spirit of Jewish nationality."

For this was the idea that had caught the imagination of Emma Lazarus—a restored and independent nationality and repatriation in Palestine. In her article in "The Century" of February, 1883, on the "Jewish Problem," she says:—

"I am fully persuaded that all suggested solutions other
than this are but temporary palliatives.... The idea formulated by George Eliot has already sunk into the minds
of many Jewish enthusiasts, and it germinates with miraculous
rapidity. 'The idea that I am possessed with,' says Deronda,
'is that of restoring a political existence to my people;
making them a nation again, giving them a national centre,

such as the English have, though they, too, are scattered over the face of the globe. That task which presents itself to me as a duty.... I am resolved to devote my life to it. AT THE LEAST, I MAY AWAKEN A MOVEMENT IN OTHER MINDS SUCH HAS BEEN AWAKENED IN MY OWN.' Could the noble prophetess who wrote the above words have lived but till to-day to see the ever-increasing necessity of adopting her inspired counsel,... she would have been herself astonished at the flame enkindled by her seed of fire, and the practical shape which the movement projected by her poetic vision is beginning to assume."

In November of 1882 appeared her first "Epistle to the Hebrews,"—one of a series of articles written for the "American Hebrew," published weekly through several months. Addressing herself now to a Jewish audience, she sets forth without reserve her views and hopes for Judaism, now passionately holding up the mirror for the shortcomings and peculiarities of her race. She says:—

"Every student of the Hebrew language is aware that we have in the conjugation of our verbs a mode known as

> the 'intensive voice,' which, by means of an almost imperceptible modification of vowel-points, intensifies the meaning of the primitive root. A similar significance seems to attach to the Jews themselves in connection with the people among whom they dwell. They are the 'intensive form' of any nationality whose language and customs they adopt.... Influenced by the same causes, they represent the same results; but the deeper lights and shadows of the Oriental temperament throw their failings, as well as their virtues, into more prominent relief."

In drawing the epistles to a close, February 24, 1883, she thus summarizes the special objects she has had in view:—

> "My chief aim has been to contribute my mite towards arousing that spirit of Jewish enthusiasm which might manifest itself: First, in a return to varied pursuits and broad system of physical and intellectual education adopted by our ancestors; Second, in a more fraternal and practical movement towards alleviating the sufferings of oppressed Jews in