

EMMA LAZARUS.

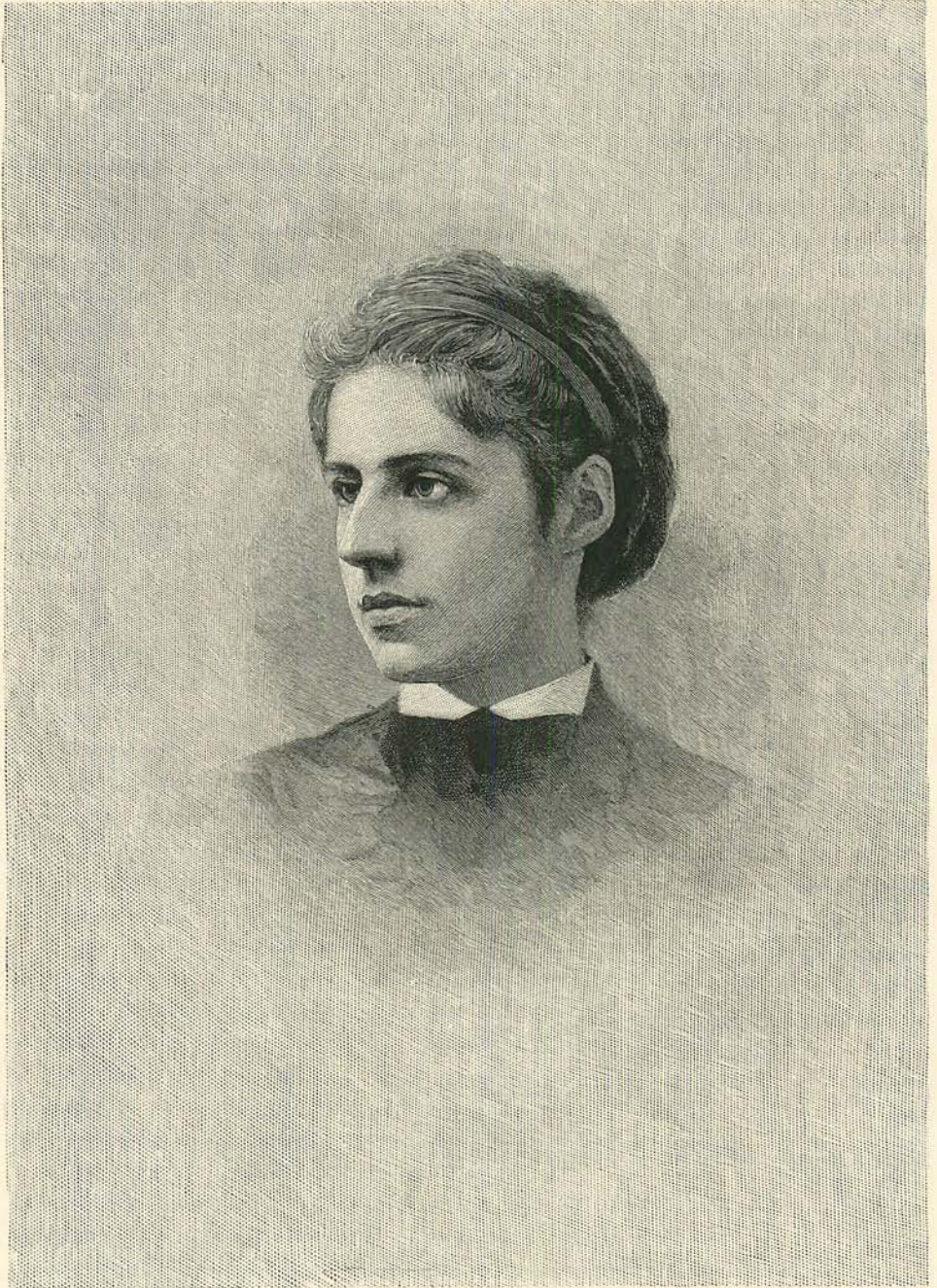
BORN JULY 22, 1849; DIED NOVEMBER 19, 1887.



NE hesitates to lift the veil and throw the light upon a life so hidden and a personality so withdrawn as that of Emma Lazarus; but while her memory is fresh, and the echo of her songs still lingers in these pages, we feel it a duty to call up her presence once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 Secession 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 key-note 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 also tragic in the extreme. Both are dashed off apparently at white heat—"Elfrida," over 1500 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, overreaches the mark. With Emma Lazarus, however, this somber 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 unconditioned, 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 Tannhäuser and of the saintly Lohengrin. All are treated with an artistic finish that shows perfect mastery of her craft, without



ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

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Emma Lagasse.

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 way-side 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 by 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 lives 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 overestimate 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 of 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, but there was something more than modesty in her unwillingness to assert herself or claim any prerogative—something even morbid and exaggerated which we know not how to express, whether as oversensitiveness 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 "Das 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 breezes 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 "faërie," 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 Turgeneff 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 writes 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 shores—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 "Modernité," which has come to be the last word of art. Moreover, great names at once appear; great shades arise to rebuke the presumptuous newcomer in this highest realm of expression. "The Spagnoletto" has grave defects that would probably preclude its ever being represented on the stage. The dénouement especially is unfortunate and sins against our moral and æsthetic 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 real bond between them — the sympathy in the blood, the deep, tragic, Judaic passion of eighteen hundred years that was smoldering in her own heart, soon to break out and change the whole current of her 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 medieval 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 insensi-

bility, 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 by 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, medieval 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 sleepers 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 — ere long,
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 luster 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, Prophecy, 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 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's Island. While under the influence of all the emotions aroused by this great crisis in the history of her race she wrote the "Dance to Death," a drama of persecution of the twelfth century, founded upon 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 of Thuringia, where the Jews, living, as they 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, Liebheid?
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 her 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 shall 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 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 candlelight 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 waters guard it in their crystal heart,
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 medieval Spain, in a small volume 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 center, such as the English have, though they, too, are scattered over the face of the globe. That is a 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 as 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 kindled by her seed of fire, and the practical shape which the movement projected by her in 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 urging its claims and its high ideals, and again dispassionately 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 their 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 the 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 countries less favored than our own; *Third*, in a closer and wider study of Hebrew literature and history; and finally, in a truer recognition of the large principles of religion, liberty, and law upon which Judaism is founded, and which should draw into harmonious unity Jews of every shade of opinion.

Her interest in Jewish affairs was at its height when she planned a visit abroad, which had been a long-cherished dream, and May 15, 1883, she sailed for England, accompanied by a younger sister. We have difficulty in recognizing the tragic priestess we have been portraying in the enthusiastic child of travel who seems new-born into a new world. From the very outset she is in a maze of wonder and delight. At sea she writes:

Our last day on board ship was a vision of beauty from morning till night—the sea like a mirror and the sky dazzling with light. In the afternoon we passed a ship in full sail, near enough to exchange salutes and cheers. After tossing about for six days without seeing a human being, except those on our vessel, even this was a sensation. Then an hour or two before sunset came the great sensation of—land! At first, nothing but a shadow on the far horizon, like the ghost of a ship; two or three widely scattered rocks

which were the promontories of Ireland—and sooner than we expected we were steaming along low-lying purple hills.

The journey to Chester gives her "the first glimpse of mellow England"—a surprise which is yet no surprise, so well known and familiar does it appear. Then Chester, with its quaint, picturesque streets, "like the scene of a Walter Scott novel, the cathedral planted in greenness, and the clear, gray river where a boatful of scarlet dragoons goes gliding by." Everything is a picture for her special benefit. She "drinks in, at every sense, the sights, sounds, and smells, and the unimaginable beauty of it all." Then the bewilderment of London, and a whirl of people, sights, and impressions. She was received with great distinction by the Jews, and many of the leading men among them warmly advocated her views. But it was not alone from her own people that she met with exceptional consideration. She had the privilege of seeing many of the most eminent personages of the day, all of whom honored her with special and personal regard. There was, no doubt, something that strongly attracted and attached people to her at this time—the force of her intellect at once made itself felt, while at the same time the unaltered simplicity and modesty of her character, and her readiness and freshness of enthusiasm, kept her still almost like a child.

She makes a flying visit to Paris, where she happens to be on the 14th of July—the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, and of the beginning of the Republic; she drives out to Versailles, "that gorgeous shell of royalty, where the crowd who celebrate the birth of the Republic wander freely through the halls and avenues, and into the most sacred rooms of the king. . . . There are ruins on every side in Paris," she says, "ruins of the Commune, or the Siege, or the Revolution; it is terrible—it seems as if the city were seared with fire and blood."

Such was Paris to her then, and she hastens back to her beloved London, starting from there on the tour through England that has been mapped out for her. "A Day in Surrey with William Morris," published in THE CENTURY MAGAZINE, describes her visit to Merton Abbey, the old Norman monastery, converted into a model factory by the poet-humanitarian, who himself received her as his guest, conducted her all over the picturesque building and garden, and explained to her his views of art and his aims for the people.

She drives through Kent, "where the fields, valleys, and slopes are garlanded with hops and ablaze with scarlet poppies." Then Canterbury, Windsor, and Oxford, Stratford, Warwick, the valley of the Wye, Wells, Exeter, and

Salisbury — cathedral after cathedral. Back to London and then north through York, Durham, and Edinburgh, and on the 15th of September she sails for home. We have merely named the names, for it is impossible to convey an idea of the delight and importance of this trip, "a crescendo of enjoyment," as she herself calls it. Long after, in strange, dark hours of suffering, these pictures of travel arose before her, vivid and tragic even in their hold and spell upon her.

The winter of 1883-84 was not especially productive. She wrote a few reminiscences of her journey and occasional poems on Jewish themes, which appeared in the "American Hebrew"; but for the most part she gave herself up to quiet retrospect and enjoyment with her friends of the life she had had a glimpse of, and the experience she had stored — a restful, happy period. In August of the same year she was stricken with a severe and dangerous malady, from which she slowly recovered, only to go through a terrible ordeal and affliction. Her father's health, which had long been failing, now broke down completely, and the whole winter was one long strain of acute anxiety, which culminated in his death, in March, 1885. The blow was a crushing one for Emma. Truly, the silver cord was loosed, and the golden bowl was broken. Life lost its meaning and its charm. Her father's sympathy and pride in her work had been her chief incentive and ambition, and had spurred her on when her own confidence and spirit failed. Never afterwards did she find complete and spontaneous expression. She decided to go abroad again as the best means of regaining composure and strength, and sailed once more in May for England, where she was welcomed now by the friends she had made, almost as to another home. She spent the summer very quietly at Richmond, an ideally beautiful spot in Yorkshire, where she soon felt the beneficial influence of her peaceful surroundings. "The very air seems to rest one here," she writes; and inspired by the romantic loveliness of the place, she even composed the first few chapters of a novel, begun with a good deal of dash and vigor, but soon abandoned, for she was still struggling with depression and gloom.

"I have neither ability, energy, nor purpose," she writes. "It is impossible to do anything, so I am forced to set it aside for the present; whether to take it up again or not in the future remains to be seen."

In the autumn she goes on the Continent, visiting the Hague, which "completely fascinates" her, and where she feels "stronger and more cheerful" than she has "for many a day." Then Paris, which this time amazes

her "with its splendor and magnificence. All the ghosts of the Revolution are somehow laid," she writes, and she spends six weeks here enjoying to the full the gorgeous autumn weather, the sights, the picture galleries, the bookshops, the whole brilliant panorama of the life; and early in December she starts for Italy.

And now once more we come upon that keen zest of enjoyment, that pure desire and delight of the eyes, which are the prerogative of the poet — and Emma Lazarus was a poet. The beauty of the world! What a rapture and intoxication it is, and how it bursts upon her in the very land of beauty, "where Dante and where Petrarch trod." A magic glow colors it all; no mere blues and greens any more, but a splendor of purple and scarlet and emerald; "each tower, castle, and village shining like a jewel; the olive, the fig, and at your feet the roses, growing in mid-December." A day in Pisa seems like a week, so crowded is it with sensations and unforgettable pictures. Then a month in Florence, which is still more entrancing with its inexhaustible treasures of beauty and art, and finally Rome, the climax of it all,

wiping out all other places and impressions, and opening a whole new world of sensations. I am wild with the excitement of this tremendous place. I have been here a week and have seen the Vatican and the Capitoline Museums, and the Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter's, besides the ruins on the streets and on the hills, and the graves of Shelley and Keats.

It is all heart-breaking. I don't only mean those beautiful graves overgrown with acanthus and violets, but the mutilated arches and columns and dumb appealing fragments looming up in the glowing sunshine under the Roman blue sky.

True to her old attractions, it is pagan Rome that appeals to her most strongly,

and the far-away past, that seems so sad and strange and near. I am even out of humor with pictures; a bit of broken stone or a fragment of a bas-relief, or a Corinthian column standing out against this lapis-lazuli sky, or a tremendous arch, are the only things I can look at for the moment — except the Sistine Chapel, which is as gigantic as the rest, and forces itself upon you with equal might.

Already, in February, spring is in the air; "the almond trees are in bloom, violets cover the grass, and oh! the divine, the celestial, the unheard-of beauty of it all!" It is almost a pang to her, "with its strange mixture of longing and regret and delight," and in the midst of it she says, "I have to exert all my strength not to lose myself in morbidness and depression."

Early in March she leaves Rome, consoled with the thought of returning the following winter. In June she was in England again, and spent the summer at Malvern. Disease was no doubt already beginning to prey upon her, for she was oppressed at times by a languor

and heaviness amounting almost to lethargy. When she returned to London, however, in September, she felt quite well again, and started for another tour in Holland, which she enjoyed as much as before. She then settled in Paris to await the time when she could leave for Italy. But she was attacked at once with grave and alarming symptoms, that betokened a fatal end to her malady. Entirely ignorant, however, of the danger that threatened her, she kept up courage and hope, made daily plans for the journey, and looked forward to setting out at any moment. But the weeks passed and the months also; slowly and gradually the hope faded. The journey to Italy must be given up; she was not in condition to be brought home, and she reluctantly resigned herself to remain where she was and "convalesce," as she confidently believed, in the spring. Once again came the analogy, which she herself pointed out now, to Heine on his mattress-grave in Paris. She too, the last time she went out, dragged herself to the Louvre, to the feet of the Venus, "the goddess without arms, who could not help." Only her indomitable will and intense desire to live seemed to keep her alive. She sunk to a very low ebb, but, as she herself expressed it, she "seemed to have always one little window looking out into life," and in the spring she rallied sufficiently to take a few drives and to sit on the balcony of her apartment. She came back to life with a feverish sort of thirst and avidity. "No such cure for pessimism," she says, "as a severe illness; the simplest pleasures are enough—to breathe the air and see the sun."

Many plans were made for leaving Paris, but it was finally decided to risk the ocean voyage and bring her home, and accordingly she sailed July 23d, arriving in New York on the last day of that month.

She did not rally after this; and now began her long agony, full of every kind of suffering, mental and physical. Only her intellect seemed kindled anew, and none but those who saw her during the last supreme ordeal can realize that wonderful flash and fire of the spirit before its extinction. Never did she appear so brilliant. Wasted to a shadow, and between acute attacks of pain, she talked about art, poetry, the scenes of travel, of which her brain was so full, and the phases of her own condition, with an eloquence for which even those who knew her best were quite unprepared. Every faculty seemed sharpened and

every sense quickened as the "strong deliveress" approached, and the ardent soul was released from the frame that could no longer contain it.

We cannot restrain a feeling of suddenness and incompleteness and a natural pang of wonder and regret for a life so richly and so vitally endowed thus cut off in its prime. But for us it is not fitting to question or repine, but rather to rejoice in the rare possession that we hold. What is any life, even the most rounded and complete, but a fragment and a hint? What Emma Lazarus might have accomplished, had she been spared, it is idle and even ungrateful to speculate. What she did accomplish has real and peculiar significance. It is the privilege of a favored few that every fact and circumstance of their individuality shall add luster and value to what they achieve. To be born a Jewess was a distinction for Emma Lazarus, and she in turn conferred distinction upon her race. To be born a woman also lends a grace and a subtle magnetism to her influence. Nowhere is there contradiction or incongruity. Her works bear the imprint of her character, and her character of her works. The same directness and honesty, the same limpid purity of tone, and the same atmosphere of things refined and beautiful. The vulgar, the false, and the ignoble—she scarcely comprehended them, while on every side she was open and ready to take in and respond to whatever can adorn and enrich life. Literature was no mere "profession" for her, which shut out other possibilities; it was only a free, wide horizon and background for culture. She was passionately devoted to music, which inspired some of her best poems; and during the last years of her life, in hours of intense physical suffering, she found relief and consolation in listening to the strains of Bach and Beethoven. When she went abroad painting was revealed to her, and she threw herself with the same ardor and enthusiasm into the study of the great masters; her last work (left unfinished) was a critical analysis of the genius and personality of Rembrandt.

And now, at the end we ask, Has the grave really closed over all these gifts? Has that eager, passionate striving ceased, that hunger and thirst which we call life, and "is the rest, silence?"

Who knows? But would we break, if we could, that repose, that silence and mystery and peace everlasting?