



Songs of a Semite: The Dance to Death, and Other Poems

Emma Lazarus

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The "Dance to Death" was published, along with other poems and translations from the Hebrew poets of mediaeval 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 centre, 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. I 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 in poetic vision is beginning to assume."

—*The Poems of Emma Lazarus*, Vol. 1 [1888]

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