

Sonnets.

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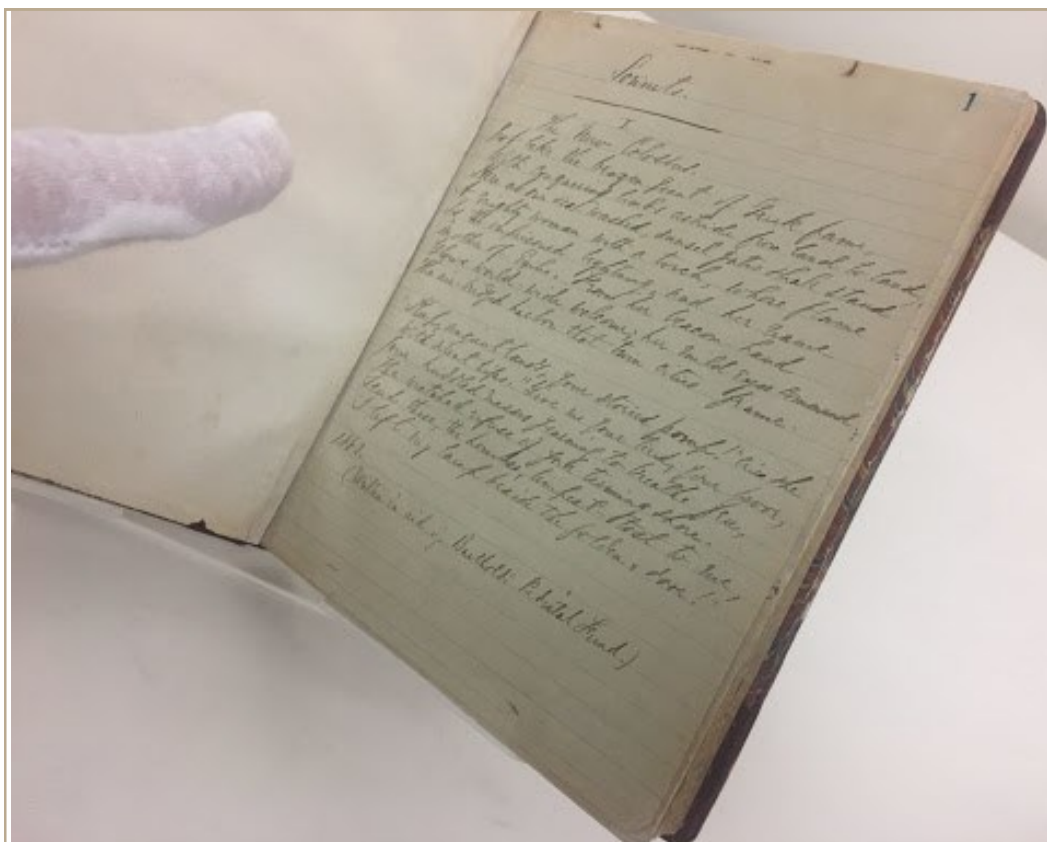
I.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

1883

(Written in aid of Bartholdi Pedestal Fund.)



“THE NEW COLOSSUS,” BY EMMA LAZARUS – 1883

SOURCE

This poem was written by Emma Lazarus in 1883.

BACKGROUND

Though the French had created the Statue as a gift, Americans needed to fundraise for the pedestal. In 1883 the writer Constance Cary Harrison gathered essays and sketches from friends, creating a portfolio to be auctioned. That money raised from the auction would help pay for the pedestal. Harrison gathered materials from writers such as Henry James, Mark Twain and artists like Winslow Homer. The source below is Harrison’s recollection of what happened when she asked Emma to contribute a poem for the statue.

“I begged Miss Lazarus to give me some verses appropriate to the occasion. She was at first inclined to rebel against writing anything “To order,” as it were, and rather mischievously let play the summer-lightning of her sarcasm upon her friend, “the Portfolio fiend,” and the enterprise in general. “Besides,” she added, “if I attempt anything now, under the circumstances, it will assuredly be flat.” “Think of that Goddess standing on her pedestal down yonder in the bay, and holding her torch out to those Russian refugees of yours you are so fond of visiting at Ward’s Island,” I suggested. The shaft sped home—her dark eyes deepened---her cheek flushed—the time for merriment was passed---she said not a word more, then.”

According to Harrison, Lazarus sent her a poem just a few days after the conversation. It attracted attention at the time and was the only piece read aloud at the auction. The auction and the exhibition would raise \$12,000 for the pedestal. The poem was celebrated at the auction, but by 1886 when the official ceremony celebrating the statue took place in New York Harbor, the poem had been forgotten.

Emma passed away in 1887, at the age of 38. Before she died, she had written her life’s work—hundreds of poems-- into a notebook, placing the New Colossus first. The handwritten poem you see is from that notebook, which is in the archive of the American Jewish Historical Society. In 1903, Emma’s friends organized to place a bronze plaque with the poem onto the inside of the pedestal’s base, permanently connecting the poem with the Statue.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

As you read the source consider how it informs these questions:

- According to Harrison, how did she persuade Emma to write a poem for the portfolio/pedestal fund?
- Why is it important to also see the poem from her book as opposed to just seeing it as a plaque on the statue?
- In the end, did Emma write a poem about Jewish immigrants? How so?
- How might one argue that this is a poem about Americans and America?

HISTORICAL NOTES

Definitions of terms used in the source.

“brazen giants of Greek fame:” a reference to the Colossus of Rhodes
“twin cities:” Brooklyn and Manhattan were two separate cities when Emma wrote the poem in 1883. They would be joined together in 1897.

