

Statement by Referee of Master's Thesis

The M.H.L. dissertation entitled:

"Humor in the Talmud"

written by Meyer Heller
(name of student)

- 1) may (with revisions) be considered for publication (✓)
cannot be considered for publication ()
with the permission of the author,
- 2) may, on request, be loaned by the Library (✓)
may not be loaned by the Library ()

Alexander Guttman
(signature of referee)

Dr. Alexander Guttman
(referee)

January 26, 1950
(date)

HUMOR IN THE TALMUD

by

MEYER HELLER

January, 1950

Referee: Dr. Alexander Guttman

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the title of
Rabbi and the degree of Master of
Hebrew Letters

TO MY WIFE

ESTHER:

BELLOVED AND DEVOTED SPOUSE

"1031" N 8th St

"אין" בשכינה טובה
אלא מתוך מחוק"
עצמות

DIGEST OF "HUMOR IN THE TALMUD"

Writers in the past have discounted or completely ignored the presence of a sense of humor among the Jews and some have even declared that their literary creations possessed no sense of humor. The aim of this essay is to take one aspect of Jewish literary creation and show how wrong it is to labor under the delusion that the Talmud is all legalism.

After accepting the definition of humor as "the sense within us which sets up a kindly contemplation of life and the expression of that sense in art", the writer goes on to point out the dangers implicit in analyzing humor. In a brief analysis of general Jewish humor, we shall discover the interesting fact that the Jewish humorist is not always a mere clown but more often he is a "preacher disguised in the garb of a jester".

This introduction leads us then to our chosen field "Talmudic Humor" and we are made aware of the fact that the Talmudists were men of "too much solidity of character to cultivate wit and humor for their own sake." Nevertheless, we shall see, that the Talmudists could not have survived had they not been endowed by God with extraordinary elasticity and with a wonderful sense of humor which enabled them to survive in the fierce struggle for existence.

There follows then a general classification and analysis of Talmudic humor according to the following outline:

- A. Rabbinic polemics with the non-Jewish critics
of Judaism.

- B. The bringing of wit into play in religious controversies with the Sadducees and Minims.
- C. The conscious humorous digressions resulting in the enlivening of sober debate.
- D. Erotica
- E. The joking exaggerations in Talmudic discussion
- F. Etymological play on words and situations --
e.g., puns, etc.
- G. The humorous popular proverbs
- H. The sense of humor of the Rabbis

The thesis concludes with the observation as to how often the wit and humor indicated in this study came to the relief of the Jew when the dreariness of the great struggle for existence threatened to unnerve him and the conviction that the Talmud is far from being a dry, dead, dreary, legalistic work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chap. No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
I	Introduction	1
II	Is There A Jewish Humor	6
III	What Constitutes Talmudic Humor	9
IV	Rabbinic Colloquies With the Mighty	13
V	Wit in Religious Controversies With the Sadducees and Minim	47
VI	Humorous Digressions and The Enliven- ing of Sober Debate	56
VII	Erotica	76
VIII	Joking Exaggerations In The Talmud	86
IX	Etymological Play on Words, Parables and Parody	92
X	Humorous Popular Sayings	109
XI	The Sense of Humor of The Rabbis	127
XII	The Opposition to Laughter	161
XIII	Conclusion	165
XIV	Footnotes	168
XV	Bibliography	180

INTRODUCTION

There have been writers in the past century who have passed judgment on the abilities and the lack of abilities of the Jewish people. Most recently, we had the example of Arnold Toynbee declaring the Jews to be a fossilized race. He has already been answered by men much more learned than myself.

However, certain accusations about the Jewish lack of a sense of humor and the "dry legalism" of the Talmud deserve an answer. Both Renan and Carlyle have declared that the Jewish race possessed no sense of humor. It is the view of this writer, however, that their opinions reflect their own viewpoint rather than the historical truth.

Even Isaac Disraeli (father of Lord Beaconsfield) made a similar accusation. He wrote:

The ancients, indeed appear not to have possessed the comic quality that we understand as humor, nor can I discover a word which exactly corresponds with our term humour in any language ancient or modern.¹

It might be indeed imagined that if three such eminent authorities agree in denying to the Hebrew race the faculty of humor and the power of evoking laughter, there must be some basis for the imputation. But I think that I shall have no difficulty in proving that this charge is unfounded.

It shall also be my aim in this essay to show how wrong it is to labor under the delusion that the Talmud is all legalism. The average person is sure that the Talmud does not contain any humor. They do not realize

that the Talmud contains a torrential sea of everything: law, ethics, metaphysics, and yes, wit and humor too flow through its pages.

The Talmud, it is true, is an encyclopaedia of law and legend but it is more than that. It is also literature, and literature is written life. And life must include the pleasant moments for without them, it becomes an unbearable drudge.

Strangely enough the Talmudic period had a corps of funmakers who earned their livelihood after the manner of today's Cantors and Jolsons. We hear of these professional jesters in Taanith where we read:

R. Beroka Hozaah used to frequent the market at Be Lapst where Elijah often appeared to him. Once he asked (the prophet), "Is there anyone in this market who has a share in the world to come!"... Whilst (they were thus conversing) two men (or brothers) passed by and (Elijah) remarked, "These two have a share in the world to come." R. Beroka then approached and asked them, "What is your occupation?" They replied, "We are jesters, *ljk n'z? 'ejk* when we see men depressed we cheer them up. Furthermore, when we see two people quarreling, we strive hard to make peace between them."²

Merrymakers then were deemed so deserving because of their allaying of the anxieties of the people and they were certain of a ticket to Paradise. However, not only were the professionals supposed to make people happy, but the guest at a wedding had to contribute to the general festivities. R. Helbo in the name of R. Huna states:³

Whosoever partakes of the wedding meal of a bridegroom and does not felicitate *INNEN* him does violence to "the five voices" mentioned in the verse: "The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that say, 'Give thanks to the Lord of Hosts!'"⁴

If any additional justification is needed for a study of Talmudic humor and laughter, we need only refer to the fact that in the eyes of the Talmudists, the Almighty, too, has his moments of laughter. In Sabbath, the statement is made:

"And I said of laughter it is to be praised, that refers to the laughter which the Holy One, Blessed be He, laughs with the righteous in the world to come."⁵

I can not conclude this introductory chapter without adding a word of thanks to Dr. Alexander Guttmann without whose help and guidance this thesis could not have been written. I am deeply indebted for his unfailing interest and encouragement, and for his many helpful suggestions.

CHAPTER I WHAT IS HUMOR?

Although it is not the province of this paper to deal in detail with humor in general, it would be well for us at this time to define our terms. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines humor as "the sense within us which sets up a kindly contemplation of life and the expression of that sense in art."⁶

The article goes on to say that, "Humor is often contrasted with "wit" a narrower term included within humor, and meaning the expression of humor in some form involving an unexpected play on words.

The element of kindness is essential to humor; there must not only be perception of the peculiarities, the contrasts and the shortcomings which lend to any character or circumstance an incongruous aspect but there must be a tolerance or acceptance of them. Where indignation is aroused the humorous conception is lost and amusement ends. Humor is here exchanged for sarcasm; similarly wit, as it passes toward anger and cruelty, becomes satire, and laughter, the physiological expression of humor, is exchanged for a "sardonic grin".⁷

The Hastings Encyclopaedia makes this very clever distinction:

"Wit is a flash; humour is a genial glow."⁸

There is a danger implicit in attempts at delimiting the field of humor for only in certain limited respects does humor lend itself to analysis. For instance, let us suppose that after careful examination an alleged joke is found to conform to all the reasonable demands of a joke. It might be expected then that we should laugh. But as a result of the scrutiny

we have lost all inclination to laugh, or rather the inclination was never kindled. The trouble is that a joke ceases to be a joke when it is approached in this way. Something is lost and that something is its very life. Everything is preserved except its laughableness.

It is therefore incumbent upon us that we in our study, avoid the pitfalls of over-analysis and thereby lose the benefits of the humor which is to be found in the Talmud. For "few of the blessings we enjoy are of greater value than the gift of humour. The pleasure attendant upon it attracts us together, forms an incentive, and gives a charm to social intercourse."⁹

Now we are ready to turn our attention to Jewish humor and its special characteristics.

CHAPTER II

IS THERE A JEWISH HUMOR?

A. A. Brill in an introduction which he wrote for one of Mendelsohn's anthologies of humor pointed out that:

To reduce the painful tension of the standards of civilization and keep it at as low a level as possible, modern man has developed many auxiliary outlets of this kind...Wit is an excellent form of mental catharsis. We can crack a joke about sex, religion or politics, the bare underlying thought of which might disgrace us...but those very ideas expressed through the technique of wit invariably obtain interesting audiences and hearty applause. The more a nation or race is subjected to hostile aggression, the more need it seems to have for a sense of humor.¹²

Brill, in this statement, follows the line of reasoning of Sigmund Freud who in a penetrating scientific study of wit states that no other race obtains as much pleasure from its shortcomings and vicissitudes as the Jew.¹³

In a recent study on the philosophy of wit, Emil Froeschels makes the challenging statement that "one source of the Jewish wit is...repressed revenge against the overpowering foe."¹⁴

Generally it may be said that there always existed a serious side of Jewish humor. In most cases beneath the playfulness of Jewish wit,

there existed an undercurrent of sadness. In an anthology of Jewish maxims, Elsa Teitelbaum pointed out that:

Through nineteen centuries of exile and persecution, the Jews have never failed to extract humor out of any situation, however oppressive. They have laughed both at their foibles and misfortune, and their animadversions of the world, without having been at the same time profound.¹⁵

The especially significant difference regarding the Jewish joke is that the Jew in telling you his humorous story wants you not only to laugh but to learn. "The Jewish parodist is not always a mere clown but more often he is a preacher disguised in the garb of a jester."¹⁶ We shall see many examples of just this type of humor in later chapters.

There is no doubt but that the wit and humor of the Jew have existed as long as he, the Jew, has existed. Libowitz wrote in one of his studies of Jewish humor:

17 . דגניח /ג'ס'ס 12 /'קל 213 קס /'ק"
פס'ס עח'ק'ק'1 ק2 2131 קס'ס 213

The answer, then to the question we raised at the beginning of this chapter must, of necessity be "Yes, but definitely." For as Adler wrote in his brief study of the nature of Jewish humor:

We meet in Hebrew literature and in the writings of those who were directly or indirectly nurtured in its spirit, wit and humour - the sympathetic representation of incongruous elements in human nature and life.

We encounter wit which seizes on the unexpected and places it before us in an unattractive light. We meet with humour, diffuse and flowing along, without any other law save its own fantastic will. We discover wit, brief and sudden, and sharply defined as a crystal. We detect wit and humour overlapping and blending with each other -- pleasant fancies, quips and cranks, bon mots, to which utterance was given, perchance, amid the saddest and the most depressing environments.¹⁸

Before we proceed into the actual material of our study, we shall devote a few general remarks to the specific type of humor to be found in the Talmud.

CHAPTER III

WHAT CONSTITUTES TALMUDIC HUMOR?

Before we begin our analysis and classification of Talmudic humor, it would be wise to point out that for the most part we do not find that the humor in the Talmud is humor just for the sake of jest. Naturally, there are exceptions to this rule. Dr. Kohut in a series written for the American Hebrew on this subject wrote:

The earnest minded men of the Talmud, although they utilize to a very large extent a playful jesting spirit were men of too much solidity of character to cultivate wit and humor for their own sake.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the Talmudists could not have survived had they not been endowed by God with extraordinary elasticity and with a wonderful sense of humor which enabled them to elude effectively all the attempts made at every age to oppress them.

However, this oppression could not help but affect the nature of Talmudic humor and imbue it with special characteristics. The mirth of the Talmudist did not come to him spontaneously nor was it the result of an overabundance of animal spirits. Rather, it became a weapon with which a beneficent God had fitted his feeble creatures whereby they were enabled to survive in the fierce struggle for existence.

These traits are especially apparent in the portions of the Talmud in which the tyranny and profligacy of the Caesars is satirized. Jacob Richman confirmed this in saying that the "persecutions they suffered at the hands of the neighbors forced them to create allegories, by which

they expressed their protest against their tormentors."²⁰ It is this type of humor which we will consider first.

In addition, a great deal of humor was brought into play in the religious controversies with the Sadducees and the Minim. Farkash points out that many times a seemingly innocent parable must be read between the lines to gain its true meaning.²¹

Occasionally we find that a lecture is prefaced by or includes some humorous remarks. This usually came about because of the desire to animate a long-winded debate by means of a witty statement or to defeat the adversary by turning the laugh against him. Examples of this type of situation will be found in later chapters in our survey.

In a category which we shall call "erotica" for lack of a better term will be found many Rabbinic anecdotes which are rather indelicate and would probably not be passed by a modern censor. However, it must be realized that their purpose was not pornographic but rather to clarify some phase of human conduct or to interpret a Biblical passage.

The nature of Talmudic dialectics with its very acute distinctions and its analogies to texts whose sense and context were written in a quite different connection led to some unusual joking exaggerations. If we were to take these digressions seriously, they probably could be dismissed without further consideration. However, if one deems them as consciously humorous, they seem to take their place in our scheme of things.

Occasionally, we shall discover in our survey of Talmudic wit mere humor of words and situations. This play on words sometimes is designed to pass away the time, to arouse the attention, to entertain the children,

and yes, to divert the rabbis themselves. We must honestly confess that these etymological puns are never hilariously funny, yet they are successful in making us smile and think.

A most interesting section will be devoted to the many humorous and human proverbs so popular among the people which dot the pages of the Talmud. I refer to those pithy sayings usually preceded in the Talmud by the three words: "עַיִן חַנּוּן יוֹדֵן". It is the author's feeling that in these brief quotations one discovers more of a people's character than is true of any other form of humor.

Finally we shall discover in our concluding section the sense of humor to be found in the personalities of the rabbis. We shall detect their parrying of opponent's thrusts rapidly, their continual readiness for attack and defense which led to that quickwittedness of repartee which is so essential to humor and which to this day has become a characteristic of the eternal Jewish spirit.

When then goes to make up Talmudic humor? The answer as we shall discover in succeeding chapters can be traced according to the following outline.

- A. Rabbinic polemics with non-Jewish critics of Judaism
- B. The bringing of wit into play in religious controversies with the Sadducees and Minim
- C. The conscious humorous digressions resulting in the enlivening of sober debate.
- D. Erotica
- E. The joking exaggerations in Talmudic discussion

- F. Etymological play on words and situations - e.g., puns, etc.
- G. The humorous popular proverbs - e. g. 'עַיִן כְּמַלְאָךְ הַיָּם
- H. The sense of humor of the Rabbis.

CHAPTER IV

RABBINIC COLLOQUIES WITH THE MIGHTY

In the Talmud we find many examples of satire of the tyranny and profligacy of the rulers with whom the Jews came in contact. Naturally in doing this, they found it prudent to veil their expressions and speak in metaphors.

One of the Rabbis who was very active in these polemics was R. Gamaliel. One of the most famous of the stories in which R. Gamaliel was involved was the legend of Adam's stolen rib. The story is found in Sanhedrin; *what?*

The Emperor (Kesar - כּסָר) (some edit כּסָר infidel) once said to Rabban Gamaliel, "Your God is a thief, for it is written, 'And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man (Adam) and he slept and He took one of his ribs (Gen. 2.21).'" Thereupon his (the Emperor's) daughter said to him, "Leave him to me and I will answer him," and (turning to the Emperor) said: "Give me a commander (שׂוֹרֵר) (guard) in charge of a military company." "Why do you need him," asked he. "Thieves visited us last nite and robbed us of a silver pitcher, leaving a golden one in its place." "Would that such visited us every day!" he exclaimed. "Ah," she retorted "was it not to Adam's gain that he was deprived of a rib and a wife (lit. שְׂפָדָה handmaiden)

presented to him in its stead to serve him?" He replied: "This is what I mean: he should have taken it from him openly (when he was awake)."

Said she to him: "Let me have a piece of raw meat." It was given to her. She placed it under her armpit.²²

"I find it loathsome," he exclaimed. "Even so would she (Eve) have been to Adam, had she been taken from him openly," she retorted.²³ (According to the rendering adopted, the flesh was repulsive because it had come into contact with her body. Likewise had Adam known that Eve was part of his body, he might have been repelled.)²⁴

Here, in this example, with the assistance of a woman, Gamaliel was able to outsmart the Emperor. Here, and in many of these polemics, the reader will probably not laugh aloud but one cannot help but smile as one detects a real wit and satire which pervades this and other stories.

For the Emperor who felt that he could duplicate the work of God, R. Gamaliel had some very sparkling remarks.

The Emperor said to Rabban Gamaliel: "It is written, 'He counteth the number of stars' (Ps. 147.4). In what way is that remarkable; I too can count them." Rabban Gamaliel brought some 'עִיִּן quinces, put them into a sieve, whirled them around, and said: "Count them."

"Keep them still," he requested. Thereupon R. Gamaliel observed, "But the Heavens revolve so." Some say that the Emperor spoke thus to him: "The number of the stars is known to me." Thereupon Rabban Gamaliel asked him, "How many molars and (other) teeth have you?" Putting his hand to his mouth, he began to count them. Said he to him: "You know not what is in your mouth and yet thou wouldst know what is in heaven!"²⁵

Another version of the same story is told in this way:

The Emperor also said to Rabban Gamaliel: "I know what your God is doing, and where He is seated." Rabban Gamaliel became (as it were) overcome and sighed, and on being asked the reason, answered, "I have a son in one of the cities of the sea, and I yearn for him. Pray tell me about him (lit. show him to me)." "Do I then know where he is?" he replied. "You do not know what is on earth, and yet (you claim to) know what is in heaven!" he retorted.²⁶

In another biting satire, R. Gamaliel heaps ridicule upon a certain disciple of the dual principle who declared that different portions of man's body were made by various gods. But we are getting ahead of our story. Let the Talmudic writer tell the story.

The Emperor said to Rabban Gamaliel, "He who created the mountains did not create the wind, for

it is written, 'For lo there is a former of mountains and a creator of wind!'" (Amos 4.13 That is how the Emperor must have translated the verse drawing an inference from the two different words used to denote Creation).

"According to this reasoning when we find it written of Adam, 'And He created' כִּפֵּ' (Gen. 1.27) and 'And He formed' יָצַק (Gen. 2.7), would you also say that He who has created this (one limb) did not create that (another limb)? Further there is a part of the human body just a handbreadth square, which contains two holes (the part containing both eye and ear), and because it is written, 'He that planteth the ear, shall not hear; He that formeth the eye, shall he not see?' (Ps. 94.9 Two different expressions are used for the creation of the eye and ear respectively) would you maintain there too that He who created the one did not create the other?"

"Even so," he answered. "Yet" he (Rabban Gamaliel) rejoined, "at death both (the one who planted and the one who created--assuming that there were two creators of man, he would not completely die unless) both agreed; otherwise the creator of the eye might insist that the eye goes on living, while the creator of the ear might wish it to die) are brought to agree."²⁷

Thus Gamaliel silenced his opposition by pointing out how inharmonious it would be for the gods, each to have created a different limb but at his death to become reconciled, and cause the death of each at the same time.

The belief that God could be present with every minyan brought forth a challenge from a heretic which was answered very aptly by R. Gamaliel

The Emperor said to Rabban Gamaliel: "Ye maintain that: 'upon every gathering of ten (Jews) the Shechinah rests' (Aboth. 3.6); how many shechinahs are there then?" Rabban Gamaliel called (Caesar's) servant and tapped him on the neck *קפדקף ד'ר קרן* 28 saying, "Why does the sun enter into Caesar's house?" (Why dost thou permit it to enter.

"But" he (the infidel) exclaimed, "the sun shines *קא'ן* (lit. rests) upon the whole world." Then if the sun, which is but one of the countless myriads of the servants of the Holy One, blessed be He, shines on the whole world, how much more the Shechinah of the Holy One, blessed be He Himself.²⁹

Occasionally the non-believer, instead of being the Emperor is some famous general or a renowned philosopher. A very intelligent question is placed in the mouth of General Agrippa and Gamaliel's answer is even more brilliant.

The General Agrippa asked R. Gamaliel, "It is written in your Torah, 'For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.' (Deut. 4.24) Is

a wise man jealous of any but a wise man, a warrior of any but a warrior, a rich man of any but a rich man?" (Consequently if God is jealous of idols, they must be comparable to Him.) He replied, "I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? to a man who marries an additional wife. If the second wife is her superior, the first will not be jealous of her, but if she is her inferior, the first wife will be jealous of her," (because the effort is when the man chooses an inferior woman to take her place in his affections).³⁰

R. Gamaliel gave particular evidence of the readiness of his repartee in the religious controversies which he had with the philosophers. Basically, the question asked is "if your God is not pleased with the worship of other Gods, why not destroy them?" The story goes:

A philosopher asked R. Gamaliel, "It is written in your Torah, 'For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.' (Deut. 4.24) Why, however, is he so jealous of its worshippers rather than of the idol itself?" He replied, "I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a human king who had a son, and this son reared a dog to which he attached his father's name, so that whenever he took an oath he exclaimed, 'By the life of this dog, my father!' When the king hears of it, with whom is he angry--his son or the dog? Surely he is angry with his son!"

(The philosopher) said to him, "You call the idol a dog; but there is some reality in it." (The Rabbi asked) "What is your proof?" He replied, "Once a fire broke out in our city, and the whole town was burnt with the exception of a certain idolatrous shrine!" He said to him, "I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a human king against whom one of his provinces rebelled. If he goes to war against it, does he fight with the living or the dead? Surely he wages war with the living!" (The idol is a dead thing, so God does not wage war with it.)

(The Philosopher) said to him, "You call the idol a dog and you call it a dead thing. In that case, let Him destroy it from the world!" He replied, "If it was something unnecessary to the world that was worshipped, He would abolish it; but people worship the sun and moon, stars and planets, brooks and valleys. Should He destroy His universe on account of fools! And thus it states, 'Am I utterly to consume all things from off the face of the ground, saith the Lord; am I to consume man and beast; am I to consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, even the stumbling blocks of the wicked!' (Zeph. 1.2f. The Talmud requires this translation E.V. I will utterly consume etc.) -- because the wicked stumble over these things is He

to destroy them from the world? Do they not worship the human being; so am I to cut off man from the face of the earth." (Zeph. 1.2f)³¹

A very similar story is one which has the Rabbis and the philosophers as antagonists:

Philosophers asked the elders in Rome, "If your God has no desire for idolatry, why does He not abolish it?" They replied, "If it was something of which the world has no need that was worshipped, He would abolish it; but people worship the sun, moon, stars and planets; should He destroy the Universe on account of fools! The world pursues its natural course, and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account."

Another illustration:

Suppose a man stole a measure of wheat and went and sowed it in the ground; it is right that it should not grow, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account.

Another Illustration:

Suppose a man has intercourse with his neighbour's wife; it is right that she should not conceive, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account." This is similar to what R. Simeon b. Lakish said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, declared, 'Not enough that the wicked

put my coinage to vulgar use, but they trouble Me and compel Me to set My seal thereon!" (the wicked make wrong use of the sexual instinct with which they have been endowed by God and trouble Him to form the embryo which results from their immorality.)³²

For an adroit reply to a provocative question, let us read Gamaliel's answer to Proclos:

Proclos, son of a philosopher, (the word for philosopher is doubtless a corruption of a proper noun) put a question to R. Gamaliel in Acco when the latter was bathing in the bath of Aphrodite. (Baths were frequently adorned with statues of deities) He said to him, "It is written in your Torah, 'And there shall cleave nought of the devoted thing to thine hand' (Deut. 13.18). Why are you bathing in the bath of Aphrodite?" He replied to him, "We may not answer (question relating to Torah) in a bath." (owing to the nudity of the persons there) When he came out, he said to him, "I did not come into her domain, she has come into mine. (the bath existed before the image of Aphrodite was set up in it and it was constructed for general use) Nobody says, the bath was made as an adornment for Aphrodite; but he says, Aphrodite was made as an adornment for the bath."³³

Since we started our sequence on R. Gamaliel with a story in which he was helped by the Emperor's daughter, it is most appropriate that we

complete this part of our survey with an incident in which the princess assisted the Rabbi against non-believers:

An Emperor said to Rabban Gamaliel: "Ye maintain that the dead will revive; but they turn to dust and can dust come to life?" Thereupon his (the emperor's) daughter said to him (the Rabbi): "Let me answer him: in our town there are two potters; one fashions (his products) from water, and the other from clay; who is the more praiseworthy?"

"He who fashions them from water," he replied (this being far more difficult). "If he can fashion (man) from water (the sperm), surely he can do so from clay!" (The dust into which the dead are turned).³⁴

Another type of humor which comes under this chapter category because it evidences the contact and the disputations between the sages of the Talmud and those of other faiths, is what we would like to call "didactic". In this peculiar species of humor, the pupil tests the patience of the teacher and as a result of this testing, humorous situations arise.

The classic story of this type is the one out of which the "Golden Rule" was elicited.

It happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, "Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot."

Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel he said to him, "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is Commentary thereof; go and learn it."³⁵

However the other two stories, besides indicating the unending patience of Hillel are much more humorous than the above mentioned story. In the first story, Hillel is prodded and teased to the point of anger but nevertheless, as a good teacher should, he retains his sense of proportion.

Our Rabbis taught: A man should always be gentle like Hillel and not impatient like Shammai. It once happened that two men made a wager with each other, saying, "He who goes and makes Hillel angry shall receive 400 zuz." Said one: "I will go and incense him." That day was the Sabbath eve and Hillel was washing his head.

He went, passed by the door of his house, and called out, "Is Hillel here, is Hillel here?" (inso-

lently without the courtesy of a title). Thereupon he robed and went out to him, saying, "My son, what do you require?" "I have a question to ask," said he. "Ask, my son, " he prompted.

Thereupon, he asked: "Why are the heads of the Babylonian round?" Hillel himself was a Babylonian.

"My son, you have asked a great question," he replied, "it is because they have no skillful midwives." He departed, tarried a while, returned and called out, "Is Hillel here?" He robed and went out to him, saying, "My son, what do you require?" "I have a question to ask," said he.

"Ask, my son," he prompted. Thereupon he asked, "Why are the eyes of the Palmyreans bleared?" "My son, you have asked a great question," he replied. "It is because they live in sandy places."

He departed, tarried a while, returned and called out, "Is Hillel here; is Hillel here?" He robed and went out to him saying, "My son what do you require?" "I have a question to ask," said he. "Ask, my son," he prompted. He asked, "Why are the feet of the (African) negroes wide?" "My son, you have asked a great question," said he "it is because they live in watery marshes" (hence their feet must be wide to enable them to walk there, just as duck's feet are webbed).

"I have many questions to ask," said he, "but fear that you may become angry." Thereupon he robed, sat before him and said, "Ask all the questions you have to ask," "Are you the Hillel who is called the Nasi (patriarch) of Israel?" "Yes," he replied. "If that is you," he retorted, "may there not be many like you in Israel." "Why, my son?" queried he. "Because I have lost 400 zuz through you," complained he. "Be careful of your moods," he answered. "Hillel is worth it that you should lose 400 zuz through him, yet Hillel shall not lose his temper."³⁶

The concluding story in this Hillel-Shammai series is a very humorous one because of the method in which Hillel demonstrates why the student must rely upon the teacher.

A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him, "How many Toroth have you?" "Two" he replied: "the Written Torah and the Oral Torah." "I believe you with respect to the written, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the Written Torah (only)."

(But) he scolded and repulsed him in anger. When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day (of teaching him) he taught him, Alef, beth, gimmel, daleth; the following day he reversed (them) to him, "But yesterday you did not teach to me thus," he protested. "Must

you then not rely upon me? (as to what the letters are?)"

"Then rely upon me with respect to the Oral (Torah) too."³⁷

As can be seen from the few examples we have brought, the wit and humor of our ancestors was very definitely manifested in the political as well as the religious controversies. In this connection, a certain Gebiha b. Pesisa, a legendary character traditionally contemporary with Alexander the Great, is mentioned with special favor. In this section we shall bring three of the humorous incidents associated with him. The first relates that:

On the twenty-fourth of Nisan the revenue farmers 'ICJON'3 (publicans) were removed from Judah and Jerusalem. For when the Africans came to plead against the Jews Before Alexander of Macedon, they said, "Canaan belongs to us, as it is written, 'The Land of Canaan with the coasts thereof' (Num. 34.12); and Canaan was the ancestor of these people (i.e., ourselves)."

Thereupon Gebiha b. Pesisa said to the Sages, "Authorize me to go and plead against them before Alexander of Macedon: should they defeat me, then

say 'ye have defeated but an ignorant man of us';
whilst if I defeat them, then say to them thus:
'The Law of Moses has defeated you!'

So they authorized him and he went and pleaded
against them. "Whence do ye adduce your proof?"
asked he. "From the Torah," they replied. "I too,"
he said, "will bring you proof only from the Torah,
for it is written, 'And he said, Cursed be Canaan;
a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.'
(Gen. 9.25)"

"Now if a slave acquires property, to whom does
he belong and whose is the property?" (Obviously it
is the owner. Therefore even if the land was given
to the Canaanites, it belongs to their masters, the
Jews, descendants of Shem).

"Moreover, it is now many years that ye have not
served us." (so that you owe us your toil too, for all
that time.) Then Alexander said to them, "Answer him!"
Give us three days' time," they pleaded. So he gave
them a respite; they sought but found no answer. Im-
mediately thereon they fled, leaving behind their sown
fields and their planted vineyards. And that year was
a Sabbatical year.³⁸

In a similar vein, in the following story Gebiha uses his "ignorance"
as a weapon to defeat the Egyptians when they came in a lawsuit against
the Jews before Alexander of Macedon.

They (the Egyptians) pleaded thus: "Is it not written, 'And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, and they lent them' (gold and precious stones) (Ex. 12.36). Then return us to the gold and silver which ye took!"

Thereupon Gebiha b. Pesisa said to the Sages, "Give me permission to go and plead against them before Alexander of Macedon; should they defeat me, then say, 'Ye have merely defeated an ignorant man amongst us;' whilst if I defeat them then say, 'The Law of Moses has defeated you.'" So they gave him permission, and he went and pleaded against them. "Whence do ye adduce your proof?" asked he. "From the Torah," they replied. "Then I too," said he, "will bring you proof only from the Torah, for it is written, 'Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years' (Ex. 12.40)."

"Pay us for the toil of 600,000 men whom ye enslaved for 430 years." Then King Alexander said to them, "answer him." "Give us three days' time," they begged. So he gave them a respite; they sought but found no answer. Straightaway they fled, leaving behind their sown fields and planted vineyards. And that year was a Sabbatical year.³⁹

The final legendary story of Gebiha deals with another lawsuit, this time, made by the Ishmaelites and the Keturians against the Jews.

They pleaded thus: "Canaan belongs jointly to all of us, for it is written, 'Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son' (Gen. 25.12); and it is (further) written, 'And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son'" (Gen. 25.19) 'Hence, both being sons of Abraham, they had equal claims upon the land. For the same reason the Keturians too made a claim.)

Thereupon Gebiha b. Pesisa said to the Sages, "Give me permission to go and plead against them before Alexander of Macedon: should they defeat me, then say, 'Ye have merely defeated an ignorant man amongst us'; whilst if I defeat them then say, 'The Law of Moses has defeated you.'" So they gave him permission, and he went and pleaded against them. "Whence do ye adduce your proof?" asked he. "From the Torah," they replied. "Then I too," said he, "will bring you proof only from the Torah, for it is written, "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts' (Gen. 25.5 f); if a father made a bequest to his children in his lifetime and sent them away from each other, has any one claim upon the other?" (Obviously not).⁴⁰

In these satires against non-believers, many are of historical value, particularly those that ridicule the profligacy of Sodom. Most of these are probably nothing but veiled allusions to the degeneracy of Rome.

The story is told that:

There were four judges in Sodom (named) Shakrai, Shakurai, Zayyafi and Mazle Dina *מזל דינא* (these are fictitious names meaning, liar, awful liar, forger and perverter of justice). Now if a man assaulted his neighbor's wife and bruised her, they would say (to the husband): "Give her to him that she may become pregnant for thee."

If one cut off the ear of his neighbor's ass, they would order, "Give it to him until it grows again." If one wounded his neighbor they would say to him (the victim), "Give him a fee for bleeding thee." He who crossed over with the ferry had to pay four zuzim, whilst he who crossed through the water had to pay eight. On one occasion, a certain fuller happened to come there. Said they to him, "Give us four zuzim" (for the use of the ferry).

"But," protested he, "I crossed through the water."
"If so," said they, "thou must give eight zuzim for passing through the water!" He refused to give it, so they assaulted him. He went before the judge, who ordered, "Give them a fee for bleeding and eight zuzim for crossing through the water."

Now Eliezer, Abraham's servant, happened to be there, and was attacked. When he went before the judge, he said, "Give them a fee for bleeding thee." Thereupon he took a stone and smote the judge. "What is this!" he exclaimed. He replied, "The fee that thou owest me give to this man (who attacked me), whilst my money will remain in status quo."

Now they had beds upon which travellers slept. If he (the guest) was too long, they shortened him (by loping off his feet); if too short, they stretched him out. Eliezer, Abraham's servant happened to go there. Said they to him, "Arise and sleep on this bed!" He replied, "I have vowed since the day of my mother's death not to sleep in a bed."

If a poor man happened to come there, every resident gave him a denar, upon which he wrote his name but no bread was given him. When he died, each came and took his back. They made this agreement amongst themselves; whoever invites a man (a stranger) to a feast shall be stripped of his garment. Now a banquet

was in progress, when Eliezer chanced there, but they gave him no bread. Wishing to dine, he went and sat down at the end of them all. Said they to him, "Who invited thee here?" He replied to the one sitting near him, "Thou didst invite me." The latter said to himself, "Peradventure they will hear that I invited him, and strip me of my garments!" So he took up his raiment and fled without. Thus he (Eliezer) did to all, until they had all gone; whereupon he consumed the entire repast.

A certain maiden gave some bread to a poor man, (hiding it) in a pitcher. On the matter becoming known, they daubed her with honey and placed her on the parapet of the wall, and the bees came and consumed her. Thus it is written, "and the Lord said, The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, because it is great;" whereupon Rab Judah commended in Rab's name: "On account of the maiden."⁴¹
(ribah) אר'ו 42

In addition to Gamaliel and Gebiha b. Pesisa, the homely R. Joshua b. Hananiah played a great role in the rabbinic colloquies with the mighty. The story tells how the Rabbi, unprepossessing in appearance, offended by an arrogant young princess, teaches her a lesson in humility by proving to her that ugly vessels are used to store precious wines, but that expensive vessels turned them to vinegar. The story is told in slightly variant versions in Nedarim and in Taanith.

The briefer version in the former relates that:

The Emperor's daughter (Hadrian) said to R. Joshua b. Hananiah: "Such comely wisdom in an ugly vessel!" He replied, "Learn from thy father's palace. In what is the wine stored?" "In earthen jars," she answered.

"But all (common) people store(wine) in earthen vessels, and thou too likewise. Thou shouldst keep it in jars of gold and silver!"

So she went and had the wine replaced in vessels of gold and silver, and it turned sour. "Thus," said he to her, "the Torah is likewise!" "But are there not handsome people who are learned too?" "Were they ugly they would be even more learned," he retorted. "וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי הַיָּדֵי הַיְיָ הֵם הַיָּדֵי הַיְיָ" 43

The variant version starts out similarly with the daughter of the Roman emperor addressing R. Joshua as:

"O glorious wisdom in an ugly vessel."
"הַיָּדֵי הַיְיָ הֵם הַיָּדֵי הַיְיָ"
He replied, "Does not your father keep wine in an earthenware vessel?" She asked, "Wherein else shall he keep it?" He said to her, "You who are nobles should keep it in vessels of gold and silver." Thereupon she went and told this to her father and he had the wine put into vessels of gold and silver and it became sour. When she was informed of this he asked his daughter, "Who gave you this advice?" She replied, "R. Joshua b. Hananiah." Thereupon the Emperor had him summoned before him and asked him, "Why did

you give her such advice?" He replied, "I answered her according to the way that she spoke to me."⁴⁴

In a story which has retained its fame to this day, the stout-hearted, undaunted sage Joshua does not hesitate to defy a monarch.

The emperor said to R. Joshua b. Hananiah (the emperor is Hadrian), "Why has this Sabbath dish such a fragrant odour?" "We have certain seasoning," he replied, "called the Sabbath, which we put into it and that gives it a fragrant odour." "Give us some of it," asked he. "To him who keeps the Sabbath" retorted he, "it is efficacious; but to him who does not keep the Sabbath, it is of no use."⁴⁵

And for those who believe that the game of charades is a new one this final incident which involved R. Joshua b. Hananiah will come as a great surprise.

R. Joshua b. Hananiah was (once) at the court of Caesar (i.e. Hadrian). A certain unbeliever *הוסיף ו'ק* showed him (by gesture): A people whose Lord has turned His face from them. He showed him (in reply): His hand is stretched over us.

Said Caesar to Rab Joshua: "What did he show thee?" "A people whose Lord has turned His face from them. And I showed him: His hand is stretched over us." They (then) said to the heretic: *ה'ן* "What didst thou show him?" "A people whose Lord has turned His face from them." "And what did he show thee?"

"I do not know." Said they: " A man who does not understand what he is being shown by gesture *עין* 46 should not converse in signs before a king." They led him forth and slew him. 47

Antonius and Rabbi are represented in quite a few places in the Talmud as having carried out some interesting debates on the merits and shortcomings of the Jewish religion. Recently Luitpold Wallach published the results of the study he made of this particular colloquy. He concluded that:

1. The older "Antoninus and Rabbi" traditions of the Rabbinical literature go back to an apocryphal colloquy between Marcus Aurelius Antonius and the Patriarch Judah I.
2. The goal of the fictitious colloquy was to prove an allegedly close relation of the Stoic emperor-philosopher with Judaism and with Rabbi. The Stoic was depicted as an adherent of Judaism and of the Jewish patriarch.
3. The author of the colloquy was a Jewish stoic imbued with Hellenism. He used the writings of Peseidonius of Apameia and the "Self-Contemplations" of Marcus Aurelius.

4. The fragments of the colloquy that have been preserved can be regarded as newly discovered fragments of the lost writings of Poseidonius.⁴⁸

We, in our study, shall however, confine ourselves to the witty aspects of the replies of Rabbi. The most well known of the colloquies includes the famous parable of the cooperation of the blind man and the lame man. The debate started when:

Antoninus said to Rabbi: "The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgement. Thus the body can plead: 'The soul has sinned, (the proof being) that from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave' (powerless to do aught). Whilst the soul can say: 'The body has sinned, (the proof being) that from the day I departed from it I fly about in the air like a bird' (and commit no sin)." He replied, "I will tell thee a parable. To what may this be compared? To a human king who owned a beautiful orchard which contained splendid figs.

Now, he appointed two watchmen therein, one lame and the other blind. (One day) the lame man said to the blind, 'I see beautiful figs in the orchard. Come and take me upon thy shoulder, that we may procure and eat them.' So the lame bestrode the blind, procured and ate them.

Some time after, the owner of the orchard came and inquired of them, 'Where are those beautiful figs?'

The lame man replied, 'Have I then feet to walk with?'

The blind man replied, 'Have I then eyes to see with?'

What did he do? He placed the lame upon the blind and judged them together. So will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, (replace it) in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, 'He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people' (Ps. 50.4) 'He shall call to the Heavens from above' - this refers to the soul; 'and to the earth,' that he may judge his people."⁴⁹

Another question asked by Antoninus is the reason why the sun rises in the East and sets in the West. To this Rabbi very bitingly replies that were the situation reversed (setting in the East and rising in the West), Antoninus would ask the same question just to be obnoxious. The Emperor then clarifies the question:

"This is my question," said he, "Why set in the West?" (rising in any quarter, it should return to the same for the setting--a question possible of course, since the earth was assumed to be flat).

He answered, "In order to salute its Maker, as it is written, 'And the host of heavens make obeisance to Thee'" (Neh. 9.6) (thus, the sun having reached the West, where the Divine Presence is, sinks down in homage, and therefore does not return to the East to set.)

"Then" said he to him, "it should go only as far as mid-heaven, pay homage and then re-ascend," (because it is not etiquette to go right up to one in saluting him).

"On account of workers and wayfarers,"⁵⁰ (Were the sun to set suddenly in mid-heaven, i.e. at midday, they would have no sign when to cease work or halt.)

Rabbi however was gentleman enough to admit that there were a few fields where Antoninus was capable of teaching him a thing or two. The question was raised as to when the soul became part of man, and this is how the discussion proceeded:

Antoninus said to Rabbi, "When is the soul placed in man; as soon as it is decreed (that the sperm shall be male or female, etc.), or when (the embryo) is actually formed?" He replied, "From the moment of formation." He objected: "Can a piece of meat be unsalted for three days without becoming putrid? (Likewise if the sperm-cell is not immediately endowed with a soul, it would become putrid, and then could not fertilize the ovum)

"But it must be from the moment that (God) decrees (its destiny)." Rabbi said: "That thing Antoninus taught me, and Scripture supports him, for it is written, 'And thy decree hath preserved my spirit' (i.e. my soul)." (Job 10.12)⁵¹

A similar story has Antoninus as the teacher and Rabbi as the willing pupil, not only eager to learn but willing to admit that he has learned.

Antoninus also inquired of Rabbi, "From what time does the Evil Tempter hold sway over man; from the formation (of the embryo) or from (its) issuing forth (into the light of the world)?"

"From the formation," he replied. "If so," he objected, "it would rebel in its mother's womb and go forth. But it is from when it issued." Rabbi said: "This thing Antoninus taught me, and Scripture supports him, for it is said, 'At the door (i.e. where the babe emerges) sin lieth in wait.'" (Gen. 4.7)⁵²

Quite a few of the incidents in the Talmud deal with the rituals, sacrifices and customs of the Jews of the time, which were challenged by the Gentiles. The first tells of

A certain Syrian $\delta\kappa\eta\iota\kappa$ (i.e. non-Jew) used to go up and partake of the Passover sacrifices in Jerusalem, boasting: "It is written, 'there shall be no alien eat thereof...no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof' (Ex. 12.43) yet I eat of the very best."

Said R. Judah b. Bathyra to him: "Did they supply you with the fat-tail?" "No," he replied. "(Then) when you journey up thither say to them, 'Supply me with the fat-tail.'"

When he went up he said to them, "Supply me with the fat-tail!" "But the fat-tail belongs (it goes up) to the Most High (it is burnt on the altar)," they replied.

"Who told you (to do) this?" they inquired. "R. Judah b. Bathyra," answered he.

"What is this (matter) before us?" they wondered. They investigated his pedigree, and discovered that he was a Syrian and killed him. (For a non-Jew might not even penetrate beyond a certain point within the Temple precincts on the pain of death).

They they sent a message to R. Judah b. Bathyra: "Peace be with thee, R. Judah b. Bathyra, for thou art in Nisibis yet thy net is spread in Jerusalem."⁵³

"פ'תו'ת'ך נסו'תך פתו'תך"

Of historic interest is the fact that King Jannai is desirous of calling upon someone to "bensch" for the family. We are interested in this incident because of the nature of Simeon b. Shetach's reply to his sister. The story relates that:

King Jannai and his queen were taking a meal together. Now after he had put the Rabbis to death, there was no one to say grace for them. He said to

his spouse: "I wish I had someone to say grace for us." She said to him: "Swear to me that if I bring you one, you will not harm him." He swore to her, and she brought Simeon b. Shetach, her brother (who was a Pharisaic leader and had been in hiding). She placed him between her husband and herself, saying, "See what honour I pay you." He replied: "It is not you who honour me but it is the Torah which honours me as it is written 'Exalt her and she shall promote thee.' (she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her) (Eccles. 11.1)"⁵⁴

Akiba's reply to Tineius Rufus defending the Sabbath was a very effective means of demonstrating the importance of the Sabbath to the Jew.

This question was asked by Turnusrufus (Tineius Rufus, a Roman governor of Judea) of R. Akiba: "Wherein does this day (the Sabbath) differ from any other?" He replied: "Wherein does one man differ from another?" (why is one a noble and one a commoner? - referring to the high office which Rufus held).

"Because my Lord (the Emperor) wishes it." "The Sabbath too, then," R. Akiba rejoined, "is distinguished because the Lord wishes it so." He replied: "I ask this: Who tells you that this day is the Sabbath?"

He answered: "Let the river Sabbath⁵⁵ prove it; let the Ba'al Ob prove it (Who cannot conjure up ■■■)

the dead on that day); let thy father's grave, whence no smoke ascends on the Sabbath,⁵⁶ prove it." He said to him: "You have shamed, disgraced and reviled him (by this proof)."⁵⁷

How the question of circumcision leads to the execution of a heretic is a particularly amusing story in the pages of the Talmud. But let the Talmud tell the story.

The emperor proposed to R. Tanhum, "Come, let us all be one people." "Very well," he answered, "but we who are circumcised cannot possibly become like you (circumcision cannot be effaced entirely); do ye become circumcised and like us."

The emperor replied: "You have spoken well; nevertheless anyone who gets the better of the king (in debate) must be thrown into the vivarium וְאֵלֶּיךָ (the arena)."⁵⁸ So they threw him in, but he was not eaten. Thereupon a heretic remarked: "The reason they did not eat him is that they are not hungry." They threw him (the heretic) in, and he was eaten.⁵⁹

There is an inference of the question of theodicy in a question which Turnus Rufus is supposed to have asked R. Akiba:

"If your God loves the poor, why does He not support them?"

He replied, "So that we may be saved through them from the punishment of Gehinnom." "On the contrary," said the other, "it is this which condemns

you to Gehinnom. I will illustrate by a parable. Suppose an earthly king was angry with his servant and put him in prison and ordered that he should be given no food or drink, and a man went and gave him food and drink. If the king heard, would he not be angry with him? And you are called 'servants' as it is written, 'For unto me the children of Israel are servants!' (Lev. 25.55)

R. Akiba answered him: "I will illustrate by another parable. Suppose an earthly king was angry with his son, and put him in prison and ordered that no food or drink should be given to him, and someone went and gave him food and drink. If the king heard of it, would he not send him a present? And we are called 'sons', as it is written: 'Sons are ye to the Lord your God'. (Deut. 14.11).

He said to him: "You are called both sons and servants. When you carry out the desires of the Omnipresent you are called "sons", and when you do not carry out the desires of the Omnipresent, you are called 'servants'. At the present time you are not carrying out the desires of the Omnipresent."⁶⁰

The question of reincarnation plays a role in an interesting discussion between Cleopatra and R. Meir. It is this writer's feeling that when R. Meir gave his reply, a smile probably flitted across his lips.

Queen Cleopatra (not of Anthony and Cleopatra fame) asked R. Meir, "I know that the dead will revive, for it is written, 'And they (the righteous) shall (in the distant future) blossom forth out of the city (Jerusalem) like the grass of the earth.' (Ps. 72.16--the parenthetical additions gives the sense according to Rabbinic interpretation).

But when they arise, shall they arise nude or in their garments?" He replied, "Thou mayest deduce (the answer) by an a fortiori argument from a wheat grain; if a grain of wheat which is buried naked sprouteth forth in many robes, how much more so the righteous, who are buried in their raiment."⁶¹

Some of the stories about Alexander the Great and his visit to Palestine which appear in the Midrash are full of ethical significance and have in them much wit and much wisdom. One of these incidents appears in the Talmud in which the conqueror seeks to gain entrance into Paradise by the gift of a human skull weighted with gold. The Sages advise him, however, to place some earth upon the eye, thereby making the gift more appropriate saying: "A human eye is not satisfied with all the gold that exists until it is covered with the earth of the grave."⁶²

I have saved for last, two choice morsels which in addition to being very humorous are excellent examples of the defensive joke against the non-Jew. Simon in his recent article pointed out that these jokes "re-exemplify that mood which dominates, or previously dominated, the celebration of Purim, which is unique among our holidays and days of remembrance

in its mood of naive, triumphant resentment. On Purim we react to the fact of Anti-Semitism like the other peoples of the world, by finding fault with the enemy."⁶³

The first incident relates the story of how Resh Lakish outsmarted the Lydians:

Resh Lakish once sold himself to the Lydians. He took with him a bag with a stone in it, because he said, it is a known fact that on the last day they grant any request (of the man they are about to kill) in order that he may forgive them his murder (lit. his blood). (א'נצק סין'א) ⁶⁴

On the last day they said to him, "What would you like?" He replied: "I want you to let me tie your arms and seat you in a row and give each one of you a blow and a half with my bottle." He bound them and seated them, and gave each of them a blow with his bag which stunned them. (One of them) ground his teeth at him. "Are you laughing at me?" he said. "I have still half a bag left for you." So he killed them all and made off."⁶⁵

Our final example portrays a conversation between a magi and Amemar. In this example we can see how effective the arguments were against those who subscribed to the principles of dualism.

A magi (priest of the Zoroastrian religion) *כע'נכ* once said to Amemar: "From the middle of thy (body) upwards thou belongest to Ormuzd (the principle of light, life, and good in the Zoroastrian system,

constantly at war with Ahriman); from the middle downwards to Ahriman,⁶⁶ (who represents darkness, death and evil)."

The latter asked: "Why then does Ahriman permit Ormuzd to send water (the excreta) through his territory."⁶⁷

Rabbinic colloquies with the mighty are not the only examples where the sense of humor plays a part. Many arguments with Minim gave the Rabbis ample opportunity to demonstrate their forensic skill. It is to this subject that we turn our attention now.

CHAPTER V

WIT IN RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES WITH THE SADDUCEES AND THE MINIM

Debates, arguments and discussions took place not only with the mighty, with the kings and philosophers, but also with the common people. Various theories have been advanced as to who the Minim were but it takes us beyond the scope of this paper to try to determine who they actually were. With the exception of one comment, we shall more or less confine our discussion to the wit and the humor which was brought into play in the religious controversies of the time.

R. Abbahu was particularly active in this field of polemics. Zecharia Frankel expresses the opinion in his introduction to the Yerushalmi that the Minim with whom Abuhu had debates were Christians. He says:

יבכ' אקבו דיב פכזב פצנ'פ וי'כוס'פ
 ע' פמ'ני'פ. ופמ'ע'י'ן פמקונות פ'אלב יכאב
 לפמ'ני'פ פ'נצכ'כ'פ א' פ'ין א'נ'ש' אלוני'פ
 פ'מ'צ'פ א'ז' פ'יקנ'פ ע' פ'י' פ'ק'יס'כ
 68 ק'א'נ'ס'ט'י'נ'ס א'ני' ע'פ' ע'אל'פ' פ'מ'ני'ש' "

One story in particular demonstrates how R. Abbahu used wit in his discussion with a Jewish-Christian.

R. Abbahu commended R. Safra to the Minim as a learned man, and he was thus exempted by them

from paying taxes for thirteen years (as honorarium for his work either (a) as teacher of Minim, (b) assistant collector of imperial revenues, (c) simply as a scholar). One day, on coming across him, they said to him: "It is written, 'You only have I known (or loved) from all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities (Amos 3.2)' if one is in anger does one vent it on one's friend?"

But he was silent and could give them no answer; so they wound a scarf around his neck and tortured him. When R. Abbahu came and found him (in this state) he said to them, "Why do you torture him?" Said they, "Have you not told us that he is a great man? He cannot explain to us the meaning of this verse!"

Said he, "I may have told you (that he was learned) in Tannaitic teaching; did I tell you (he was learned) in Scripture?" "How is ^{it} that you know it?" they contended. "We," he replied, "who are frequently with you, set ourselves the task of studying it thoroughly but others, (those of Babylonia), do not study it as carefully."

Said they, "Will you then tell us the meaning?" "I will explain it by a parable," he replied, "To what may it be compared? To a man who is the creditor of two persons, one of them a friend, the other an

enemy; of his friend he will accept payment little by little, whereas of his enemy he will exact payment in one sum (So does God punish Israel only by intermittent visitations)."⁶⁹

One Min tried to catch R. Abbahu in a seeming paradox. This sectarian said to R. Abbahu:

"Your God is a priest, since it is written, 'That they take for me Terumah' (wave offering, Ex. 25.2) (wave offerings were as a rule given to priests). Now when He had buried Moses (Deut. 34.6) wherein did He bathe (after contact with the corpse)? (Lev. 22.4-6).

Should you reply 'in water': is it not written 'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?' (Isa. 40.12) (He could not bathe in water, relatively so scanty compared with Himself)."

"He bathed in fire," he answered, "for it is written, 'Behold the Lord will come in fire'" (Isa. 66.15). "Is then purification by fire effective?" "On the contrary," he replied, "bathing (for purposes of purification) should essentially be in fire, for it is written, 'And all that abideth not the fire, ye shall make to go through the water.' (Num. 31.23; essentially therefore purification is by fire)."⁷⁰

The seeming confusion of instructions given by God to Ezekiel leads to the accusation made by a Min that God was trying to make a fool of

the prophets, but Abbahu was able to answer him successfully:

A certain Min said to R. Abbahu: "Your God is a jester *ינד* (he makes his prophets ridiculous) for He said to Ezekiel, 'lie down on your left side' (Ezek 4.4) and it is also written 'lie on thy right side' (Ezek 4.6)." (Just then) a disciple came and asked him: "What is the reason for the Sabbatical year?" "Now," said R. Abbahu, "I shall give you an answer which will suit you both equally. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, 'Sow your seed six years but omit the seventh, that ye may know that the earth is mine.' (Lev. 25,3,23)

They however did not do so, but sinned and were exiled. Now it is the universal practice that a king of flesh and blood against whom his subjects (lit. his country) have rebelled, if he be cruel, kills them all; if merciful, slays half of them; but if he is exceptionally merciful (lit. a merciful one full of mercy) *פ'נד* *לדן* *ינד* he only chastises the great ones (the leaders). So also the Holy One, blessed be He, afflicted Ezekiel in order to cleanse Israel from their iniquities."⁷¹

Abbahu veiled a curse very cleverly when a Min asked him:

"When will the Messiah come?" He replied, "When darkness covers this people" (alluding to the questioner and his companions). "You curse

me," he exclaimed. He retorted, "It is but a
verse: 'For behold the darkness shall cover the
earth and gross darkness the people: but the
Lord shall shine upon thee, and his glory shall
be seen upon thee.'"72 (Isa. 60.2)

Perhaps the most humorous of the incidents in Abbahu's disputation
was one which involved a play on the word *ḥilē* - joy.

A certain min whose name was Soson once said
to R. Abbahu, "You are destined to draw water for
me in the world to come, for it is written, 'There-
fore 'besason' *ḥilē* shall ye draw water.'" (Isa. 12.3)

If the other retorted, "it had been written,
'Le-sason *ḥilē* for joy' it would be as you say,
but as it is written 'be-sason' (with joy) the mean-
ing must be that a water-skin *ḥilē* will be made
of your skin, and water will be drawn with it."73

Gebiha b. Pesisa who was mentioned in the previous chapter as having
been very active in disputations with kings, also is supposed to have
had quite a heated, nevertheless amusing argument with a Min.

A sectarian (min) said to Gebiha b. Pesisa,
"Woe to you, ye wicked, who maintain that the dead
will revive: if even the living die, shall the
dead live!"

He replied, "Woe to you, ye wicked, who
maintain that the dead will not revive: if what

was not (now) lives, surely what has lived, will live again! Thou hast called me wicked," said he, "If I stood up I could kick thee and strip thee of thy hump!" (there are other interpretations of this passage).

"If thou couldst do that" he retorted, "thou wouldst be called a great doctor and command large fees."⁷⁴

R. Gamaliel too, who was quite prominent in discussions and colloquies with the Emperor, had occasion once to clarify *אגון* to a Min and in so doing showed up the ignorance of the Min.

A certain Min once said to R. Gamaliel: "You are a people with whom its God has performed *אגון* (severed his connection with them) for it is said in Scriptures, 'With their flocks and their herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him: He hath drawn off *אגון* (the shoe) from them.'" (Hos. 5.6)

The other replied: "Fool, it is written: 'He hath drawn off (the shoe) for them?' *אגון*
It is written...from them ^{*אגון*} now in the case of a sister-in-law from whom the brother drew off (the shoe) could there be any validity in the act?"⁷⁵

From the Talmud, it would seem that the usual approach in these debate-discussions with the Minim followed the following pattern: (A)
The Min states this paradox must be true because Scripture states

followed by the (B) reply, invoking another Scriptural passage indicating that there is an answer to the paradox. A good example of just this sort of thing is the conversation between the Min and R. Abina.

A Min once said to R. Abina: "It is written, 'And what one nation in the earth is like Thy People (like) Israel' (II Sam. 7.23). Wherein lies their superiority: ye too are combined with us, for it is written, 'All the nations are as nothing before Him?'" (Isa. 40.17) He answered, "One of yourselves (Balaam) has already testified for us, as it is written, 'And he (Israel) shall not be reckoned amongst the nations,'" ⁷⁶ (Num. 23.9).

Even Beruria was involved in one of these debates but she shows her adversary that he took his passage out of the context to prove his point.

A certain Min (current edition Sadducee) said to Beruria: "It is written: 'Sing, O barren, that thou didst not bear.' (Isa. 54.1). Because she did not bear is she to sing?"

She replied to him: "You fool! Look at the end of the verse, where it is written, 'For the children of the desolate shall be more than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.'" ⁷⁷

The final incident we would like to deal with is the story of a discussion between a Min and R. Ammi in which the Rabbi employs a parable very effectively to prove his point.

A sectarian (Min) said to R. Ammi: "Ye maintain that the dead will revive; but they turn to dust, and can dust come to life?" He replied, "I will tell thee a parable. This may be compared to a human king who commanded his servants to build him a great palace in a place where there was no water or earth (for making bricks).

So they went and built it. But after some time it collapsed; so he commanded them to rebuild it in a place where water and earth was to be found; but they replied, 'We cannot.' Thereupon he became angry with them and said, 'If ye could build in a place containing no water or earth, surely ye can where there is.' (thus if God can make men without these, surely He will be able to resuscitate their dust)"

"Yet," (continued R. Ammi) "If thou dost not believe, go forth into the field and see a mouse, which today is but part flesh and part dust (i.e., only partly formed, it being believed then that there was a species of mice developing from the earth), and yet by tomorrow has developed and become all flesh. And shouldst thou say, 'That takes a long time.' (whereas resurrection must happen in a moment) go up to the mountains where thou wilt see but one snail, whilst by tomorrow the rain has descended and it is covered with snails.

(thus proving that God can create life with great speed).⁷⁸

This concludes our consideration of the wit and humor employed in religious controversies with the Sadducees and the Minim. The field of "enlivening sober debate" which we turn to next, will prove to be a very fruitful one in our search for humor in the Talmud.

CHAPTER VI

HUMOROUS DIGRESSIONS AND THE ENLIVENING OF SOBER DEBATE

The humor we have discussed thus far has been wit pointed against others. However, as we would expect, there are many cases where humor is turned on oneself. In some cases, it takes the form of self criticism and in other--an opportunity to brighten the atmosphere of a legalistic discussion. Humor, very definitely radiated its refreshing influence in the academic halls alike of Jabneh, Pumbeditha and Sura.

Rabbah, it is reported in two places, was in the habit of beginning his discourses with a jocular introduction, in this way animating the spirit of his hearers.⁷⁹ And if Rabbah could begin his lecture with a humorous statement, why shouldn't R. Meir spice the drudgery of a journey by indulging in a pun at the expense of his host.

R. Meir and R. Judah and R. Jose were on a journey together. (R. Meir always paid close attention to people's names, whereas R. Judah and R. Jose paid no attention to them.) Once as they came to a certain place, they looked for a lodging, and as they were given it, they said to him (the Innkeeper): "What is your name?" He replied, "Kidor."

Then he (R. Meir) said: "Therefrom it is evident that he is a wicked man, for it is said: 'For a generation (kidor) very forward are they.' (Deut 32.20)." (The name kidor suggested to R. Meir one who does not deserve confidence. That

as he later explained, was an idiosyncrasy of his own amounting at best to an intuitive caution.)

R. Judah and R. Jose entrusted their purses to him (it was on the eve of Sabbath). R. Meir did not entrust his purse to him, but went and placed it on the grave of that man's father.

Thereupon the man had a vision in his dream (saying) "Go, take the purse lying at the head of this man." In the morning (the Innkeeper) told them (the rabbis) about it saying: "This is what appeared to me in my dream." They replied to him: "There is no substance in the dream of the Sabbath night." (The Sabbath rest gives rise to idle thoughts which are then reflected in dreams.) R. Meir went, waited there all day, and then took the purse with him.

In the morning they (the Rabbis) said to him: "Give us our purses." He said: "There never was such a thing." (lit. - these things never happened)

ר' מירא פ' ד' ר' מירא R. Meir then said to them, "Why don't you pay attention to people's names?" They said, "why have you not told us, (before) sir?" He answered: "I consider this (the suggestion conveyed by the sound of the man's name) but a suspicion; I would not consider that a definite presumption."⁸⁰

Moritz Lazarus points out that much can be learned from the above incident.

This satiric use of a Biblical expression
היכולתו של ר' ז' is incredible if it were not well-attested, ■
should serve as a caution against a too serious weigh-
ing of every Talmudic sentence.⁸¹

R. Alexandri too, like Rabbah was very clever in attracting attention. Realizing that life is a very desirable commodity, he once called out:

"Who wants life, who wants life?" All the
people came and gathered round him saying: "Give
us life!" He then quoted to them, "Who is the
man who desireth life and loveth days that he may ■
see good therein? Keep thy tongue from evile and
thy lips from speaking guile, depart from evil
and do good, seek peace and pursue it." (Ps. 34.13-15)
Lest one say, 'I kept my tongue from evil and my
lips from speaking guile, I may therefore indulge
in sleep.' Scripture therefore tells us, 'Turn
from evil and do good.' By 'good', nought but Torah
is meant; as it is said, "For I have given you a
good doctrine, forsake ye not my Torah."⁸²

The facetious answers which R. Judah gave R. Zera certainly deserve a place in this section devoted to those parts of the Talmud which are very definitely humorous digressions. The story is told that:

R. Zera met Rab Judah standing by the door of his
father-in-law's house and saw that he was in a

cheerful mood, and if he would ask him all the secrets of the universe he would disclose (them) to him.

He accordingly asked him: "Why do goats march at the head (of the flock) and then sheep?" -

Said he to him: "It is as the world's creation, darkness preceding and then light." (Goats are dark colored while sheep are white.)

"Why are the latter covered, while the former are uncovered?" (Sheep have thick tails which cover their hind parts; but goats have a thin tail) "Those with whose (material) we cover ourselves are themselves covered, whilst those wherewith we do not cover ourselves are uncovered."⁸³

A story of how the Jews outsmarted their captors might more properly have belonged in the previous chapter. But it does have its place in this chapter because in the tractate in which they were placed, they seem to serve the purpose of a light moment placed in the midst of difficult debate. The incident is given here in its entirety as it appears in Sanhedrin.

Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that two men (Jews) were taken captive on Mount Carmel, and their captor was walking behind them. One of them said to the other, "The camel walking in front of us is blind in one eye and is laden with two barrels, one of wine, and the other of

oil, and of the two men leading it, one is a Jew the other a heathen."

Their captor said to them, "Ye stiff-necked people, whence do ye know this?" They replied, "Because the camel is eating the herbs before it only on the side where it can see, but not on the other, where it cannot see. It is laden with two barrels, one of wine and the other of oil: because wine drips and is absorbed (into the earth), whilst oil drips and rests (on the surface)!" They had observed two lines of such drops, one absorbed into the earth, and the other remaining on the surface.)

"And of the two men leading it, one is a Jew and the other a heathen: because a heathen obeys the call of nature in the roadway, whilst a Jew turns aside." He hastened after them and found that it was as they had said.

So he went and kissed them on the head (kissing, in ancient days as well as in our own, was often a mark of respect and admiration, not necessarily of affection), brought them into his house and prepared a great feast for them. He danced (with joy) before them and exclaimed, "Blessed be He who made choice of Abraham's seed and imparted to them of His wisdom, and wherever they

go they become princes to their masters." Then he liberated them and they went home in peace.³⁴

Additional proof of how our Sages valued the sense of humor and laughter, in general can be deduced from an incident in which the Rabbis were discussing the second psalm and the statement was made that:

"He that sitteth in heaven laugheth." (Ps. 2.4)

(It was on this that R. Isaac remarked that there is no laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He, except on that day.) But is there not, indeed? Yet Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: "The day consists of twelve hours; during the first three hours the Holy One blessed be He, is occupying Himself with the Torah, during the second three, He sits in judgment on the whole world. When He sees that the world is so guilty as to deserve destruction, He transfers Himself from the seat of Justice to the seat of Mercy; (i.e., instead of meting out punishment, He exercises clemency) during the third quarter, He is feeding the whole world, from the horned buffalo to the brood of vermin; during the fourth quarter He is sporting with the leviathan (a huge sea monster, real according to some but according to others imaginary. We have here a magnification of God's power in sporting with the mightiest, as men do with their animal pets.) as it is said, 'There is leviathan, whom Thou hast formed

to sport therewith?' (Ps. 104.26; hence we see there is laughter before the Lord.)" Said R. Nahman b. Isaac: "Yes, He sports with His creatures, but does not laugh at His creatures except on that day." (The discomfiture of the nations which sought to rule without the restraints of the moral law will prove the most laughter-provoking sight.)⁸⁵

Much jest is to be found in the Talmud on the subject of Daniel and his three companions. The question is asked:

"Whither did the Rabbis go?" (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah after emerging from the furnace are never mentioned again). Rab said: "They died through an evil eye" (belief that eye had power to affect harm). Samuel said: "They drowned in the spittle."⁸⁶

The inference, of course is that when the nations expressed their scorn of the apostates, they spat at them and so much spittle collected that the three heroes were drowned in it. It is hard to believe that this was meant to be taken seriously. One can be reasonably sure that they probably said it in a humorous vein.

Continuing in the humorous vein, the question is asked:

"Whither had Daniel gone?" (Not being mentioned in connection with the spittle story of his three comrades). Rab said: "To dig a great spring at Tiberias." Samuel said: "To procure

animal fodder." R. Johanan said: "To obtain pigs from Alexandria of Egypt" (which were of a distinguished breed- perhaps this is² a sarcastic remark at certain Alexandrians). But that is not so: For we learnt that Theodos the doctor said: "No cow or pig leaves Alexandria of Egypt without its uterus being cut out, to prevent reproduction." (the Alexandrians being anxious for a monopoly of that breed.)

He procured small ones to which they paid no attention. (Not thinking that these would be required for breeding purposes.)⁸⁷

The humor of the situation is of course in the fact that the Rabbis jokingly attribute to Daniel, a Biblical hero, the task of being a pig smuggler.

As could be expected, many of the humorous digressions deal with the subject of women. The marriage of a Babylonian to a woman of little intelligence and the eventual involvement of Baba b. Buta makes an amusing story.

A certain Babylonian went up to the Land of Israel and took a wife (there). "Boil me two (cow's) feet ^{לְבָנִים}", he ordered and she boiled him two lentils (misunderstanding his Babylonian pronunciation and mistaking ^{לְבָנִים} feet for ^{לְבָנִים} lentils.) Another version "Boil me two (meaning same) lentils" and she

boiled him (just) two lentils, taking him literally which infuriated him with her.

The next day he said, "Boil me a griwa" (a large measure of lentils. Thinking that she had intentionally boiled only two the previous day through laziness or meanness, he asked for an extraordinarily large quantity, believing that she would scale it down,) so she boiled him a griwa.

"Go and bring me two bezuni" *בזוני*⁸⁸ (denoting either melons or candles) so she went and brought him two candles. "Go and leave them on the head of babe"⁸⁹ Now Baba b. Buta was sitting on the threshold, engaged in judging a lawsuit. So she went and broke them on his head. Said he to her, "What is the meaning of this that thou hast done?" She replied, "Thus my husband did order me." Thou hast performed thy husband's will," he rejoined, "may the Almighty bring forth from thee, two sons like Baba B. Buta."⁹⁰

This bit of humor might more properly come under the category of humor resulting from play on words but here too, it was felt that the purpose of this story was to put the Rabbis in the proper mood by relating a humorous story.

The ingenuity of R. Ishmael in finding a redeeming feature in an otherwise ugly woman must have caused many a laugh in the halls of the

Academy when it was retold. The story goes:

A man once said to his wife, "Konam, פּוֹיָהּ
that you benefit not from me until you show a be-
coming defect (ought beautiful) in yourself to R.
Ishmael, son of R. Jose. Said he to them (either
to husband and wife or to those who repeated the
matter to him):

"Perhaps her head is beautiful?" "It's round" they replied.

"Perhaps her hair is beautiful?" "It is like stalks of flax."

"Perhaps her eyes are beautiful?" "They are bleared."

"Perhaps her nose is beautiful?" "It is swollen."

"Perhaps her lips are beautiful?" "They are thick"

"Perhaps her neck is beautiful?" "It is squat." פּוֹדָהּ

"Perhaps her abdomen is beautiful?" "It protrudes."

"Perhaps her feet are beautiful?" "They are as broad as
those of a duck."

"Perhaps her name is beautiful?" "It is liklukith (repulsive)."

Said he to them, "She is fittingly called liklukith,
since she is repulsive through her defects; and so he
permitted her (to her husband).⁹¹

In other words, despite the fact that she had no beautiful features,
nevertheless, the fact that her name befitted her was a "becoming de-
fect" - a redeeming factor.

Yes, the Talmud does have humor and humanity and if the reader needs
additional proof he need only read the simple tales related by Joshua ben

Hananiah when he admitted that there had been Jewish children who were ready matches for him. I refer particularly to the saucy little girl who told R. Joshua as he walked through a field that the path on which he was treading had been made by other trespassers like him. Joshua told the story in this way:

"I was once on a journey, and there was a path across a field; I made my way through it, when a little girl called out to me, 'Master! is not this part of the field?' - 'No' I replied, 'this is a trodden path.' 'Robbers like yourself,' she retorted, 'have trodden it down.'"⁹²

An amusing incident pertaining to a little boy was also related

by R. Joshua.

"What was the incident with the little boy?

I was once on a journey when I noticed a little boy sitting at a crossroad. 'By what road,' I asked him 'do we go to the Town?' - 'This one,' he replied 'is short but long and that one is long but short.' I proceeded along the 'short but long' road. When I approached the town I discovered that it was hedged in by gardens and orchards. Turning back I said to him, 'My son did you not tell me that this road was short?' 'And,' he replied, 'did I not also tell you: But long?'

I kissed him upon his head and said to him:

'Happy are you, O Israel, all of you are wise, both young and old.'"⁹³

A slurring reference to what must have been a very healthy appetite preceded these two witty stories of the young boy and the little girl.

R. Joshua ben Hananiah remarked: "No one has ever had the better of me except a woman; a little boy and a little girl. What was the incident of the woman? I was once staying at an inn where the hostess served me with beans. On the first day I ate all of them leaving nothing. On the second day too I left nothing. On the third day she overseasoned (caused to burn) *בשר חמוץ* with salt, and as soon as I tasted them, I withdrew my hand.

"My master," she said to me, "Why do you not eat?" - "I have already eaten," I replied, earlier in the day. "You should then," she said to me, "have withdrawn your hand from the bread." "My master," she continued, "is it possible that you left (the dish today) as compensation for the meals you did not leave earlier, for have not the sages laid down: 'Nothing is to be left in the pot (by the waiter) but something must be left (by the guest) on the plate.'" *אם לא כן הוסיף*

אם לא כן הוסיף
אם לא כן הוסיף

Many of the Rabbis, just like the students of today, felt that too great an emphasis was placed on the importance of a superfluous copulative waw *ו*. In this example, we see the use of satire and sarcasm to prove a point. The legal discussion results from the

discussion of the verse:

"And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the whore." (Lev. 21.9)

"Scripture here speaks of a maiden (naarah who is an arusah)." This is R. Ishmael's opinion. R. Akiba said, "(a priest's daughter) whether an arusah or a nesuah, is excepted (from the punishment of strangulation) but is punished with fire."

■ (At this point, R. Ishmael questions the severity of the sentence.) R. Akiba replied: "My brother, I interpret the 'and the daughter etc.' when it would have been sufficient to say 'the daughter etc.' teaching the inclusion of a nesuah (superfluous waw (and); if this superfluous waw indicates the inclusion of a nesuah then include an unmarried woman too."⁹⁵

R. Jeremiah, in his own way, seemed to be putting on a concerted campaign against some of the very strict legalism which occasionally showed its face. His weapon, however, was a very effective sense of humor. Sometimes he was even expelled from class but he usually managed to prove his point. The story is told in Baba Bathra:

A young pigeon which is found on the ground within 50 cubits from a cote, belongs to the owner of the cote; if found beyond 50 cubits from the cote, it belongs to the finder.

R. Jeremiah raised the question: "If one foot is within 50 cubits and the other beyond, how do we decide?" It was for this that they turned R. Jeremiah out of the Beth Hamidrash.⁹⁶

Another story concerning R. Jeremiah confirms his reputation as a humorist, for even the Talmud admits that the motivation of R. Jeremiah's absurd questions were his desires to provoke laughter. In this instance:

R. Jeremiah inquired of R. Zera: "According to R. Meir who ruled: 'A beast that was in a woman's body is a valid birth,' what is the law where its father (who is entitled to effect the betrothal of his daughter while she is a minor) received for it a token of betrothal? (which is a valid kinyan)."

"In what respect could this ever matter (such an absurd betrothal)."

"In respect of causing its sister to be forbidden (to marry the man who betrothed it; it is forbidden to marry a wife's sister)."

This then presumes (since a wife's sister is forbidden to a man only during the lifetime of his wife) that it is viable! But did not R. Judah citing Rab state: "R. Meir gave his ruling (that an abortion of a beast or wild animal is regarded as valid birth) only because in the case of its own species

⁵
(beat born from beast or wild animal from wild animal) it is viable." (But when a woman aborted such creatures, the question of wife's sisters could not arise in such a case.)

Said R. Aha b. Jacob: "To such an extent did R. Jeremiah try (by his absurd enquiries) to make R. Zera laugh; but the latter did not laugh."⁹⁷
(It is forbidden to indulge in laughter in this world)⁹⁸

One conclusion that is inescapable after reading the story I am about to report is that the learned students of yesterday were just as capable as the not-so-learned students of today at annoying an instructor.

When R. Ammi and R. Assi were sitting before R. Isaac the Smith, one of them said to him: "Will the Master please tell us some legal points?" while the other said: "Will the master please give us some homiletical instruction?"

When he commenced a homiletical discourse he was prevented by the one, and when he commenced a legal discourse, he was prevented by the other.

He therefore said to them: "I will tell you a parable: To what is this like: To a man who has had two wives, one young and one old. The young one used to pluck out his white hair, whereas the old one used to pluck out his black hair. He thus finally remained bald on both sides." ⁹⁹

I don't think that most "legal" books have a story as witty as the story just quoted. There is a story told in the Talmud about R. Zeiri and his landlady, which though it might not have been said in jest presents, nevertheless, a very humorous picture.

Ze'iri deposited some money with his landlady, and while he was away visiting Rab (or the schoolhouse) she died. So he went after her to the cemetery *בית עץ* (lit. court of death) and said to her, "Where is my money?"

She replied to him: "Go and take it from under the ground, in the hole of the doorpost, in such and such a place, and tell my mother to send me my comb and my tube of eye paint by the hand of so and so who is coming here tomorrow. Does not this (that she knew someone else was going to die) show that they know?"¹⁰⁰

Occasionally, in the course of finding these humorous digressions, you find a few that sound so modern and so contemporary that it makes the reader wonder whether these particular incidents were not "planted" by some present-day writer. In this example, an inspector when asked how business was, replies by changing the subject. The reply to his answer leaves one laughing.

Johanan of Hukok ~~was~~ out to some villages (to inspect the crops). On his return he was asked, "Has the wheat crop been successful (lit. comely)?"

"The barley crop has been successful," he replied (by which they might understand that the former was not. He was unwilling actually to state the bad news.)

"Go out and tell it to the horses and asses," they retorted.¹⁰¹ פ'ג'ינוד' פ'ס'וד' דע'ר' ל'ג'

Then we have the seemingly contemporaneous story which might properly be labelled "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." The story relates:

The passage commencing "Make known to Jerusalem her abominations" ה'ג'ר'ג'ת' א'ל' פ'ס'וד' א'ל' ע'ר'ו' (Ezek. 16) is both read and translated.

This is stated to exclude the view of R. Eleazer as it has been taught: "On one occasion a man read in the presence of R. Eliezer, "Make known to Jerusalem her abominations."

He said to him, "While you are investigating the abominations of Jerusalem, go and investigate the abominations of your mother." Inquiries were made into his birth, and he was found to be illegitimate.¹⁰²

The situations which result from the misunderstanding of instructions or the inability to comprehend a veiled allusion are often very humorous. Let us take for instance the story of the kneading of the unleavened bread in Pesahim:

R. Judah said: "A woman must knead (unleavened bread) only with water which was kept overnight."
[Because in Nisan the water in the wells is warm which hastens fermentation. Therefore it must be drawn in the evening before it is required so it can cool off).

R. Mattenai taught this (in a public lecture) at Papunia (a town between Bagdad and Pumpeditha). He lectured in Hebrew using the actual words *yde p'n* (which may mean water belonging to us or urine).

On the morrow all took their pitchers and repaired to him and demanded of him "Give us water." Said he to them, "I meant with water which has been kept overnight."¹⁰³ (*yde p'n*)

Then we have the very fascinating story of R. Simeon bar Yochai's son who thought he was cursed but then discovers, thanks to his father's ingenuity, that in actuality he had been blessed.

R. Simeon bar Yochai, feeling that they (men he saw) were men of importance told his son to go along with them that they might bless him.

They asked him "What is your business here?" He replied: "Father told me, 'Go along with them that they may bless you.'"

Said they to him: "May it be (heaven's) pleasure that you sew and mow *ג'ון*, not; that what you bring in, go not out; that what goes out, you bring not in;

that your house be desolate and your inn be inhabited;
that your board be disturbed and you behold not a new
year."

When he came home to his father, he said to
him: "So far were they from blessing me, that they
(even) distressed me sorely." *כי כבודי לא יצא*

His father asked him: "What did they say to you?"
They said thus and thus. Said the father to him:
"These are all blessings. That 'you sow and mow not'
(means) that you beget children and they do not die.
That 'what you bring in go not out' (means) that you
bring home daughters-in-law and your sons do not die,
so that your wives need not leave again. 'What
goes out you bring not in' (means) that you give
your daughters (in marriage), and their husbands do
not die, so that your daughters need not come back.
'That your house be desolate and your inn be inhabited'
(means) that the world is your inn and the other world
(the sepulchre) is a home. 'That your board be dis-
turbed' (that is) by sons and daughters and that 'you
behold not a new year' (means) that your wife do not
die and you have not to take you a new wife."¹⁰⁴

Again, as in previous chapters, we have saved for final considera-
tion a particularly choice humorous morsel about the learned R. Zera
who could not understand why anyone would ever repeat the Shema and

it fell upon R. Papa's broad shoulders to try to offer some explanation.

Now, on with the story.

R. Papa said to him: "But perhaps (the reason why he repeats) is because at first he was not thinking of what he said and now he does think? He (R. Zera) replied: Is he to treat heaven like an ordinary acquaintance *כ'נ"ל ע"ב חקירות* (lit. intimacy toward heaven?). If he does not think of what he is saying, I will hit him with a blacksmith's hammer till he does think.¹⁰⁵ *א"ת"ר ד' דנ"ר 36 א"ר"ר א"ר"ר*

ש"ס ח"נ

We have seen in this chapter on humorous digressions and the enlivening of sober debate that the humor of the Talmudist was age-old and every bit of wit usually added some illuminating philosophic observation to the discussion. For the most part the humor was never particularly rough and hateful.

In the next chapter we will discover that men in general have never changed and that fairly often, humorous discussions in the Talmud revolved about women and sex.

CHAPTER VII

EROTICA

Much of the humor of the Talmud has to do with sayings and incidents on the relations of the sexes. Some of this humor, because of its nature would probably not be able to get by a Hollywood censor.

However, for us they do serve the purpose of indicating in no uncertain fashion that the Rabbis of old, though they were teachers and masters, were always ready and capable of displaying the saving grace of humor.

I particularly like the decision that is made in the Talmud on the perennial question of whether it is up to man to pursue woman or woman to seek the male. I do believe that R. Dostai was doing a little ribbing of his own in the instance I am about to give, but I feel that the reader will agree that there is reason in his ribbing.

R. Dostai son of R. Jannai was asked by his disciples: "Why (in matrimony) does a man go in search of a woman and no woman goes in search of a man?" "This is analogous to the case of a man who lost something. Who goes in search of what? He who lost the things goes in search of what he lost." (the rib from which Eve was built was taken from Adam).

"And why does the man lie face downwards and the woman face upwards toward the man?" "He [faces the elements) from which he was created (the earth)

and she (faces the man) from whom she was created (the rib)."

"And why is man easily pacified and a woman is not easily pacified?" "He (derives his nature) from the place from which he was created (earth which yields) and she (derives hers) from the place from which she was created (the unyielding bone of a rib)."

"Why is a woman's voice sweet and a man's voice is not sweet?" "He (derives his) from the place from which he was created (a beat upon the earth produces no note) and she (derives hers) from the place which she was created (a bone can be made to produce certain notes)." Thus it is said, "For sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." (Cant. 2.14)¹⁰⁶

We shall confine ourself in the first section of this chapter to humorous, provoking but usually true comments on the nature of women. R. Joshua, for instance is responsible for the rather witty comment that: "A woman prefers one kab (metaphorical for a scanty livelihood) and sexual indulgence to nine kab (luxurious style of living) and continence."¹⁰⁷

One can't help but feel that the following statement made in Bera-koth must have caused many a chuckle when it was delivered. It certainly causes the modern man to smile and perhaps, laugh. I refer to the statement made that:

A man should not walk behind a woman on the road (to avoid unchaste thoughts) and even if his wife happens to be in front of him on a bridge he should let her pass on one side, and whoever crosses a river behind a woman will have no portion in the future world. (Because the woman in crossing will naturally lift up her dress.)¹⁰⁸

R. Gidal must have been an interesting character if one considers the following story about him at its face value.

R. Gidal was accustomed to go and sit at the gates of the bathing place (where the women took their ritual bath). He used to say to the women (who came to bathe): "Bathe thus or bathe thus." The Rabbis said to him: "Is not the Master afraid lest his passion get the better of him?" He replied: "They look to me like so many white geese."¹⁰⁹

The description of the nature of Rahab as a woman and the comments on her "sex appeal" serve as an excellent transition to our second section of "erotica" - Relations Between Him and Her.

Our Rabbis taught: "Rahab inspired lust ^{וְרַחַב} by her name; Jael by her voice; Abigail by her memory; Michal, daughter of Saul, by her appearance." "R. Isaac said: "Whoever says, "Rahab, Rahab" at once has an issue ^{וְרַחַב}. Said R. Nahman to him: "I say 'Rahab, Rahab' and nothing happens to me." He replied, "I was speaking of one who knew her and is intimate with her."¹¹⁰

In addition to Rahab, the relations between David and Bath Sheba, when Abishag teased him, became one subject on which the Rabbis let their respective imaginations run wild. The story is told that:

She (Abishag) said to him (David), "Let us marry", but he (David) said: "Thou art forbidden to me." (Since he had already the allotted number of wives) "When courage fails the thief, he becomes virtuous"¹¹¹ *א'ע"ג א'ר'ד'ס ו'כ"ח ב'ק'י א'נ'ע'ס*
(so taunting him with impotence), she gibed. Then he said to them (his servants), "Call me Bath Sheba." And we read: "And Bath Sheba went to the king into the chamber" (I Ki. 1.15). Rab Judah said in Rab's name: "On that occasion Bath Sheba dried herself thirteen times." (they had intercourse).¹¹²

א'נ'ע'ס א'ר'ד'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס א'נ'ע'ס

Very often, in discussing a very serious matter, the nature of the subject would sometimes result in remarks that were not meant to be taken seriously, or sometimes the quotation is particularly funny because of the context in which it is found.

For instance, in a very serious discussion on the matter of adultery and circumstantial evidence connected therewith, the question arises:

How long is the duration in the matter of seclusion? Sufficient for misconduct, i.e., sufficient for coition, i.e., sufficient for sexual contact, i.e., sufficient for a person to walk round a date

palm. Such is the view of R. Ishamel.

R. Eliezer says: "Sufficient for preparing a cup of wine (by diluting it with water)."

R. Joshue says: "Sufficient to drink it;"

Ben. Azzai: "Sufficient to swallow it."

R. Judah b Bathyra says: "Sufficient to swallow three eggs one after the other."

R. Eleazer b. Jeremiah says: "Sufficient for a weaver to knot a thread."

Hanin b. Phineas says: "Sufficient for a woman to extend her hand to her mouth to remove a chip of wood (from between the teeth)."

Palermo says: "Sufficient for her to extend her hand to a basket and take a loaf therefrom."¹¹³

Obviously some of the remarks made, i.e., "sufficient for a person to walk around a date palm" were probably said facetiously or at least were accompanied by a smile on the lips of the originator of the statement.

There is one discussion in Yebamoth in which the whole discussion seemingly takes place accompanied by seriousness but this writer feels that when Rabbah made his statement concerning accidental insertion, a burst of laughter arose.

The question under discussion is:

If a man cohabited with his deceased brother's wife, even if he acted in error or under compulsion he constitutes thereby a kinyan (the widow is deemed

to be his legal wife).

R. Hiyya asks: "How is one to understand the action under compulsion in our Mishna?" Raba stated: "There can be no compulsion in sexual intercourse since erection depends entirely on the will." But when he slept?"¹¹⁴ (Pashi...when in a state of erection the man fell from a raised bench upon his sister-in-law who happened to be below).

Surely Rabbah stated: "One who fell from a roof and his fall resulted in accidental insertion, is liable to pay an indemnity (to the woman with whom the accidental contact had taken place); and if the woman was his sister-in-law, no kinyan is thereby constituted (by the accidental contact; she does not become his lawful wife)"

(Intercourse under compulsion is possible) when, for instance his intention was intercourse with his wife and (while he was in the state of erection) his sister-in-law seized him and he cohabited with her.¹¹⁵

R. Abbahu as we have noted was famous for bringing wit into service during the course of his instruction. In this story about R. Elai, he demonstrates an excellent ability at word-play.

The Rabbis said to R. Abbahu: "Show us where R. Elai is hiding." He replied, "He amused himself

with an Aaronide girl his last keen companion, and she kept him awake."

Some say this referred to a woman and others say

that it referred to a tractate.¹¹⁶

וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עִוְבֵי אַהֲרֹן

In other words some read "אֲשֶׁר" as "אֲהֹן" and insist that he

married a second wife who was of keen disposition and she kept him awake. Others, however, place him on a higher pedestal and claim that he was engaged all night in the study of his last chosen tractate dealing with priestly "Aaronide" laws which bristle with keen dialectical arguments. Rashi, however, was quite willing to call a spade a spade and commenting on the word "אֲשֶׁר" he says: "

"אֲשֶׁר" אֵינוֹ אֶלֶּם אֲהֹן

The final story in this second section of "Erotica" entitled "Between Him and Her" deals with the sad story of the temptation of R. Hiyya b. Abba which finds a place in our study because the story has some humorous overtones.

Everytime R. Hiyya b. Abba fell upon his face

(in Talmudic times after the Eighteen Benedictions

each person prayed privately for whatever he desired)

he used to say, "The Merciful save us from the Tempter."

One day his wife heard him. "Let me see," she re-

flected, "it is so many years that he has held aloof

from me: why then should he pray thus (surely he

can restrain his passions)!"

One day while he was studying in his garden, she adorned herself and repeatedly walked up and down before him. "Who are you?" he demanded. "I am Harutha (a well-known prostitute of that town) and have returned today," she replied. He desired her. Said she to him, "Bring me that pomegranate from the uppermost bough." He jumped up, went and brought it to her.

When he re-entered his house, his wife was firing the oven, whereupon he ascended and sat in it. "What means this?" she demanded. He told her what had befallen. "It was I" she assured him; but he paid no heed to her until she gave him proof (the pomegranate)↓ "Nevertheless," said he, "my intention was evil." (Lit. for a forbidden thing) 117

"יִישׁוּעַ כִּדְבִיר" "

As far as this writer could determine there were no sections or incidents in the Talmud which ridicule the institution of marriage. What we do have, however, are some very witty sayings and some amusing incidents about the marriages of the Rabbis.

There is a wonderful statement about the course of love and marriage which sums up beautifully the ups and downs of married life. The writer says:

When love was strong (between my wife and myself) we could have made our bed on the width of a sword-blade; now that our love has grown weak,

a bed of sixty cubits is insufficient for us.¹¹⁸

The insight which the Talmudists had in the advantages of a happy marriage can best be seen in the statement:

Three things increase a man's self-esteem

(lit. enlarge his spirit) 1287 /ג'0211

a beautiful dwelling, a beautiful wife, and beautiful clothes.¹¹⁹

Not only did they have insights into a happy marriage but they were well aware of and were willing to accept the weakness of the scholar as a human being. Our Rabbis taught:

A baal keri on whom nine kabs of water have been thrown is clean. Nehum, a man of Gimzu, whispered to R. Akiba, and R. Akiba whispered it to Ben Azzai and Ben Azzai went forth and repeated it to the disciples in public. Two Amoraim in the West differed in regard to this; R. Jose b. Abin and R. Jose b. Zebida. One stated: "He repeated it," and one taught, "He whispered it." The one who taught "he repeated it" held that the reason (for the concession) was to prevent neglect of the Torah and of procreation. The one who taught "he whispered it" thought that the reason was in order that scholars might not always be with their wives like cocks (and therefore he did not want it to be well known among the scholars.)¹²⁰

A most amusing and amazing story concludes our section on "Erotica". The reason for the use of the word "amusing" will be obvious after the

section is read. "Amazing" as an adjective was used because this writer is pleasantly overwhelmed by the candidness of the Rabbis on a seemingly unfitting subject for a legal tome.

R. Kahana once went in and hid under Rab's bed. He heard him chatting (with his wife) and joking and doing what he required. He said to him: "one would think that Abba's mouth had never sipped the dish before!" He said to him: "Kahana, are you here? Go out, because it is rude (lit. it is not the way of the world)." *"כבוד הדין"* He replied: It is a matter of Torah, and I require to learn.¹²¹

Just one more proof in the cavalcade of evidence which we have thus far presented in our study of humor in the Talmud.

CHAPTER VIII

JOKING EXAGGERATIONS IN THE TALMUD

Many abuses and arguments which seem to have met a dead end, and are perfectly capable of resisting the combined assaults of reason and denunciation, often yield to the genial onslaught of humor. We have had some examples of this type of humor, c.g., the accidental insertion discussed in Yehemoth 53B and 54A, which were placed in other chapters because the exaggeration aspect of the story was not the major factor involved. Here, in this chapter we find a few examples where the overstatement is the major humorous element in the entire incident. For instance, the question is raised in Menahos:

Plimi asked Rabbi: "If one has two heads, on which one shall he place the phylacteries?"
He answered (him): "Let him remove his head or be cursed (receive excommunication)."¹²²

The whole subject of the place of exaggeration in our literature is discussed very thoroughly in one tractate of the Talmud. The section begins:

An apple tree *אפל* was in the center of the altar, containing at times as much as 300 measures. Raba said this is an exaggeration *אין אדם* (Rashi - not meant to be taken literally for it never had 300 measures).

R. Ammi said: The Torah speaks in exaggerations

(in rhetorical speech) 'מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. The prophets speak in exaggeration. The sages speak in exaggeration.

The sages as mentioned above. The Torah as in Deut. 1.28, "Large fortified cities are in heaven." The prophets as in Malachi 1.1 "The Earth shook at his voice."

Samuel said: In Three places, the sages speak in an exaggerated manner. Namely (1) the apple tree, (2) the golden vine, and (3) the curtains אֲרָזִים at the entrance to the Temple.¹²³

However, the master of exaggeration in the Talmud was without a doubt Rabbah b. Bar Hana who in his own right can be given the title of the first Baron Munchausen. Various studies have been made as to the meaning of these overstatements, none of which have been generally accepted. It would take us beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the meaning of these "tall stories".

We shall consider them rather as excellent examples of "hyperbole". In these stories, very wittily and very cleverly, Rabbah was able to "put a thing across" by veiling specific allusions that might have resulted in bodily harm for the author.

One of the most amusing of all of the stories was the one in which Rabbah said:

Rabbah said: "I saw an antelope, one day old, that was as big as Mount Tabor." "(How big is Mount Tabor?)" - "Four parasangs." 'וְעַד
"The length of its neck (lit. stretching) אֲרָזִים אֲרָזִים

was three parasangs, and the resting place of its head (i.e., when resting on the ground) was one parasang and a half. It cast a ball of excrement *קדו'ס קנ'ו* and blocked up the Jordan."¹²⁴

I have yet to see this next story matched in any literature.

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: "Once we were travelling on board a ship and saw a fish whose back was covered with sand out of which grew grass. Thinking it was dry land (one of the sea islands) we went up and baked and cooked, upon its back. When, however, its back was heated, it turned, and had not the ship been nearby, we should have been drowned."¹²⁵

Most of the overstatement seems to take place on the sea or on a ship.

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further related: "Once we travelled on board a ship and we saw a bird standing up to its ankles in the water while its head reached the sky. We thought the water was not deep (lit. there was no water) and wished to go down to cool ourselves, but a Bath Kol called out 'Do not go down here for a carpenter's axe was dropped (into this water) seven years ago and it has not (yet) reached the bottom'. And this, not (only) because the water is deep but (also) because it is rapid."¹²⁶

There can be no doubt that these stories are allegories on the political and social conditions of the time. But even read as pure stories, the joking exaggeration which can be found in them, gives us much to be amused about.

In the story about to be related, Hormin is described as a champion juggler in typical Munchausen terms.

Rabbah said: "I saw how Hormin (Hormiz) (evil demon), the son of Lillith (female night demon) was running on the parapet of the wall of Mahuza, and a rider, galloping below on horseback could not overtake him. Once they saddled for him two mules which stood on two bridges of the Rognag (name of a river) and he jumped from one to the other, backward and forward, (lit. from this to that and from that to this) 'lcəḏ 'kəN/ 'kəḏ 'kəN holding in his hands two cups of wine, pouring alternately from one to the other, and not a drop fell to the ground."127

Most of the objects described in these hyperboles always seem to be of gargantuan proportions. For instance:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: "Once we were travelling on board a ship and saw a fish in whose nostrils a parasite (a mud-eater, a parasite living on fishes) had entered (and killed the fish). Thereupon the water cast up the fish and threw it upon the shore.

Sixty towns were destroyed thereby, sixty towns ate therefrom, and sixty towns salted (the remnants thereof, and from one of its eyeballs three hundred kegs of oil were filled. On returning after twelve calendar months (lit. months of the year) we saw that they were cutting rafters from its skeleton and proceeding to rebuild those towns."¹²⁸

And similarly there is the fort-sized frog.

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: "I saw a frog the size (lit. which was) of the fort of Hagronia. (What is the size of the Fort of Hagronia? - Sixty houses) There came a snake and swallowed the frog. Then came a raven and swallowed the snake, and perched (lit. and went up and sat) *ר'א' פ'לוי* on a tree."

(*ל'גן אב*) Imagine (come and see) how strong was the tree. R. Papa b. Samuel said: "Had I not been there I would not have believed it."¹²⁹

It should be noted and this may be of significance in the analysis of the implications of these stories, that in the last story and the one about to be related, Rabbah has other Rabbis confirm his observations.

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: "We travelled once on board a ship, and the ship sailed between one fin of the fish and the other for three days and three nights; it (swimming) upwards (i.e.,

against the wind) and we floating downwards (i.e. sailing with the wind).

And if you think the ship did not sail fast enough, R. Dimi, when he came, stated that it covered sixty parasangs in the time it takes to warm a kettle of water. When a horseman shot an arrow (the ship) outstripped it." And R. Ashi said: This was one of the small sea monsters(*תנין קטן*) which have (only) two fins.¹³⁰

There can be little doubt that these hyperboles like some other Jewish jokes had the task of self-defense. They served to protect the Jew against the hostile enemy. We turn now in our survey to a rich source of Talmudic humor: the play on words.

CHAPTER IX

ETYMOLOGICAL PLAY ON WORDS, PARABLES AND PARODY

It would be best for us to define what we mean by "etymological play on words." The simpler term for the $\frac{1}{4}$ word description we are using is a "pun". Leacock clarifies why a pun causes humor when he says:

In the case of the pun, the contrast or incongruity that makes humor is got from the fact that one and the same sound means two different things, and hence the word brings into connection two things that really have nothing to do with one another.¹³¹

It should be noted that there is a special characteristic of Hebrew, as a Semitic language which allows for a wide variety of word-play. In fact, there are many who have held that Jewish wit consists above all, in the pun or play on words.

This idiosyncrasy of Hebrew as a language which lent itself to much word-play was explicated very clearly recently in an article by Simon. He explained that:

The English auxiliary verbs are expressed in Hebrew by various modifications of the simple verb-roots, and the same applies when the intensification of an action is to be expressed, etc. In general, a great number of meanings in highly varied, very often antithetical sense unfold from each other for the first time, only after the insertion of the "dots" or

"points" which serve as vocalization aids; in the "undotted" text the precise meaning can often be made out only from the context. Thus, a person who makes a pun is speaking, as it were, "unpunctuatedly," and shoots derivatives, with meanings as removed from each other as possible, back into the original concept-roots. If the two there forcefully bump each other head on, as fighters do, the neutrally observing third person sneers at the obvious identity between the sound and the meaning of a word, an identity which is the hidden basis of puns.¹³²

The Hebrew "punner" then has unlimited possibilities at taking a word at its "sounding" worth and exhaustively exploiting its many meanings. Because of this special nature of Semitic languages it will be necessary for us in many cases to give the original Hebrew or Aramaic text, in addition to the English translation.

Thus, for example we learn in Pesachim:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana said in R. Johanan a name in the name of R. Judah b. R. Ilai: 'Eat onions and dwell in the protection of your house (Do not spend overmuch on food then you will be able to afford your house), and do not eat geese and fowls lest your heart pursue you.' (Do not cultivate a greedy appetite so that you always want to eat.)

When Ulla came, he said: "In the West (Pal-
 estine) a proverb is current: 'He who eats the fat
 tail (alitha) must hide in the loft, (he who
 squanders his money on costly dishes must hide from
 his creditors) but he who eats cress may lie by
 the dunghill of the town' (afraid of none by virtue
 of not being in debt)."¹³³

From the translation the advice does not seem to be particularly
 witty but when one realizes that through the clever use of 13 words,
 Rabbah expressed all of the thoughts of the above quoted paragraph,
 you can begin to understand the unlimited possibilities of the Hebrew
 language. The Hebrew reads:

אכילת אכילת אכילת אכילת
 אכילת אכילת אכילת אכילת
 אכילת אכילת אכילת אכילת

Similarly the Talmud quotes a statement of Resh Lakish:

קודם קודם קודם קודם
 קודם קודם קודם קודם
 קודם קודם קודם קודם

which is translated:

"Gather yourselves together, yes, gather."

which Resh Lakish translated, "First adorn your-
 self and then adorn others."

This entire statement has significance only if we realize that
 Resh Lakish connected " קודם " - to gather, the root of " קודם " with
 " קודם ", to adorn, inferring therefore that a person should be
 just himself, before demanding it of others.

Very often, the Rabbis took a Biblical statement and by ingenious word-play derive some very significant meanings. For instance, R. Joseph takes a verse in Hosea and says:

יֵשׁוּעַ מִן הַיָּד הַזֹּאת וְיֵשׁוּעַ מִן הַיָּד הַזֹּאת וְיֵשׁוּעַ מִן הַיָּד הַזֹּאת

to be translated:

My people ask counsel of their stock, and their staff (יֵשׁוּעַ) declareth unto them (Hos. 4.12) whoever is lenient (יֵשׁוּעַ) to him, to him he concedes (right).¹³⁵

Thus, very wittily, R. Joseph has connected the word " יֵשׁוּעַ " a staff, with the word " יֵשׁוּעַ " he is lenient.

Occasionally a name is taken and by virtue of a linguistic play on the root letters of the name, a meaning is derived which can be identified with the character of the person. For instance:

It has been taught: Rabbi says: If her name had not been called Delilah (דִּלְיָה) she was fit that it should be so called. She had weakened (דִּלְיָה) his strength, and she weakened his heart, she weakened his actions. ¹³⁶

Similarly R. Abuhu remarks concerning a woman named Tamar who according to Jastrow informed against the Rabbis before the Roman authorities,

Tamar is אֲמָרָה bitterness, she abides in her bitterness אֲמָרָה and we tried to sweeten her (by bribe) but in vain has the smelter smelted (gold could not buy her).¹³⁷

We also find in the Yerushalmi this word-play statement about Kimhit, the mother of seven great priests:

"כסו סתמי קצ וקומי, חק קתמי ב"

to be translated:

All flours are flour but the flour of Kimhit is fine flour.¹³⁸

A rather unusual play on words is found in:

The case of R. Adda b. Ahaba who saw a heathen woman wearing a red head-dress (mantle - ככר) in the street and thinking that she was an Israelite woman, he rose and tore it from her. It turned out that she was a heathen woman, and they fined him four hundred zuz. He said to her: What is your name. She replied; Mathun מנח Mathun, he said to her: that makes four hundred zuz.¹³⁹

The meaning here becomes clear if we understand that the Aramaic for two hundred is "mathun" (מנח). מנח also means deliberate and Adda infers that had he been less rash, he would have saved himself four hundred zuz.¹⁴⁰ In a sense, we had in the last example a double play on words.

An excellent example of the fact that all was not seriousness with the Rabbis particularly when it came to play on words, is the story in Sukkol.

There were once two minim פ'י' one was called Sason סס and the other Simha סמח. Said Sason to Simha, "I am better than you since it is written,

'They shall obtain sason and simha.'" (Isa. 35.10)

"I" said Simha to Sason, "am better than you since it is written, 'The Jews had 'simha and sason!'"

"One day," said Sason to Simha, "they will take you out and make you a runner, *קפידו* since it is written, 'For with simha shall they go forth'" (Is. 55.12).

"One day," said Simha to Sason, "they will take you out and draw with you water, for it is written, 'Therefore with Sason shall ye draw water.'" (Isa. 12.3)¹⁴¹

In the "simha-sason" story we have an example of word play where it became possible not only to use words to call up a funny or ridiculous idea, but to get fun out of the words themselves.

At times we find that the word-play is rather crude. An example of this type is to be found in Eullin:

*יין דאס איז א גוטער
דראק און א גוטער דראק*

to be translated:

Where do we find a reference to Esther in the Torah? In the statement, "I will surely hide my face."¹⁴²

Here the humor seems to be derived only from the similarity in sound of "Esther" and "Hes-ter" (meaning to hide).

However, most of the examples that we have discussed, and those which we shall discuss do make use of cleverer techniques. R. Akiba, for example, was able to lift one of his pupils out of a melancholy

mood by virtue of some clever wordplay.

A pupil of R. Akiba was sitting with a saddened face. "What have you?" (what is wrong) (asked his teacher of him)

"I saw in a dream three things which forebode evil," answered the pupil. "I will die in the month of Adar, I did not see Nissan (which follows) and what I planted I did not harvest."

"(On the contrary)" answered Akiba, "all three will be for the good. In the majesty of the law you will be uplifted (a play on the words majesty - גָּדְלוֹ Adar - אָדָר). You will not be put under test in Nissan (a play on נִסָּיוֹן test and יָסוּד - month) and you will not bury the child that will be born to you."¹⁴³

There are two excellent examples of paranomasia that can be found in Yerushalmi Sotah. The first is a very clever play on " קָדְמוֹת " and reminds one of "veni, vidi, vicet". The statement begins:

"Remember your creator" קָדְמוֹת (Eccles. 12.1)

This last term can be read in שְׁלֹשָׁה three ways (in the Hebrew Text)

1. Your place of origin קָדְמוֹת - the place from which you came.
2. Your pit קָדְמוֹת - the place to which you are going.
3. Your creator קָדְמוֹת - he to whom you will have to account for your actions.¹⁴⁴

The second example in Yerushalmi Sotah can only be understood if we do not forget that in Hebrew the word "head" and "beginning" are ex-

pressed by the same word " עקו ".

R. Meir asked why does it say in Ecclesiastes

2. 14 that the "sage has his eyes on his head

יעקו?" Does the fool have his eyes in his feet?

R. Abba Marc explained, "When he only knows the beginning of the subject ~~עקו~~ עקו, he (immediately) knows what will happen at the end." 145

A Midrashic explanation results from the play on words made by Raba with a Biblical verse:

Raba points out this contradiction: The text is written *נחל'* (root-meaning happy, whilst we read *נחל'*) - destruction. If he is meritorious it makes him happy, if not it makes him desolate. 146

Here is a difference between the text and the pronunciation with special significance to both meanings.

R. Hanina, too, derives an interesting explanation of a difficult *keri-ksiv* on the basis of a simple play on words. He points out that:

It is written *יעו* and we read *יעו*. R. Hanina said: The righteous eat it at ease *יעו* (the word may be traced to root meaning ease) whereas when the wicked eat it, it is unto them like thorns *יעו* (Aramaic equivalent of the reading means "thorn"). 147

However, to confine Hebrew paranomasia to word-play only on the basis of the root and its variations would be unfair. We have examples of witty word play which result from considering a word to be merely an

abbreviation of what the word actually stands for. For example:

R. Isaac citing R. Ammi stated: "When a male comes into the world his provision comes with him, (The Hebrew for) male (זכר) being composed of the consonants of the words for) 'this is provision' (זכר ופרנסה), for it is written, 'And he prepared a great provision זכר ופרנסה (kera) for them.' (II Ki. 6.25)

A female has nothing with her, (the Hebrew for) female (נקבה) implying 'she comes with nothing', (נקבה בלי דבר). Unless she demands her food nothing is given to her, for it is written, 'Demand נקבה from me thy wages and I will give it.'" (Gen. 30.28)¹⁴⁸

Not only the mature heroes and leaders of Judaism have displayed keen wit and clever play on words in the course of their controversies, but even little children gave evidence of ready wit. Of this nature are the playful allusions on the physical characteristics of the alphabet made by one of the pupils.

The Rabbis told Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: "Children have come to the Beth Hamidrash and said things the like of which was not said even in the days of Joshua the son of Nun. (Thus) alef beth means learn wisdom א' ב' ; gimmel dalet show kindness to the poor ג' ד' ; why is the foot of the gimmel stretched toward the dalet? Because it is fitting for the benevolent to run after (seek out) the poor. And why is the roof of the dalet stretched out toward

the gimmel? Because he (the poor) must make himself available to him (and not trouble his benefactor too much to find him).

And why is the face of the dalet turned away from the gimmel? Because he must give him help in secret (as though with averted face) lest he be ashamed of him.

He Waw, that is the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. Zayin, Heth, teth, yod, kaf, lamed: (this sequence teaches, and if thou doest thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, will sustain thee, be gracious unto thee, show goodness to thee, give thee a heritage (*וְיָרַד*), and bind a crown (*וְיָצַק*) on thee in the world to come.

The open mem and the closed mem (denote) open teaching (*מִן הַיָּם*) and closed esoteric teaching (*מִן הַיָּם*) (that which men are forbidden to seek).

The bent nun and the straight nun: The faithful if bent (humble) (will ultimately be) the faithful, the straightened (Rashi says: upright in the world to come).

Samek, ayyin: Support *פִּינּוּ* the poor. *פִּינּוּ*
Another interpretation: devise mnemonics *פִּינּוּ* in the Torah and (thus) acquire (memorize) it.

The bent pe and the straight pe (intimate) an open mouth *פִּי* and a closed mouth *פִּי* (the medial bent pe is almost closed).

A bent zadde and a straight tzaddi; the righteous ז'ז is bent in this world; the righteous is straightened (in the next world).

Kuf stands for kadash (holy).

Resh for ^{שׁ}wicked. Why is the face of the kuf averted from the resh? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'I cannot look at the wicked.' And why is the crown of the kuf (the upward turn of the tittle on the upper line of the kuf) turned toward the resh? The Holy One, blessed be He said: 'If he repents, I will bind a crown on him like Mine.'

And why is the foot of the Kuf suspended (not joined to the rest of the letter? (to show) that if he repents he can enter and be brought in (to God's favour) through this (opening).

Shin (stands for) שׁ falsehood.

Taw (for) אמת truth. Why are the letters of Sheker close together whilst those of Emeth are far apart ('a' being the first, 'm' the middle and 's' the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet). Falsehood is frequent, truth is rare (instances of truth are found only at distant intervals). And why does falsehood stand on foot, whilst truth has a brick like foundation (שׁ - shin used to be written this way). The 'emes" are firmly set resting on two ends. Truth can stand, falsehood cannot stand." 1149

The use of the abbreviation principle is especially apparent in a masterpiece of word play which appears in Sabbath. It will be necessary in order to make sense out of this quotation to give the Hebrew in all cases.

- The word entrance *קוץ* implies there is a way *אם יבנה*
- The word stairs, ladder *לדב* implies a way to the roof *עד יבנה*
- The words, a relish *אמרי'כח* imply when will this end (relishes being used sparingly and lasting a long time) *אם תכלה*
- The word a house *אד'ר* implies come and sit therein *אם וא'ת'ר*
- The words 'a small house' *אד'ר'ק* imply a confined narrow house (Rashi) *אם ק'ר*
- The words 'an inverted vessel' *אד'ר'ק* imply (a low seat, invert it and sit down) *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word bricks *אד'ר'ק* implies unto children's children (lasting many generations) *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word prickly shrubbery, hedge *אד'ר'ק* implies barrier *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word pitcher *אד'ר'ק* is so called because it draws water from the river. *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word small jug *אד'ר'ק* implies like this (give us a glass this size to drink) *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word myrtle branch *אד'ר'ק* implies folly (people danced there-with at the wedding and looked like fools in doing so) *אם י'ר'ק*
- the word wash basin *אד'ר'ק* implies washing everybody *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word mortar *אד'ר'ק* implies missing (carved out) *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word for a club used as a pestle *אד'ר'ק* implies 'come and I will strike it' *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word upper garment *אד'ר'ק* implies no shame *אם י'ר'ק*
- The word cloak *אד'ר'ק* is so named because one looks in it like a shapeless mass. *אם י'ר'ק*

The word for a large woolen cloak *אורחא* implies roll it up and sit down *הסתה ארבע אמות*

Bed *כוריה* is so called because it leads to procreation *עגל ובעל ובעל*

The word for a leaping well (a well which springs forth only to disappear again) *קורא קורא* implies this well is empty *קורא קורא קורא*

The word for turban *קרי* implies that the secret of the Lord is revealed to those that fear him, (worn by Rabbinic scholars).

The word for Palace *מלכותא* implies at the door is judgement (All come for justice to the King's palace.)¹⁵⁰

Although there is much to be enthusiastic about with regard to word-play nevertheless, it is safe to say that humor which rests on words alone does not lie on a strong foundation. Humor reaches its real ground when it becomes the humor of situation and character.

In this second section we are devoting just a few paragraphs to some of the **parables** which appear in the Talmud. Though not strictly humorous, these parables are clever, satiric expressions of a political nature, generally directed against the Roman government. An example is the fable in which Akiba told of the fox who advised the fishes to leave the water:

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked Government (Romans) issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practise the Torah. Pappus b. Judah came and found R. Akiba publicly bringing gatherings

together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: "Akiba, are you not afraid of the government." He replied: "I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of a river and he saw fishes going in swarm from one place to another.

He said to them: 'From what are you fleeing?' They replied: 'From the nets cast for us by men.' He said to them: 'Would you like to come upon the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors?'

They replied: 'Art thou the one that they call the cleverest of animals? Thou are not clever but foolish. If we are afraid of the elements in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!' So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, 'For that is thy life and the length of thy days' (Deut. 30.20) if we go and neglect it, how much worse off we shall be."¹⁵¹

R. Meir was quite a master of the parable if we are to believe the statement in Sanhedrin:

R. Meir had three hundred parables of foxes, and we have only three left (probably of those collected by R. Meir) (as illustrations to the verses).

- a. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18.2)

- b. "Just balances, just weights" (Lev. 19.36)
- c. "The righteous is delivered out of trouble
and the wicked comes in his stead' (Prov. 11.8)¹⁵²

Rashi gives the parables in question, as follows, combined in a single story (there are manuscripts which say, "We have only one").

A fox once craftily induced a wolf to go and join the Jews in their Sabbath preparations and share in their festivities. On his appearing in their midst the Jews fell upon him with sticks and beat him. He therefore came back determined to kill the fox. But the latter pleaded: "It is no fault of mine that you were beaten, but they have a grudge against your father who once helped them in preparing their banquet, and then consumed all the choice bits."

"And was I beaten for the wrong done by my father?" cried the indignant wolf. "Yes," replied the fox, "the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

"However," he continued, "come with me and I will supply you with abundant food." He led him to a well which had a beam across it from either end of which hung a rope with a bucket attached. The fox entered the upper bucket and descended into the well whilst the lower one was drawn up. "Where are you going?" asked the wolf.

The fox pointing to the cheese-like reflection of the moon, replied: "Here is plenty of meat and cheese; get into the other bucket and come down at once." The wolf did so, and as he descended, the fox was drawn up. "And how am I to get out?" demanded the wolf.

"Ah," said the fox, "the righteous is delivered out of trouble and the wicked cometh in his stead."

Is it not written, "Just balances, just weights?"¹⁵³

It is probable that there were other satiric passages of this nature in the Talmud which were deleted by later censors.

We conclude this chapter with two examples of parody which are found in the Talmud. The best definition we have seen of parody is that which appears in Israel Davidson's comprehensive study of the parody to be found in Jewish literature. He defines parody as a:

Composition in which the form and expression of grave or dignified writings are closely imitated, but are made ridiculous by the subject or method of treatment...In its simplest form, a parody may consist of the mere change of a word, or even a letter...¹⁵⁴

It should be noted that when a parody is produced by the change of a letter or only a vowel, it is not far removed from a pun.

An excellent example of parody appears in Yerushalmi Pesahim. The statement is made there

"To go back to study the Law," We may notice that one must sometimes not turn aside from study,

to do even the most primary good deeds. Thus R. Abbahu sent his son to Tiberias to study; the son it was reported occupied his time in "good works" (burying the dead, visiting the sick, etc.)

R. Abbahu sent to him to say, "Are there no graves in Caesarea that I sent you to Tiberias?"¹⁵⁵

Thus very cleverly he was parodying the very famous verse in Exodus 14.11. Incidentally, R. Abbahu's colleagues supported, Haninah, Abahu's son, by stating that if there is no one to do the mitzvot, then the son was justified in neglecting his study.

Finally we have the story of the deputation which came from Palestine to urge upon Hananiah the nephew of Rabbi Joshua, to submit to the authority of the Palestinian Sanhedrin, publicly parodied Scriptural passages. One of them substituted "Hananiah" for "the Lord" in "These are the feast of the Lord" (Lev. 23.4)

Another recited "out of Babylonia shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from ~~Behar-Pekod~~" instead of "out of Zion" and "from Jerusalem" (Is. 2.3)¹⁵⁶

It should be noted that these parodies have no intention of satirizing or criticizing the parent form. They merely take it as a pattern or model on which to frame their theme. Such humor as there is, depends on the juxtaposition made, by similarity or form between the lofty theme of the ~~original~~ original statement and the trivial theme of the parody.

CHAPTER X

HUMOROUS POPULAR SAYINGS

A proverb does not have as its original motivation the attempt at being humorous. Nevertheless, in the pithy wording and in the clever simple way of expressing a profound thought, much humor is to be found. No one can deny that the Talmud is the original source of many of our present day proverbs.

For instance, in Eruvin, Raba of Parazika in presenting an argument in favor of buttressing for an entrance points out that:

Raba of Parazika replied: "In the case of Sukkah, since (it is usually made) for one individual, the person realizes his responsibility...In the case of an entrance (to an alley) since (it is made) for the use of many, (the people affected might) rely upon one another and so overlook (any defects in the crossbeam) for do not people say, 'A pot in charge of two cooks (or partners) is neither hot nor cold.'"¹⁵⁷

We, in our own time make some slight emendations and say, "Too many cooks spoil the broth." Here, though the use of a witty proverb, the writer was successful in showing that the Sukkah requires no buttressing but an entrance requires buttressing.

There are a few more examples, which we shall quote in this first section of popular sayings which were employed by the Rabbis to make a point crystal clear in their legal arguments.

We can take for example a discussion between Raba and Abaye on the subject:

"And he redeemed against his will." Raba thought to interpret: against the master's will. Said Abaye to him: "How so -- that a bond is drawn up for her value? But why (must he accept it)." "He holds a pearl in his hand -- shall we give him a shard."¹⁵⁸

נְקִיטָה מִכֶּסֶד נִשְׁמָר לְפָנֵי רַבִּי אֲבָיִי וְרַבִּי חֵלְבִי

Here the proverb probably has a double meaning. Either we can say the inference is he holds something of value, must he ^{therefore} accept something valueless? Or, we can ask: must he accept the shard on which such a bond may be written?

An amusing story is told in Berachos concerning a landlord who did not give his tenant a lawful share in vine twigs and his alibi was that his tenant was a thief and did not deserve a lawful share. To this excuse, the Talmud answers with the laconic statement:

If you steal from a thief, you also have a taste of it.¹⁵⁹ * כִּי יִשְׁטֹל מִן הַיֵּדִיּוֹת וְיִשְׁטֹל מִן הַיֵּדִיּוֹת *
* כִּי יִשְׁטֹל מִן הַיֵּדִיּוֹת וְיִשְׁטֹל מִן הַיֵּדִיּוֹת *

The Talmud indicates therefore that even if your tenant is a thief, this fact does not free you from giving him his lawful share.

The status of the Hebrew slave and the wonderful privileges accorded to him led to the statement:

Because he is well with thee: he must be with (i.e. equal to) thee in food and drink, that thou shouldst not eat white bread and he black bread, thou drink old wine and he new wine, thou

sleep on a feather bed and he on straw. Hence
it was said, "Whoever buys a Hebrew slave is
like buying a master for himself."¹⁶⁰

מי שישן על ערש של פשתן וישן על ערש של קש
אומר "מי שקנה עבד עברי הוא כמי שקנה
אדוניו לעצמו."

As we have pointed out in previous chapters, the subject of woman
and their idiosyncracies, and marriage and its problems lent itself to
much good-natured kidding. Naturally, we would expect to find the
same thing to be true when it came to popular proverbs, and we do.

There is, of course, the popular saying about a woman's proclivity
to talk which appears in Kiddushin.

Ten kabs of gossip *amit* (may be translated "talk")
descended to the world; nine were taken by women.¹⁶¹

Since the Rabbis were already in the midst of the 9:1 ratio they
continued with some slighting remarks about slaves and Ethiopians.

Ten kabs of drunkenness (some read blackness)
descended to the world; nine were taken by Ethiopians.

Ten kabs of sleep descended to the world;
nine were taken by slaves, and one by the rest
of the world.¹⁶²

Another idiosyncrasy of women, seemingly as common 1500 years ago
as it is today, becomes the target of the arrows of the Rabbis when they
point out that:

All women are alike when it comes to beautifying
themselves. At sixty as at six; the sound of a timbrel

makes her nimble.¹⁶³

"אם עתה כרת עית דקל טבא דיהא"

At times, the Talmud attributes ulterior motives to some women.

We have in mind the reference to Abigail. The statement is made in Megillah:

While a woman talks, she spins.¹⁶⁴

'אימתא דביתא איהא איהא'

The inference in this case was that Abigail, while speaking about Nabal, put in a word for herself, proposing that should Nabal die, David might do well to marry her.¹⁶⁵

There were others who felt that a more appropriate popular proverb to apply to Abigail would be:

The goose stoops as it goes along, but its eyes peer afar.¹⁶⁶

דיעא דגאסא דאיהא דאיהא דאיהא דאיהא דאיהא

However, we must not conclude that the only remarks the Rabbis made on the subject of marriage were facetious and were statements which lacked real significance. We have quite a few statements which indicate a real insight into a successful marriage and the proper relationship between a man and his wife.

There is for example the statement of R. Johanan who said:

R. Johanan also said: "Whoever is faithless, his wife is faithless to him; as it is said, 'If mine heart have been enticed unto a woman and I have laid wait at my neighbor's door' (Job 31.9); and it continues, 'Then let my wife grind unto another and let others bow down upon her.' That is what the proverb tells, 'He among the full-grown pumpkins and his wife among the young ones.'" ¹⁶⁷

'אימתא דביתא איהא איהא דאיהא דאיהא דאיהא'

As additional proof, there is the story of the girl who was matched to a man who was superior to her in all ways. One would think that she would be satisfied to let well enough alone. However, she was intelligent enough to admit that she was deceived and that it would be unwise to have a husband who was superior to her in rank. She expressed it with this laconic folk-saying:

"I want no shoe larger than my foot."¹⁶⁸

'KJ'VF Kf 'KXON P22 'JKON'

There are, nevertheless examples of facetiousness in the discussion of proper mating. The classic remark on this subject was made by Resh Lakish who said:

A tall man must not marry a tall girl lest their offspring be a mast (an espying pole). A male dwarf must not marry a female midget lest their offspring be a dwarf of the smallest size. A light-complected man must not marry a light complected girl lest their child be a scurf ^{פגול}
A very dark complected man must not marry an equally dark complected woman lest their offspring be black as pitch ^{חלב} (yellowish black and looking like those who suffer from the effects of famine).¹⁶⁹

Of one thing we can be sure, the Rabbis were very certain that marriage was a good thing- for the woman, that is. They were firmly convinced that a woman could not be happy unless she had some man to watch over her. Again, it was Resh Lakish who seemed to concern him-

self with these matters. He said:

כֹּבֵדָא רַחֲמֵינָא 13 16 רַחֲמֵינָא רַב 170

The Hebrew is given here first because there are two variant translations of the first clause. Jastrow translates "It is preferable to live in grief than to dwell in widowhood." Rashi on the other hand translates: "It is preferable to live as husband and wife than to dwell in widowhood." Either way the meaning is clear; namely, that a woman prefers an unhappy life in a married state to a happy one in solitude.

Rav Ashi confirms Resh Lakish's statement and says:

אֲדָרְבֵי קַבֵּל מֵוֹלֵב כִּי־אֵל כֹּבֵד אֲוֵבָא 171

which can be translated "if her husband is only a cabbage-head,¹⁷² she requires no lentils for the pot. The inference here being that for the sake of any married life, a woman will willingly renounce all other pleasures even to the extent of doing without good food and she will even enjoy the poorest meal.

The Rabbis, as I believe has been demonstrated, did show some insight into the marriage problem. However, their knowledge did not cease there. They were also quite aware of the fact that a child could very easily be spoiled.

An example of this excellent psychological insight occurs in Bera-chos when the question arises as to why the Jews, when they had all they could desire after leaving Egypt, acted up and complained. R. Hiyya

b. Abba gave the answer when he pointed out:

R. Hiyye b Abba said: "It is like the case of a man who had a son; he bathed him and anointed him and gave him plenty to eat and drink and hung a purse round his neck and set him down at the door of a bawdy house. How could the boy help sinning?" R. Aha the son of R. Shesheth: This bears out the popular saying: "A full stomach is a bad sort ^{אדם כש} כש ^{אדם כש} , as it says, 'when they were fed they became full, they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore they have forgotten Me.'" (Hos. 13.6)¹⁷³

There is the saying in Pesachim which gives an indication how much more desirable it is for the head of the household to be with his family.

כד' כח כדן ע"י ע"כח כדן

Better a kab from the ground than a kor from the roof.¹⁷⁴

The inference being, of course, that it is much better to earn a little near home rather than much money, far away from home.

We, in our own times, use the saying "Only small change rattles in the pocket." The Talmud had a word for it in the statement:

כ"ך ע"ך ע"ך ע"ד"ר ע"כ"כ

One stone in a pitcher cries out "rattle, rattle."¹⁷⁵

However, when the pitcher is full of stones, they have no room for rattling. So also, one scholar in a family of fools achieves fame, whilst a whole family of scholars are taken for granted.

The danger of revealing all of your intimate secrets to members of your family is revealed in the statement:

וַיִּזְכַּר אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיָדָעְנוּ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיָדָעְנוּ לֵב בְּטָרְפוֹתָיו
לֵב בְּטָרְפוֹתָיו וְיָדָעְנוּ לֵב בְּטָרְפוֹתָיו

If your sister's son has been appointed a constable, look out that you pass not before him in the street.¹⁷⁶

The Talmud warns you that because your nephew knows all of your affairs, he may blackmail you.

Similarly one must be careful in the appointment of an administrator of a town. An incident is related:

Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel: "Why did the kingdom of Saul not endure? Because no reproach rested on him (on Saul's descent) for R. Johanan had said in the name of R. Simeon b. Jehozadak: 'One should not appoint any one administrator of a community unless he carries a basket of reptiles¹⁷⁷ on his back so that if he became arrogant, one could tell him: 'turn around,'"¹⁷⁸

Rab Judah is trying to point out that we can prevent the arrogance of the administrator by pointing to a family skeleton and saying: "turn around and your basket of reptiles, your family ignominy, will stand revealed."

There is a certain sadness in the popular saying which appears next. It reveals the all too well-known truism that it is easier to die than

to get rich. The question arises:

Why did the Rabbis safeguard (the lender) in the case of the poor man dying (by allowing him to set aside dues and recover), and not in the case of his becoming rich (by not forcing the poor man to repay, although he is no longer entitled to any dues?

It is a common thing for people to die, but not to become rich (and we do not legislate for exceptional cases). R. Papa said: "This is borne out by the common saying: 'If (you hear that) your neighbour has died, believe it; if (you hear that) he has become rich, do not believe it.'"179

Note, too, the ^{צרכים של צדקה צרכי דין קדש} clever play on words in the above statement.

It is interesting to note that just as in proverbs of other nations, so too the Hebrew popular saying employs the figures of animals and birds. Somehow, it was much simpler to clarify a point if the animal kingdom was used. This very technique is used in answering a question put by Abaye to R. Joseph.

Said Abaye to R. Joseph: "Why should you want us to penalize the purchaser? (who buys ■)

the slave). Let us penalize the vendor!" He replied, "It is not the mouse that is the thief but the hole." "If there were no mouse," he retorted, "how should the hole come by it?"¹⁸⁰

אם לא היה חור לא היה שם עכשיו חור

To teach the lesson that a person should not be overdemanding, the Talmud recounts the story of Balaam the son of Beor. The story is told in Sanhedrin in this way:

'And they slew the kings of Midian, the rest of them that were slain...Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword.' (Num. 31.8). What business had Balaam there? R. Jonathan said: "He went to receive his reward for the twenty four thousand Israelites whose destruction he encompassed." (Num. 25.1-9, since Israel was thus seduced and punished through his advice, as stated above, he demanded payment).

Mar Zutra b. Tobiah remarked in Rab's name.

This is what men say "When the camel went to demand horns, they cut off the ears he had."¹⁸¹

So, too, Balaam did not know when to leave well enough alone and he demanded reward, thereby losing his life.

אם לא היה חור לא היה שם עכשיו חור

The wisdom of silence is praised in the popular saying:

חכמה יקנייך חמא אובא אובא אובא

If thy neighbor calls thee an ass, put a saddle on thy back.¹⁸²

In other words, you won't get very far by quarreling with him to convince him otherwise and the mere argument may prove that there is some merit to his statement.

The fact that the bad will usually seek out the bad and the good, the good is manifested in two popular sayings having the same meaning which appear in Baba Kamma. The first is:

A bad palm will usually make its way to a
grove of barren trees.

which leads to:

Not for nothing did the starling follow the
raven but because it is of its kind.¹⁸³

We have an example in which a popular saying is used to prove a legal point. The attempt is made to justify the placing of a cushion on an ass on the Sabbath by arguing that it warms the ass. This is followed by the statement that where the ass needs warming, it suffers but where it needs cooling, it does not, just as people say:

An ass feels cold even in the summer solstice

SINA (June - July)¹⁸⁴

The final example we have which makes use of the figure of animals, seems to be the predominant psychology of those who handle our diplomatic affairs these days. The reader, I believe will find the point to be clear after reading the comment on the following Biblical verse.

"And the elders of Moab and the elders of
Midian departed." (Num. 22.7) A Tanna taught:
"There was never peace between Midian and Moab.

The matter may be compared to two dogs in one kennel which were always enraged at each other. Then a wolf attacked one, whereupon the other said, 'If I do not help him, he will kill him today, and attack me tomorrow; so they both went and killed the wolf.'" R. Papa observed: "Thus people say, 'The weasel and the cat (when at peace with each other) had a feast on the fat of the luckless.'" 185

In the last quotation, we found that the Talmudists did make references to specific groups and gave us some valuable information as to the characteristics of the people. Occasionally some of these slights and references to particular groups are very humorous but more than that, they do give us some valuable historical information about some of Israel's neighbors.

Let us take for a moment, the example in Hullin

פ'קדן י"א פ'קדן י"ב
If a Nereshite kisses you, count your teeth. 186

Rashi explains that you had better be sure you have them all - particularly the gold ones, for they were terrible thieves.

Not only were the Nereshites deemed rather low but the residents who lived along the Pekod River and the Pumpedithites were not thought

of highly either. On the same page in which the Nereshites are insulted, there appears the following statement:

אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר
אשר

If a resident of the Pekod River joins you on the highway, it is because of the beautiful cloak, he saw upon you; if a Pumpedithite escorts you, change your lodging place.¹⁸⁷

In other words the Pekodites were friendly not because of the motivation of love, but because it was their desire to steal the beautiful cloak from your back. Similarly, if the Pumpedithite knew where you were staying, it would be a good idea to change your address for they were expert thieves.

Occasionally, it was the practitioners of a certain trade or profession who came in for the insults rather than a national group. Of such a nature is the controversial statement:

The best doctor belongs in Hell.¹⁸⁸

Rashi realized that a statement like this might be misinterpreted as condemning all doctors, and so he explains that being unafraid of sickness, they are haughty before the Almighty. Again their treatment is sometimes fatal; while on the other hand, by refusing treatment to the poor they may indirectly cause their death; or it is probable that it is not directed against healing as such, but against the advanced views held by physicians in those days.

Another example of a reference to a particular group is:

אזכרה נגינה לנאמרים, אך לא יקבלוה, כי הם
אזכרה נגינה לנאמרים, אך לא יקבלוה, כי הם

A flute is musical to nobles, but give it
to weavers and they will not accept it.¹⁸⁹

The writer is trying to say that fools will criticise where men of taste will admire.

However, for the most part the slurring references which we do find are usually directed to national groups. One incident, a reference to the descendants of Edom, which I shall quote in its entirety is particularly interesting. It starts with a reference to a statement in Obadiah.

"The vision of Obadiah. Thus said the Lord God concerning Edom." (Obad. 1.1) Why particularly Obadiah against Edom? R. Isaac said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let Obadiah, who has lived with two wicked persons (Ahab and Jezebel), and yet has not taken example by their deeds, come and prophesy against the wicked Esau (i.e. Edom. Esau is the "father" of Edom) who lived with two righteous persons (Isaac and Rebecca) and yet did not learn from their good deeds."

Ephraim Maksha'ah, the disciple of R. Meir, said on the authority of R. Meir: "Obadiah was an Edomite proselyte: and thus people say, 'From the very forest itself comes the (handle of the) axe that fells it.'"¹⁹⁰

From this story we gather that the descendant of Edom was found to be the most suitable person to reprimand the Jews. Also we gather from the narrative that the Rabbis of the Talmud identified Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's household, with the Obadiah of the minor prophets.

Occasionally, in the popular statements there are vilifying remarks against some of the Rabbis. The story is told in Berakot of R. Nahman who wanted to send a cup of wine to his wife Yaltha, and Ulla had refused to send her the cup because "the fruit of a woman's body is blessed only from the fruit of a man's body." She became angry at this slight and used the popular statement: "Gossip comes from pedlars and vermin from rags."¹⁹¹ *'NCS .GIGNOI 'N 7132NA*
She inferred that nothing better could be expected from a man like Ulla.

A rather clever statement appears in Makkot which has reference to Shechem:

They say here in Babylon, "Toby did the (bad) jobbing and Ziggad (a popular name of slaves) got the (hard) flogging,"¹⁹² or as they say there (in Palestine): "Shechem got him a wife (referring to Dinah's abduction by Shechem and the subsequent circumcision of all the Shechemites) (Gen. 39) and Magbai (another popular name for Shechem) caught the knife."¹⁹³

We conclude the chapter on popular witty sayings with a few proverbs that have to do with the general field of knowledge. The attainment of "חכמה" was a very worthy enterprise among the Jews of old. However, we must state at the outset that part of the beauty of the statements which follow lie in the language used and the translation isn't quite as expressive as the original. The first is a statement by Abaye:

Abaye said: "We have it on tradition that no one is poor save he who lacks knowledge. In the West (Palestine) there is a proverb: He who has this, has everything; he who lacks this, what has he? Has one acquired this, what does he lack? Has he not acquired this, what does he possess?"¹⁹⁴

אין אדם דליל אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה
 אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה

The other statement is that of R. Papa quoting a popular saying, "דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה" which has reference to people who lack knowledge.

Weep for him who knows not his fortune, laugh for him who knows not his fortune. Woe to him who knows not the difference between good and bad.¹⁹⁵

דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה
 דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה אלא דליל חכמה

Not only did the Talmud value knowledge per se, but the fact that the Talmudists appreciated the value of a fitting answer is shown by the oft-quoted proverb:

Better one grain of pepper than a basket full
of pumpkins.¹⁹⁶

קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב
In Yoma, Samuel's irrefutable simple interpretation is preferred

to the involved explanation of the other Rabbis. The Talmud felt then,
that a sharp mind was better than mere learning.

A very clever incident is related in Yebamot in which Shimi b.
Hiyya points out rather sarcastically that although Rab had used his
knowledge wisely and displayed marvelous courage and originality by
a ruling he made, nevertheless he stopped short of putting his belief
into practice and for this Shimi condemns him.

A girl who has intercourse with slave or idolator-
Rab ruled that the child is legitimate. For once
a man appeared before Rab and asked him, "What (is
the legal position of the child) where an idolator
or a slave had intercourse with the daughter of an
Israelite?"

"The child is legitimate," the Master replied.
"Give me then, your daughter," said the man.

"I will not give her to you" (was the Master's
reply).

Said Shimi b. Hiyya to Rab, "People say that
in Media a camel can dance on a kab (small measure
of capacity); here is a kab, here is the camel
and here is Media, but there is no dancing."¹⁹⁷

קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב קָרָב

Shimi commented wisely then that if Rab would not give his daughter, certainly others would follow his action rather than his theoretical ruling.

Finally, there appears the complaint of all older people expressed so beautifully in the Talmud:

כך היונו לנו כעבדים
כאשר היינו צעירים

When we were young we were treated as men,
whereas now that we have grown old, we are looked
upon as babies?198

Yes, the Talmud has humor and humanity. More than that, however, the Rabbis themselves in their own lives possessed wit and made no pretence at being superhuman. This we shall see more clearly in our next chapter.

CHAPTER XI

THE SENSE OF HUMOR OF THE RABBIS

You will find in the Talmud not only laughs at the foibles of humanity generally, but even laughs by the rabbis themselves. We have already mentioned in an earlier chapter the fact that there must have existed professional jesters who were worthy of future life by virtue of the good works which they performed. However, there was one Rabbi who, though not a professional jester, did attain for himself quite a reputation as a profound wit. Unfortunately, at times his wit annoyed and even offended Rabbi Judah Hanasi. An incident is related in Moed Katan concerning one of his sallies.

R. Simeon, Rabbi's son and Bar Kappara were once sitting rehearsing the lesson together when a difficulty arose about a certain passage

כאן (a halachic interpretation) and R. Simeon said to Bar Kappara, "This (matter) needs Rabbi (to explain it)," and Bar Kappara replied: "And what forsooth can Rabbi (have to) say on this?" ...Later Bar Kappara realized that he (Rabbi) had taken the matter to heart and submitted himself to the (disability of a) "reproof" א'ע"פ כ'ש"ל for thirty days.¹⁹⁹

Bar Kappara seems to have had the true soul of a humorist for he did enjoy making people laugh even to the point of employing slapstick techniques. The story is told that:

On the day that Rabbi laughed, punishment would come upon the world (Rabbi suffered internal pains for thirteen years, during which there was never a drought). So he said to Bar Kappara (who was a humorist): "Do not make me laugh, and I will give you forty measures of wheat."

He replied, "But let the Master see that I may take whatever measure I desire." So he took a large basket, pitched it over (that it should retain the wheat), placed it on his head, went to (Rabbi) and said to him, "Fill me the forty measures of wheat which I may demand from you." Thereupon Rabbi burst into laughter, and said to him, "Did I not warn you not to jest?"

He replied "I wish to take the wheat which I may (justly) demand."²⁰⁰

Bar Kappara always seemed to be ready with a clever remark no matter what the event. On the occasion of the birth of a daughter to R. Simeon, everyone was consoling him because he did not have a son. Bar Kappara however, came to the point in a story told in Baba Batra:

A daughter was born to R. Simeon, the son of Rabbi and he felt disappointed. His father said to him: "Increase has come to the world." Bar Kappara said to him: "Your father has given you an empty consolation. The world cannot do

without either males or females. Yet happy is he whose children are males, and alas for him whose children are females. The world cannot do without either a spice seller or a tanner. Yet happy is he whose occupation is that of a spice seller, and alas for him whose occupation is that of a tanner."²⁰¹

On occasion Bar Kappara injected his humor into what otherwise might have been a very dull wedding.

Ben Eleasa, a very wealthy man was Rabbi's son-in-law, and he was invited to the wedding of R. Simeon b. Rabbi. (At the wedding) Bar Kappara asked Rabbi, "What is meant by Toebah (abomination)?" Now every explanation offered by Rabbi was refuted by him, so he said to him, "Explain it yourself." He replied, "Let your housewife come and fill me a cup." She came and did so, upon which he said to Rabbi, "Arise and dance for me that I may tell it to you."

Thus saith the Divine Law, (Thou erreest in respect of her). אַתָּה טוֹעֵה בְּדַבְרֵיהֶּר

At his second cup he asked him, "What is meant by "tebel" (disgrace)." He replied in the same manner as before (until) he remarked, "Do (something for me, and I will tell you."

On his complying, he said "Tebel hu" means:
Is there (^{perf}perfume) in it (the animal)? Is Intimacy
therewith sweeter than all other intimacies. (lit.
different from, that thou leavest thine own kind
for it).

Then he further questioned, "And what is meant
by zimnah זמנא (wickedness)?" "Do as before
(and I will tell you)." When he did so, he said
zimnah means זמנא איז (who is she, i.e. through pro-
miscuous intercourse, the parentage is unknown,
and thus a father might marry the daughter).

Now Ben Eleasa could not endure all this, so
he and his wife left.²⁰²

However, Bar Kappara did not have a monopoly on witty and ironic
remarks. Many of the Rabbis had their own individual problems in their
own lives which were very often the butt of many humorous remarks. We
shall confine ourselves in this second section of the chapter to those
incidents and remarks made by the Rabbis which had to do with women
and marriage.

The Talmud tells a very funny story about one rabbi who was blessed
with a loving wife who liked to do the opposite of everything her hus-
band wanted. But let the Talmud tell the story.

Rab was constantly tormented by his wife.

If he told her, "Prepare me lentils," she would
prepare him small peas; (and if he asked for)

small peas, she prepared him lentils. When his son Hiyya grew up her gave her (his father's instructions) in the reverse order (so that when his mother, as usual, did the reverse of what was requested by Hiyya in the name of his father, Rab had exactly what he had wished for).

"Your mother," Rab once remarked to him, "has improved." (lit. improved for you) "It was I," the other replied, "who reversed (your orders) to her." "This is what people say," the first said to him, "Thine own offspring teaches thee reason."²⁰³

The expedient of an "opposite system" had not occurred to him before his son had thought of it.

After reading this story, one can understand the statement made by Rab to R. Hiyya when he was taking leave of him:

Rab was once taking leave of R. Hiyya. The latter said to him, "May the All Merciful deliver you from that which is worse than death." "But is there" (Rab wondered) "anything that is worse than death?" When he went out he considered the matter and found (the following text): "And I find more bitter than death the woman." (Eccles. 7.26)²⁰⁴

Evidently Rab had considerable trouble with his wife. Witness the statement of Raba b. Mehasia in the name of R. Hama b. Goria in Rab's name:

Rather any complaint but not a complaint of bowels, any pain but not heart pain, any ache but not headache; any evil, but not an evil wife.²⁰⁵

The problem of when a student of the Torah should marry is not only a problem today but it was a problem to the Rabbis centuries ago. An entire discussion is devoted to this problem in the tractate Kiddushin:

Our Rabbis taught: "If one has to study Torah and to marry a wife, he should first study and then marry. But if he cannot (live) without a wife, he should first marry ~~and~~ then study." Rab Judah said in Samuel's name; "The halachah is: (a man) first marries and then studies."

R. Johanan said: "(With) a millstone around the neck shall one study Torah." Yet they do not differ; the one refers to ourselves (the Babylonians); the other to them (Palestinians).²⁰⁶

Rashi explains that the Babylonian scholars used to travel to Palestine, the home of the Mishnah; hence they were free of household worries; and so might marry before study. But the Palestinians, studying at home and bearing family responsibilities, could make no progress, if married, and so they were bound to study first. Tosafes reverses the interpretation. However, the Rabbis were well aware of the temptations that a single man faced. R. Johanan went so far as to say that:

Concerning three does the Holy One, blessed be He make proclamation every day (as having earned his special approval) (one of the three is): a bachelor *קרו*

who lives in a large town without sinning...²⁰⁷

The final comment which we have on the subject of women which reveals to us the humor and the humanity of the Rabbis is a statement by R. Simeon b. Gamaliel given after Rab made the statement that:

One is forbidden to say, "How beautiful is that idolatress!" The following objection was raised: It happened that R. Simeon b. Gamaliel, while standing on a step on the Temple-Mount, saw a heathen woman who was particularly beautiful, and he exclaimed: "How great are Thy works, O Lord." (Ps. 104.24)²⁰⁸

The Rabbis were always very much aware of the importance of joy and laughter in all our activities but they were particularly cognizant of the need of a happy attitude in the observance of the holidays and festivals. For instance:

Rab said: It is the duty of a man to mellow himself *with wine* (with wine) on Purim, until he can no longer tell the difference between "Cursed be Haman!" and "Blessed be Mordecai".²⁰⁹

It was not merely a recommendation or a good idea to rejoice on a festival but the Rabbis also taught:

A man is duty bound to make his children and his household rejoice on a festival, for it is,

said, "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" (thou and thy son and thy daughter). (Deut. 16.14)

"Wherewith does he make them rejoice?" "With wine." R. Judah said: "Men with what is suitable for them, and women with what is suitable for them. 'men with what is suitable for them': with wine. "And women with what?" R. Joseph recited: "In Babylonia with colored garments; in Eretz Israel with ironed linen garments."²¹⁰

The *ש'פ' סנה' סנה' סנה'* was a very definite example of joy without bounds.

The Talmud in fact states that:

Our Rabbis taught: "He who has not witnessed the *ש'פ' סנה' סנה' סנה'* has never seen rejoicing in his life"²¹¹

In fact, it was on this occasion that R. Simeon ben Gamaliel demonstrated all of his wonderful acrobatic skills.

They said of R. Simeon ben Gamaliel that when he rejoiced at the *ש'פ' סנה' סנה' סנה'* he used to take eight lighted torches (and throw them in the air) and catch one and throw one and they did not touch one another and when he prostrated himself, he used to dig (*ת'י*) his two thumbs in the ground, bend down (while still leaning on them), kiss the ground and draw himself up again, a feat which no other man could do, and this is what is meant by Kidah, *ס'פ'* a form of prostration.²¹²

The mention of R. Simeon brings to mind the statement of R. Simeon b. Gamaliel with regard to the necessity of joy in the accepting of, and in the performance of a commandment.

R. Simeon ben Gamaliel said: "Every precept which they accepted with joy, e.g., circumcision, as it is written, "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil," they still observe with joy.

While every precept which they accepted with displeasure *אבבדא* (lit. quarreling), e.g. the forbidden degrees of consanguinity, as it is written, "And Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, on account of the affairs of their families," they still perform them with strife, for there is no marriage settlement which does not contain a quarrel ((lit: in which they (the parties concerned) throw no discord)).²¹³

This belief was shared by other Rabbis besides R. Simeon for they agreed that:

Divine presence rests upon men neither through gloom, nor through sloth nor through frivolity, nor through levity, nor through talk, nor through idle chatter, save through a matter of joy in connection with a precept as it is said:

"But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played that the hand of the

Lord came upon him." (II Kings 3.15)²¹⁴

Meharsha observes that the verse is quoted merely to show that the Divine presence does not rest on a man plunged in gloom ^{in this case} occasioned by Jehoram's visit.

We conclude this section on the observance of the holidays and festivals with what is probably the first recorded complaint of a Rabbi that his congregants walked out on him during a Festival day in the midst of his sermons. Our Rabbis taught:

It happened that R. Eliezer was once sitting and lecturing the whole day (of the Festival) on Festival Laws. (When) The first ^{group} left (the lecture hall) he said: "These are people of butts."

^{וְהָיוּ} (very rich counting the wine by the butts. They have left thus early because of the large quantities of food and drink waiting for them.

They are gluttons. (When) the second group (left) he said: "These are people of casks." ^{וְהָיוּ}

(When) the third group (left) he said: "These are people of pitchers." ^{וְהָיוּ} Less rich than the second but wealthier than the next group.) (When) the fourth group (left) he said:

"These are people of flasks:" ^{וְהָיוּ}

(When the fifth group (left) he said: "These are people of beakers" ^{וְהָיוּ} (less keen on their pleasure)

(When) the sixth group began to go out he said: "These are the people of the curse." ^{וְהָיוּ}

The emptiness of the lecture hall roused his ire.

וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ

To those who remained: "My sons not of you
I said this but of those who have gone out, who
put aside life eternal and occupy themselves with
the life temporal."²¹⁵

The Rabbis were not only human and able to laugh at themselves
but very often, they were quite willing and able to assign human traits
to great Jewish heroes. Ordinarily, one might expect that Moses would
be considered a saint without any human faults, yet in Sanhedrin we
have an example of Moses being suspected of adultery. This accusation
comes about as a result of the statement which appears in Numbers 16.4.

"And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his
face." (Num. 16.4) What news did he hear? --
R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in R. Johnathan's name:
"That he was suspected of (adultery with) a mar-
ried woman, as it is written, 'They were jealous
of Moses in the camp,' (Ps. 106.16) which teaches
that every person warned his wife on Moses' account,
as it is written, 'And Moses took the tabernacle,
and pitched it without the camp.' (Ex. 33.7) - to
avoid all ground of suspicion."²¹⁶

However, not only were the Talmudists willing to admit that Moses
could make an error but there were occasions when the Rabbis were will-
ing to admit that even audacity was effective against God. This re-

markable statement is made in commenting on a verse which is found in Numbers.

"And the princes of Moab abode with Balaam" (Num. 22.8). But whither had the princes of Midian gone? As soon as he said to them, "Lodge here the night and I will bring you word again (as the Lord shall speak unto me) (Ibid), they reasoned, "Does any father hate his son (they knew that it was useless to wait)."

R. Nahman said: "Impudence, even against heaven, is of avail; at first, it is written, 'Thou shalt not go with them' (Num 22.12) yet subsequently it is said, 'rise up and go with them.'" (Num. 22.20)²¹⁷

Here then was a case where insisting, wrested from God consent for him to go. Another excellent example of this type of interference is the intercession of the Angel Gabriel before God in behalf of the people. The incident begins:

Abaye asked R. Dimi: "To what do ye in 'the West' relate the following verse: 'Go not forth hastily to strife, for what wilt thou do in the end thereof when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbour, but reveal not the secrets of another.'" (Prov. 25.8-9)

(He answered): "When the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Ezekiel, 'Go and say unto Israel, an

Amorite was thy father, and thy mother was a Hittite'
(Ezek. 16.3), the intercessory (אֲשֶׁר יִפְתָּח)²¹⁸
spirit said before the Holy One, blessed be He,
"Sovereign of the Universe! if Abraham and Sarah
came and stood before Thee, wouldst Thou say this
to them and put them to shame?' Debate thy cause
with thy neighbour (reproach him alone) but reveal
not thy secret to another! (do not rake up another's
shame)."²¹⁹

There is one more story which, though told in legendary form,
represents a remarkable assertion of the independence of human reason-
ing and actually represents God as being very pleased with the clever-
ness of his people. The story is told in Baba Mezia.

A heavenly voice cried out: "Why do ye dis-
pute with R. Eliezer seeing that in all matters the
Halachah agrees with him?" But R. Joshua arose and
exclaimed: "It is not in heaven." (Deut. 30.12)

What did he mean by this? Said R. Jeremiah:
"That the Torah had already been given at Mount
Sinai; we pay no attention to a heavenly voice
because Thou hast long since written in the Torah
at Mount Sinai, 'After the majority must one incline.'
(Ex. 23.2) (Though the story is told in legendary
form, this is a remarkable assertion of the indepen-
dence of human reasoning).

R. Nathan met Elijah and asked him: "What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour?"

He laughed (with joy) and he replied, saying, "My sons have defeated me, my sons have defeated me."²²⁰

Finally, we have the example of a prophet being considered a very ordinary human being who sometimes is answered back to by the people. In this instance, the comment is made on the verse:

"Why is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?" (Jer. 8.5) Rab said: "The Keneseth Israel gave the prophet a victorious answer. ^{וַיִּשְׁמַע} (For) the prophet said to Israel, 'Return and repent: your fathers who sinned--where are they?' They replied, 'And your prophets who did not sin--where are they?' As it is written, 'Your fathers, where are they?--and the prophets, do they live forever!' He answered them, 'Yet (your fathers) repented and admitted' (the justice of their punishment)."²²¹

There are interpreters of this last Talmudic passage who feel that it would make better sense if the phrase "He answered them" is deleted and read, "yet they (the people) repented and admitted." This is to say that the people despite their victorious rejoinder, did not press the advantage home but were moved by the words of Jeremiah and confessed their guilt.

The subject of the am ha-arez was one which lent itself to considerable jesting by the Rabbis. There are those however who have tried to interpret the am ha-arez passage as meaning what it literally says. Before we get too involved in a discussion of the nature of the passage, let us first give the passage as it appears in Pesahim.

R. Eleazar said: "An am ha-arez, it is permitted to stab him (even) on the Day of Atonement, which falls on the Sabbath." Said his disciples to him, "Master, did you say to slaughter him (ritually)?" He replied: "This ritual slaughter requires a benediction whereas that (stabbing) does not require a benediction."

It was taught, R. Meir used to say: "Whoever marries his daughter to an am ha-arez, is as though he bound and laid her before a lion; just as a lion tears his prey and devours it and has no shame, so an am ha-arez strikes and cohabits and has no shame."²²²

There can be no doubt about the fact that a strong antipathy existed between the scholar and the am ha-arez. Nevertheless, it is perfectly obvious that a statement like the one above is probably humorous and represents nothing more than the Rabbis indulging in a jeu d'esprit.

If additional proof is needed, we can refer to one statement which appears in Barakot in which we have pictured the true attitude of the Rabbi to the worker. The Rabbi declares:

I am a being created by God and he is a being created by God. I have my trade in town, and he has his on the field. I rise early for my work, he rises early for his (I am industrious and he is industrious). As he does not boast of his (worldly, material) occupation, so I may not boast of my (intellectual) occupation. If you think that I accomplish much and he accomplishes little, remember what we have learned: "It matters not whether a man accomplishes much or little, if only his soul is directed heavenward (to the ideal)."²²³

This is an excellent example of a case in which the men of Jabneh distinguished themselves by their nobility and their clear recognition of the necessity of the division of labor. We must of necessity say then, that a passage similar to the one which we quoted from Pesahim cannot be considered as anything but a jest.

Moritz Lazarus made a rather comprehensive study on the subject of joking about the am ha-arez, and published the following conclusion which this writer concurs with wholeheartedly.

The whole passage of "an ignoramus may be slit up" or "torn into pieces like a fish" can be nothing more than a jest. Every doubt must vanish before the gradation from "even if it be the Day of Atonement" and "even if it fall upon the Sabbath," to the question put by the disciples:

"why not slaughter them?" culminating in the answer "because slaughtering requires a blessing."

Only medieval misery burdening the soul could fail to recognize the intention to jest. The complete change of meaning produced by Alfasi's addition "because he ran after a betrothed maiden" and therefore incurred his fate only "on account of pursuit" surely is an apologetic device invented by himself or one of his predecessors. The matter is as clear as daylight, yet here are a few proofs.

I. Why should both R. Eleazar and R. Samuel bar Nahmani, quoting R. Jochanan, have failed to mention the chief circumstance in so important a matter as murder.

II. The whole series of sentences to which the above belongs relates to the character and treatment of the am ha-arez in general. It is conceivable that the most important of them should involve special consideration?

III. "If an ignoramus may be slit up on account of pursuit," why limit^{it} to the am ha-arez? Would not the same law be applicable to the disciple of the wise? To allege that it does not occur with a disciple of the wise is simply sophistry. What a monstrous style for a lawgiver to omit mention

of the chief condition leading to a threatened result, and cite an unessential fact favoring the condition!

If more convincing proof were needed that these are but "jesting words" (*קדין'א*) it can be found upon the same page in the utterance of no less a personage than Rabbi himself: "An ignoremus may not eat the flesh of the cattle, for the Scriptures say: This is the law of the cattle and the fowl, and whoever does not devote himself to the Law is forbidden to eat the flesh of cattle and fowl." Could anyone seriously think that R. Jehudah Nasi legally forbade an am ha-arez to eat meat? And gentle R. Akiba who accused himself, would he have touched a hair of the head of a talmid chacham in his am ha-arez days? Here too, the progression from the dog to an ass is proof positive of intended pleasantry. The clinching argument is furnished by R. Chiya. If his words are not a wretched joke, they are pure nonsense.²²⁴

Thus we can not consider the am ha-arez passage as having serious meaning or halachic significance but rather must regard it as a poor example of the humor of the Rabbis.

We have in our examples of the wit of the Rabbis many examples which are not in the limited sense, humorous. However, they do indicate the humanity of the Rabbis and in that respect one can't help but smile at these statements.

The Rabbis, for example, list for us a whole Emily Post procedure on how a person should accept honors bestowed upon him:

Our Rabbis taught: If one is asked to pass before the Ark, he ought to refuse (as feeling himself unworthy for the sacred duty) and if he does not refuse, he resembles a dish without salt; but if he persists too much in refusing, he resembles a dish which is oversalted. How should he act? The first time he should refuse; the second time he should hesitate; the third time he should stretch his legs and go down.²²⁵

How long should prayer be? This question too occupied the sages and the discussion which followed proved to be very clever.

Once a certain disciple went down before (the reading desk was at a lower level than the floor of the synagogue) the Ark in the presence of R. Eliezer, and he read the prayer at great length. His disciples said to him: "Master, how long is this fellow is!" He replied to them: "Is he drawing it out any more than our master Moses, of whom it is written: 'The Forty Days and Forty Nights' (that I fell down)." (Deut. 9.25)

Another time it happened that a certain disciple
went down before the Ark in the presence of R.
Eleazar, and he cut the prayer very short. His
disciples said to him: "How concise this fellow
is!" He replied to them: "Is he any more concise
than our Master Moses, who prayed, as it is written:
'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee' (Num. 12.13)."²²⁶

The Modesty of the Rabbis at times is very striking. They were
not reluctant to admit that occasionally some subject under discussion
might have been too difficult for them. Their method of expressing the
fact that a Mishnah stood before them and yet was inexplicable, was
very original.

בְּיָמֵינוּ וְכֵן וְכֵן וְכֵן וְכֵן וְכֵן
"Behold a table, meat and knife, yet we have
no mouth to eat."²²⁷

A very similar statement with regard to the inability of the Rabbis
to resolve a situation is to be found in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

"To Ezra, the priest and scribe." (Ezra 7.6).

R. Eliezer noted the redundancy of the term "scribe".
Why is "scribe" listed? To show that just as he
enumerated the words of the Torah, so he enumerated
the words of the Sages. R. Hagi said in the name of
R. Samuel b. Nahman: "Our ancestors cultivated the
land, planted, ploughed and harvested, cut, threshed
and baked the bread and we don't have a mouth with
which to eat it."²²⁸

In other words, here they wish to point out that the sages did a multitude of things to facilitate our religious studies and despite all these aids, we don't understand what they had to say.

Even when making a mistake, a great Rabbi like Tarfon was willing to admit that he had made a mistake. His admission of error was rather humorous as we shall see in the following incident.

It once happened that R. Tarfon ordered a cow (belonging to Menahem) whose womb had been removed, to be given to dogs. (he declared her unfit for human consumption). When the matter was brought before the sages of Yabneh, they permitted her (as human food) for Theodos the Physician stated that no cow or sow was allowed to leave Alexandria in Egypt unless her womb had first been cut out, so as to prevent her from having issue (the Egyptian breed was unique in quality and so they took this measure in order to limit its breeding to that country. Such a mutilation did not, however, effect them.)

Thereupon R. Tarfon exclaimed: "Thy ass is gone, Tarfon!" (*רַבִּי תַרְפוֹן מְסֻבֵּי*). But R. Akiba said to him: "You are not bound to make compensation since he who is publicly recognized as a Membeh is free from liability to pay."²²⁹

The humor of the situation can be seen in the fact that Tarfon was bidding his ass goodbye for he felt that he would have to sell his ass to compensate the owner of the cow for his erroneous decision.

The respect which the Rabbis had for each other and which resulted in great care to avoid offending a superior, often resulted in very delicate situations. The question is asked:

How do we know that the blood of the drawing thing is tame? R. Eliezer whispered in an undertone: "From that which is written in Lev. 11.4 *אשר יאמר* 'that is unclean to you.'" R. Simeon said to him: "From the argument that thou didst utter in an undertone, one can tell that thou art a scholar."²³⁰

אמר ר' אבהו ר' אבהו ר' אבהו ר' אבהו ר' אבהו
Rashi explains that R. Eliezer whispered and did not answer in a loud voice as he usually did out of respect for R. Simeon, so as not to let anyone think that he was acting as a teacher in the presence of R. Simeon. Despite his whispering, R. Simeon, like all good teachers, overheard him and told him that he had answered correctly but was to be complimented because he had the intelligence to whisper it.

There is however, a story on the ^{la}ughtiness of a Rabbi Eliezer in the Talmud which has its interesting moments. We are particularly interested in the reply of the ugly man to the proud Rabbi but we are getting ahead of our story. We can even visualize the picture. It must have been a very proud moment for the young Rabbi when, with his studies ended, he left the academy with all its precious associations and full or ardent hope, set out for his native place. He had every reason to feel the glow of conscious pride for he had completed with rare diligence the course assigned and attained the highest rank among his companions. Having set the scene, let's let the Talmud tell the story.

Once R. Eleazar, son of Simeon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher and he was riding leisurely on his ass by the riverside and was feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah. There chanced to meet him an exceedingly ugly man who greeted him, "Peace be upon you sir." He, however, did not return his salutation but instead said to him, "Empty one, how ugly you are. Are your fellow citizens as ugly as you are?"

The man replied, "I do not know, but go and tell the craftsman who made me, 'how ugly is the vessel which you have made.'" ^{יִתְּנֶה יְהוָה דַּמְיוֹן}

When R. Eleazar had realized that he had done wrong, he dismounted from the ass and prostrated himself before the man and said to him, "I submit myself to you, forgive me." The man replied: "I will not forgive you until you go to the craftsman who made me and say to him, "How ugly is the vessel which you have made."

He (R. Eleazar) walked behind him until he reached his native city. When his fellow citizens came out to meet him greeting him with the words, "Peace be upon you, O Teacher, O Master," the man asked them, "Whom are you addressing thus?" They replied, "The man who is walking behind you."

Thereupon he exclaimed: "If this man is a teacher, may there not be any more like him in Israel." The people then asked him, "Why?" He replied, "Such and such a thing has he done to me." They said to him: "Nevertheless forgive him, for he is a man greatly learned in Torah." The man replied, "For your sakes will I forgive him, but only on the condition that he does not act in the same manner in the future."²³¹

One of the most outstanding examples of the humanity of the Rabbis is the well-known story of the optimism of Rabbi Akiba. The story is told that:

Long ago as Rabbis Gamaliel, R. Eleazer b. Azariah, R. Joshua and R. Akiba were walking on the road, they heard the voice of the crowds at Rome (on travelling) from Puteoli (a great seaport in Italy) a hundred and twenty miles away. They all fell a-weeping, but R. Akiba seemed merry. Said they to him: "Wherefore are you merry?"

Said he to them: "Wherefore are you weeping?" Said they: "These heathen who bow down to images and burn incense to idols live in safety and ease whereas our Temple, the footstool of our God is burned down by fire, and should we then not weep?"

He replied, "Therefore am I merry. If they that offend him fare thus, how much better shall

fare they that do obey him." Once again they came to Mount Scopus they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies. They fell a weeping and R. Akiba seemed merry. Wherefore said they to him, "are you merry?" Said he, "wherefore are you weeping?" Said they to him: "A place of which it was once said 'And the common man that draweth nigh shall be put to death' (Num. 51) is now become the haunt of foxes, and should we not weep?" Said he to them, "Therefore am I merry; for it is written, 'And I will take to me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah, the son of Jeberechiah. (Is. 8.2) (also Zech 1.1)

Now what connection has this Uriah the priest with Zechariah? Uriah lived during the times of the first Temple while (the other) Zechariah lived (and prophesied) during the second Temple; but Holy Writ linked the (later) prophecy of Zechariah with the (earlier) prophecy (in the days) of Uriah^{as} it is written "Therefore for your sake shall Zion be ploughed as a field." (Mic 3.12)

In Zechariah it is written "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, there shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem" (Zech. 8.4) so long as Uriah's (threatening) prophecy might not

be fulfilled, it is quite certain that Zechariah's prophecy also is to find its literal fulfillment.

Said they to him, "Akiba, you have comforted us."²³²

We obtain an additional insight into the humanistic philosophy of the Rabbis in the incident which R. Simeon b. Eleazar relates about the destiny of a man in this world.

R. Simeon b. Eleazar said, "Have you ever seen a wild beast or bird without ^ocraft? Yet they are sustained without anxiety."

It was taught: R. Simeon b. Eleazar said: "In my whole lifetime I have not seen a deer engaged in gathering fruits, a lion carrying burdens, or a fox as a shopkeeper, yet they are sustained without trouble, though they were created only to serve me, whereas I was created to serve my Maker.

Now if these who were created only to serve me are sustained without trouble, I who was created to serve my Maker (should certainly be sustained)!! But it is because I have acted evilly and destroyed my livelihood."²³³

- A fascinating story is found in Sabbath which portrays for us the frankness of some of the Rabbis in dealing with a problem. It seems that:

Rab Judah and R. Jeremiah b. Abba and R. Hanan b. Raba visited the home of Abin of Meshikya (a town in Babylonia). For R. Judah and R. Jeremiah b. Abba couches were brought; for R. Hanan b. Raba none

was brought. Now, he found him reciting to his son, "and over an infant's excrement (a dish may be inverted over a lamp) on account of his infant (to prevent him from dabbling with it)."

Said he to him, "Abin, a fool recites nonsense to his son."²³⁴

This rude remark was made by R. Hanan in spleen at his host's discourtesy in saying, that the excrement was fit for dogs so that it might be handled. Therefore one could carry it out altogether, so why overturn a dish upon it.

Modesty, haughtiness, frankness and sometimes even rudeness play a part in the discussion of the Rabbis. A story is told in Berakot about R. Eliezer in which he, in a very interesting way dismisses some scholars who come to condole him.

Our Rabbis taught: For male and female slaves, no row (of comforters)! (It was customary for those returning from a burial to the mourner's house to stand in a row before him to comfort him), nor is the blessing of mourners (said after the first meal taken by the mourner after the funeral) said, nor is condolence offered. When the bondswoman of R. Eliezer died, his disciples went in to condole with him. When he saw them he went up to an upper chamber but they went up after him. He then went into an ante-room and they followed him there. He said to

them: " I thought that you would be scalded with warm water; I see you are not scalded even with boiling hot water."²³⁵

It was as if R. Eliezer said: "I thought you would take the first hint and you do not even take the last!"

Not only were the Rabbis willing to scold other scholars but very often in incompetent teacher, when recognized as such was condemned and considered unworthy. It seems that:

The members of the Nasi's household once appointed an incompetent teacher (lit. Judge--shofet), and the Rabbis said to Judah b. Nahmani, the interpreter (whose function it was to expound aloud to the audience what the teacher had spoken concisely and in a low voice) of Resh Lakish: "Go and stand at his side as interpreter."

Standing by him, he (Judah) bent down to hear what he wished to teach, but the teacher made no attempt to say anything. Thereupon R. Judah took as his opening text: "Woe unto him who saith unto wood: 'Awake!' - to the dumb stone: 'Arise!' Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it."

(Hab. 2.19)²³⁶

We conclude the section on the "humanity of the Rabbis" with an amusing little incident which indicates to us that the scholars were well aware of the fact that people very often finagled to get around

the law. They knew that people very often would cause the formation of a blemish in an attempt to render an animal unfit. This kind of practice was forbidden. When someone asked how did such a thing happen, the reply came:

Barley was strewn on the one side of the hedge and it (the firstling) was on the other side. As it wanted to eat thereof, it stuck its head (through the hedge) and the hedge tore its lip (which counts as a permanent blemish).²³⁷

We devote this final section to the "humor of the Rabbis". The subject, though a very broad and general one, will offer us an opportunity to laugh aloud at incidents and stories told by the Rabbis about themselves rather than the humor related about others.

The subject of hospitality lent itself to the following amusing incident. One of the Rabbis was asked by a group to sit down on the couch and he sat down. Upon sitting down, he was reproached and they told him: "what is the reason that when they told you to sit on the couch, you did sit." It seems that the couch was reserved for distinguished visitors, while the common visitor sat on an ordinary stool and therefore his immediate compliance savoured of arrogance.

His answer to them was:

(כ"ב ט"ו) א"ת א"ת א"ת א"ת א"ת א"ת א"ת א"ת א"ת
"Whatever your host tells you, do" (var. Lec. "except depart")²³⁸

The text probably reads better without this addition, but if it is retained (which we prefer to do), it was probably meant humorously, meaning that a guest should not outstay his welcome to the point where he has to be told to go!

The following story is an exceptionally good one. It is in a class all by itself and can be placed in the "this too is for the good!" category (*אשר יבא לי רע*). To this day, many Jews manifest this optimistic attitude and it is due to this kind of an attitude that people can laugh though persecuted unmercifully.

R. Huna said in the name of Rab citing R. Meir, and so it was taught in the name of R. Akiba: A man should always accustom himself to say, "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good," (as exemplified in) the following incident. R. Akiba was once going along the road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was everywhere refused.

He said, "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good," and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a cock, an ass and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the cock, a lion came and ate the ass. He said: "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good." The same night some brigands came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. He said to them (apparently to the men of the town, on a subsequent occasion or perhaps to his disciples who accompanied him):

"Did I not say to you whatever the All-Merciful does is all for good?"²³⁹ (Because the lamp or the cock or the ass might have disclosed his whereabouts to the brigands).

The Rabbis, as will very often happen when there exist various groups, did ridicule and minimize the contributions of members of other schools of thought. Thus in Baba Mezia, the overly acute interpreters of the Law are teased. The statement is made:

קוּנְנָה? קוּפְדִּיָּתָה קוּפְדִּיָּתָה יְדִּיָּתָה אִלּוּ קוּפְדִּיָּתָה
- Are thou perhaps from Pumpeditha, where they draw an elephant through the eye of a needle?²⁴⁰

Another slight was made against one of the schools when in trying to explain the death of R. Adda b. Abba, Abaye indicated that it was because he insulted Abaye when he used to say to his students:

יֵן "אִלּוּ יְדִּיָּתָה יְדִּיָּתָה
קוּפְדִּיָּתָה יְדִּיָּתָה יְדִּיָּתָה
Instead of gnawing bones at Abaye, why do

you not eat fat meat in the school of Raba.²⁴¹

He inferred that the teaching was much superior at Raba's school and he would learn much more than he would at the school of Abaye.

Sometimes the insult was not against the school but against an individual. One such incident is that which is told about Resh Lakish when he defeated Rabbi Johanan in a legal dispute concerning the making of weapons.

One day there was a dispute in the schoolhouse (with respect to the following, viz.) a sword, knife, dagger, spear, handsaw and a scythe -- "At what stage (of their manufacture) can they become unclean?

"When their manufacture is finished," (Before that they are not complete articles or utensils, and only such can become unclean).

"And when is their manufacture finished?"

R. Johanan ruled: "When they are tempered in a furnace." Resh Lakish maintained: "When they have been furnished in water." Said he to him:

"A robber understands his trade."²⁴²

"אָס' דאָס וואָס אַ רובער אַרבעט"

Graetz points out with regard to this incident that:

This was quoted only proverbially, though in later times it was taken literally, and Resh Lakish was held to have been a robber. Actually he had been a circus attendant, to which his necessitous circumstances had reduced him, and these weapons were used in the course of that calling.²⁴³

In most cases, it was not insults which were exchanged but rather good natured kidding. An example is to be found in a debate in Baba Kamma in which Raba concluded the argument humorously.

Rabina said to Raba: "Is not 'foot' (mentioned in the commencing clause) identical with 'animal' (mentioned in the second clause" (wherefore then this redundancy)? He answered him" (In the commencing clause, the Mishnah deals with Principles (damage done by the actual foot, whereas in second clause,) derivatives are introduced." (Damage done by other parts of the body of the animal).

But according to this, the subsequent Mishnah states: "Tooth is Mu'ed!...Any animal is Mu'ed! What principles and what derivatives could be distinguished there?" Raba however answered him humorously, "I expounded one (mishnah); it is now for you to expound the other."²⁴⁴

There were a few men in the Talmud who besides being noted for their scholarship were also noted for their girth and they, too, like fat men all over the world became the subject of much good natured kidding. They used to say that:

When R. Ishmael son of R. Jose and R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon met, one could pass through with a yoke of oxen under them and not touch them.²⁴⁵

Another very amusing story is told about the very stout R. Ishmael.

R. Ishmael son of R. Jose visited the home of R. Simeon b. R. Jose b. Lakunia. They offered him a goblet, which he accepted at the first invitation and drank in one draught. Said they to him: "Do you not agree that he who drinks his goblet in one draught is greedy?" Said he to them: "This was not said when your goblet is small, your wine sweet, and my stomach broad."²⁴⁶

"אם רחב בטןי וסודתי חמה וייןי מתוק וכוונתך קטנה" כחג"ב

We conclude our section on the humor of the Talmud with the amusing story of the Rabbi who could not stand the smell of garlic.

It once happened that while Rabbi was delivering a lecture, he noticed a smell of garlic *פיק א'ו*. Thereupon he said: "Let him who has eaten garlic go out." R. Hiyya arose and left; then all the other disciples rose in turn and went out. In the morning R. Simeon, Rabbi's son, met and asked him; "Was it you who caused annoyance to my father yesterday?" "Heaven forbid that such a thing should happen in Israel," he answered.²⁴⁷

In other words, he acted with the intention of saving the real offender from humiliation.

We have attempted in the last chapter to indicate how wide the gamut of Rabbinical humor ran. It included everything from hilarious jesting to satire and humor which attempted to be instructive. However, it would be a serious error to think that all the Rabbis understood the importance of humor and valued laughter. It is this problem which we shall deal with in this next chapter.

CHAPTER XII

THE OPPOSITION TO LAUGHTER

Though in all our previous references, we have attempted to show that humor was present among the Talmudists, it would be incorrect if we did not point out that the pervading and dominant characteristic of the Talmudists is earnestness and seriousness.

For example, a man like

R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: "It is forbidden to a man to fill his mouth with laughter in this world, because it says, 'Then will our mouth be filled with laughter and our tongue with singing' (Ps. 126.2)."

"When will that be?" "At the time when 'They shall say among the nations, the Lord hath done great things with these (Ps. 126.3).'" It was related of Resh Lakish that he never again filled his mouth with laughter in this world after he heard this saying from R. Johanan his teacher.²⁴⁸

The condemnation of scoffing and bitter satire is nowhere any clearer than the statement which appears in Avodah Zarah.

Said R. Eleazar: "He who scoffs, affliction will befall him, as it is said, 'Now therefore do ye not scoff, lest your punishment be made severe.'"

(Isa. 26.22. The word ~~בְּ~~ here rendered 'your hands', may also stand for 'your affliction'). Raba used to say to the Rabbis: "I beg of you, do not scoff, so that you incur no punishment." R. Kattina said: "He who scoffs, his sustenance will be reduced, as it is said, 'He withdraweth His hand in the case of scoffers.'" (A homiletical rendering of Hos. 7.5) R. Simeon b. Lakish said: "He who scoffs will fall into Gehenna, as it is said, 'A proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name, worketh for arrogant wrath.'" (Prov. 21.24, rendered homiletically). And by 'wrath' nought but Gehenna is meant; as it is said, "That day is a day of wrath." (Zeph 1.15) (This refers to the Day of Judgment when the wicked will be sentenced to Gehenna.)²⁴⁹

A few instances are given in Berachoth of cases where an individual was compelled to resort to various radical devices to distract the guests at a wedding feast from their exuberant boisterousness.

Thus,

Mar, the son of Rabina made a marriage feast for his son. He saw that the Rabbis were growing very merry, so he brought a precious cup (crystal cup) worth four hundred zuz and broke it before them, and they became serious.²⁵⁰

The very identical thing happened when

Rav Ashi made a marriage feast for his son. He

saw that the rabbis were growing very merry, so he brought a cup of white crystal and broke it before them and they became serious.²⁵¹

We have two examples where the references were made to Tephillin as a means of checking undue levity.

Abaye was sitting before Rabbah, who observed that he seemed very merry. He said: "It is written, and rejoice with trembling." He replied, "I am putting on t~~h~~illin."²⁵²

He inferred that his wearing of Tephillin would guarantee that he would not go too far in his merriment. A similar story is told concerning another scholar.

R. Jeremiah was sitting before R. Zera who saw that he seemed very merry. He said to him: "It is written, 'In all sorrow there is profit' [Prov. 14.23]." He replied: "I am wearing t~~h~~illin."²⁵³

Certain groups in their regimen of discipline forbade laughter because of the fact that they felt it led to immorality. We find the statement in DMAI that if a man has taken upon himself to become an associate (*שׂרן*) (i.e., a member of a group of scrupulous observers of the Law, especially in matters of tithes and purity,) certain restrictions are placed upon him and:

R. Judah adds: "Nor may he be addicted to making vows or to laughter."²⁵⁴ (which supposedly leads to immorality).

Naturally, there was a time and place for mirth and laughter and this is what R. Johanan referred to when he said:

As long as that wicked man lived (Nebuchadnezzar) mirth was never heard in the mouth of any living being.²⁵⁵

We have included a chapter of this nature in our study, so as to avoid the temptation of considering the Talmud, a book which has as one of its prime motivations the development of the sense of humor. Nothing could be further from the truth. At the same time, I believe we are now in a position to refute the incorrect statement that the Talmudists were dry legalists and lacked a sense of humor.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

We have taken only one leaf out of that collective human experience of eight hundred years that was set down in the early centuries of the modern calendar - that great book which man call the Talmud.

The stories which we have related and discussed mirror the many sided life of the Jewish people and are in a real sense, a commentary on it. Much of the wit and humor which was included in this study came to the relief of the Jew when the dreariness and tragic earnestness of the great struggle of existence threatened to unnerve him.

Nothing offered the Jew so good a safeguard against despondency as the power to enjoy the humorous side of things in the midst of embarrassment. These disappointments and adversities which the Jews had to encounter and the overwhelming powers they had to contend with, whetted their intellect into a sharp bright steel which flashed forth its dazzling splendor to overawe their foe.

There is an old Talmudic saying:

R. Ilai said: "By three things may a person's character be determined: By his cup (the effect of drink, on his mind), by his purse (money spent on charity) and by his anger; and some say: by his laughter also.²⁵⁶

This dictum has always held true for the single individual and it has held true for the entire nation as well. What has provoked a

people's laughter and the way in which a people laughs at its own misfortunes and weaknesses, has afforded us a glimpse into its inner character.

We have found in our survey that the Jew was able to find his humor in all his surroundings: man, nature, and even God himself; he can hardly enter into any conversation without telling a joke or two. Even the teacher in the school or the preacher in the pulpit tried to liven his talk with a few humorous parables.

Olsvanger points out that:

It always pains the Jew to repress a story that has just occurred to him. "Eyzehu Giber? Hakoyvesh a playchvertl!" ("Who is a hero? He who represses a joke!") says the Jew, prodyng the talmudic saying: "Eyzehu giber? Hakovesh es yitsro!" ("Who is a hero? He who represses his passion!").²⁵⁷

There can be no doubt about it. The wit and humor in the Talmud was present at all times. The Rabbis always had the gift of glossing over in humorous manner, and of showing irony about the various forms and expressions of life and of recognizing the comical side of being.

We have aimed in our study to make an ancient book, the Talmud, which in fact is a library, live again. Admittedly, we dealt with only one of the thousands of phases of the gigantic work.

No, the Talmud is not a dead book. For 1500 years our people, young and old, made this book the source of their strength. In discussing

the ancient laws, even those which were no longer applicable to their daily experience, they forgot the degradations and the indignities to which they were subjected.

The Jewish people in the days of the Bible and Talmud have sung their part. To make it heard for generations to come, is a great and sacred task. But to make it part of the whole of the human symphony is a task no less important. In the Harmony of all the voices, and in the attempt to make each of them sound clearly so that it may be heard and understood, lies the guarantee for a better world and a greater, more meaningful civilization.

FOOTNOTES

1. Disraeli, Isaac, "Works", Vol. 2, p.434
2. Taan. 22A
3. Ber. 6B
4. Jer. 33.11
5. Sab. 30B
6. Article "Humor" in "Encyclopaedia Britannica", Vol. 11, p. 883
7. Ibid. p. 883
8. Article "Humor" in Hastings "Encyclopaedia of Religion", Vol. IV, p. 872
9. L'Estrange, "History of English Humor", p. 13
10. Leacock, S. "Humor: Theory and Technique" p. 201
11. Quoted in Mendelssohn, F. , "The Jew Laughs", p. 15
12. Brill, A. A. in "Introduction to Mendelssohn, F. S. "The Jew Laughs"
p. ix.
13. Freud, S. in "Basic Writings", p. 705
14. Froeschels, E. "Philosophy in Wit", p. 37
15. Teitelbaum, E. "An Anthology of Jewish Humor and Maxims", p. 11
16. Davidson, I. "Parody in Jewish Literature", p. XIX
17. Libowitz, "~~Parody in Jewish Literature~~ ^{"P'gilei Shalom"}", p. 9
18. Adler, H. "Jewish Wit and Humor" in "19th Century", March 1893, p. 458
19. Kohut, A., Art. "Wit in Talmud" in American Hebrew, Vol. 26, #13,
p. 195
20. Richman, J. "Laughs from Jewish Lore", p. xviii

21. Parkash , פ. 2

דוויכוח גמ'נים, בכותים וקמא'נים ונצמנים
ידי של קרב' של אש' ושל היתול' ומפני עבד'י
הוויכוח' היו נאמ'ים בכות' לפני כז' עם נכד'
יקבל' של כן יאזו' הוויכוח' אלן' אמת' את'
אויב'ים אמכב' אש' ודאנ'ה

22. Rashi translates, ^{קמת הכמן וכן זנק צל'תא וממוק אגא' דאנית מאספ' שלי} she placed it under the hot ashes and after roasting it, etc,
then took it out and offered it to him to eat.

23. ^{דא מאיספ' ט'פ. זכא'י אמת'כה קוצ' אמכ תקוניה}
Rashi says--one often takes an instinctive dislike to food or other
objects if they are first seen in their raw state.

24. Sanh. 39A

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid. A similar account appears in Hul. 87A

28. So Rashi...other translate, "Struck him with his ladle." פכדו של צוואכו

29. Sanh. 39A. of also Hul 59B - 60A

30 Ab. Zarah 55A

31. Ab. Zarah 54E - 55A

32. Ab. Zarah 54B

33. Ab. Zarah 44B

34. Sanh. 90B - 91A

35. Shab. 31A

36. Shab. 30B - 31A

37. Shab. 31A

38. Sanh. 91A
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Sanh. 109B
42. A play on the words *אָר* and *אָר'ן*
43. Ned. 50B
44. Taan. 7A
45. Shab. 119A
46. Rashi explains the word as meaning *אָר*
47. Hag. 5B
48. Wallach, L. "The Colloquy . . . With Judah I", in JQR, Vol. 31, p. 285
49. Sanh. 91A & B
50. Sanh. 91B
51. Sanh. 91B
52. Ibid.
53. Pes. 3B
54. Ber. 48A
55. A legendary river, said to flow with such a strong current on week days, carrying along stones and rubble with tremendous force, as to be quite unnavigable but resting on the Sabbath.
56. The whole week smoke ascended from his grave, as he was being burnt in the fires of purgatory; but even the wicked in Gehenna have rest from their torments on the Sabbath.
57. Sanh. 65B
58. Rashi explains: *אֵין אֵין אֵין אֵין אֵין*
59. Sanh. 39A

60. B.B. 10A
61. Sanh. 90B
62. Tamid. 31B
63. Simon, E. in "Notes on Jewish Wit", Jewish Frontier, Oct. '48, p. 46
64. Rashi Explains: "יֵשׁ לָהּ חַוָּלָה"
65. Git. 47A
66. The upper part of the body which contains the head and the heart, and consequently what is good in man, belongs to the former; the lower half of the body, the seat of the sexual and excretory organs to the latter.
67. Sanh. 39A
68. Frankel, Z. "נְסִיבָא נִירָא" p. 59b
69. Ab. Zarah 4A
70. Sanh. 39A
71. Ibid.
72. Sanh. 99A
73. Suk. 48E
74. Sanh. 91A
75. Yeb. 102B (Certainly it is not valid. It is the sister-in-law that performs the *אֵיבָרָה* while the ^{though initiating the act} brother-in-law only submits to it. God, in the image of the text quoted, standing towards Israel in the relationship of a Levi to his sister-in-law, cannot perform the *אֵיבָרָה* and his action, so to speak is invalid: the bond between Him and His people remaining in force.)
76. Sanh. 39A & B

77. Ber. 10A. "The point is that at present she is barren, but in the future she shall have many children. Probably Beruria was thinking of Rome as "The married wife" and Jerusalem as "the desolate".

78. Sanh. 91A

79. Sab. 30B and Pes. 117A

80. Yoma 83B

81. Lazarus, W., "The Ethics of Judaism", p. 62

82. Ab. Zarah 19B

83. Sab. 77B

84. Sanh. 104A & B

85. Ab. Zarah 3B

86. Sanh. 93A

87. Ibid.

88. Rashi explains:

לשון ענין ענין ענין ענין ענין
נקרא גוי'ן דלמן אכא' מניכור בת כוונ'ן

89. Rashi explains:

ח כאן הכתוב: כ'א אקא

"Break them on top of the threshold."

90. Ned. 66B

91. Ibid.

92. Er. 53B

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Sanh. 51B

96. B.B. 32B. Rashi feels that he was thrown out because his question was regarded as foolish פו'ס מ'טו'ן א'ע

but Tosafos disagrees and feels that he was expelled because he ventured to call in question the statement of the Rabbis that a young bird can hop only 50 cubits.

- 97. Nidah. 23A
- 98. Ber. 31A
- 99. B. K. 60B
- 100. Ber. 19B
- 101. Pes. 3B
- 102. Meg. 25B
- 103. Pes. 42A
- 104. M. K. 9B
- 105. Meg. 25A
- 106. Nidah 31B
- 107. Sota 20A
- 108. Ber. 61A
- 109. Ber. 20A
- 110. Meg. 15A
- 111. Rashi explains ^{כשנכתב חסד אינו מוצא מקור לשם מחזיק בזה דאיהו}
באין ראיין בלוחי מנני לקניק יחס בנק אהה אומח
- 112. Sanh. 22A - Rashi explains: ^{אם אלה י"ם היאם ומקנחין בין תשי"ג}
למשי"ג ומקנה צ"ה בתוד"ס י"ם תיקוח: וזקא ג"ה א"ר
- 113. Sotah 4A ^{א"ר חלקי יחצונה ופעלק צ"ה א"ר יאצ"ס הכניח"ת משי"ג}
א"ר חלק" (ע"ו ב"ו א
- 114. Rashi states: ^{מ"א אבילו נבל מן יחס ונתקצ}
- 115. Yeb. 53B - 54A
- 116. Er. 53B
- 117. Kid. 81B
- 118. Sanh. 7A
- 119. Ber. 57B
- 120. Ber. 22A
- 121. Ber. 62A
- 122. Men. 37A

123. Hul. 90B
124. B.B. 73B
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid.
127. B.B. 73A & B
128. B.B. 73B
129. Ibid
130. Ibid.
131. Leacock, S., "Humor: Its Theory and Technique", p. 17
132. Simon, E. "Notes on Jewish Wit in "Jewish Frontier" Oct. '48, p.42-43
133. Pes. 114A
134. Appears in B. M. 107B, B.B. 60A and Sanh. 18B
135. Pes. 52B
136. Sotah 9B
137. Yer. Meg. Chap. III, par. 4
138. Yer. Meg. Chap. I, par. 10
139. Ber. 20A
140. Rashi gives a slightly different explanation indicating that R. Adda meant that her name caused him to lose money - "ספד פסו"
141. Suk. 48B
142. Hul. 139B
143. Yer. Maas. Sh. Chap. IV, Par. 12
144. Yer. Sotah Chap II, Par. 2
145. Yer Sotah, Chap VIII, Par. 10
146. Yoma 76B
147. Yoma 75B

148. Niddah 31B
149. Sab. 104A
150. Sab. 77B
151. Ber. 61B
152. Sanh. 39A
153. Sanh. 39A. of. Rashi
154. Davidson, I. "Parody in Jewish Literature", p. XIV
155. Yer. Pes. Chap. III, par. 7
156. Yer. Ned. Chap. VI, par. 9
157. Er. 3A
158. Kid. 18A
159. Ber. 5B
160. Kid. 22A
161. Kid. 49B
162. Ibid.
163. M.K. 9B
164. Meg. 14B
165. This is Rashi's Explanation:
"אֲיָקוּ דִּין' פֶּקֶע"
166. Meg. 14B
167. Sotah 10A
168. Kid. 49A
169. Bek. 45B
170. Yeb. 118B
171. Ibid.
172. Jastrow translated קודץ - dull or ugly while Rashi believes it means
אנאען בױב יאע of a tainted family.

173. Ber. 32A. Similar to this statement is the one made by R. Yannai's School which appears on the same page. "The silver and gold which Thou didst shower on Israel until they said, Enough (dai) that it was which led to their making of the calf. They said in the school of R. Yannai: A lion does not roar over a basket of straw but over a basket of flesh."

אין איני נופס מתוק קובב על תבן
אלא מתוק קובב על ער

174. Pes. 113A

175. B.M. 85B

176. Yoma 18B

177. Rashi explains: *פ' ג' ע' ל' ו' ז'* as meaning *מאמתה בוי'א* family shame

178. Yoma 22B

179. Git. 30B

180. Git. 45A

181. Sanh. 106A

182. B.K. 92B

183. Ibid.

184. Sab. 53A

185. Sanh. 105A

186. Hul. 127A

187. Ibid.

188. Kid. 82A

189. Yoma 20B

190. Sanh. 39B

191. Ber. 51B

192. There is also a play on words here on the name "Ziggad" *זיג'אד* *זיג'אד* who is hoisted. Aramaic "Minnegad" means "gets a flogging"

193. Mak. 11A

194. Ned. 41A
195. Sanh. 103A
196. Meg. 7A; Hag. 10A; Yoma 85B
197. Yeb. 45A
198. B.K. 92B
199. M.K. 16A
200. Ned. 50B-51A
201. B.B. 16B
202. Ned. 51A
203. Yeb. 63A
204. Ibid.
205. Shab. 11A
206. Kid 209B
207. Pes. 113A & B
208. A.Z. 20B
209. Meg. 7B
210. Pes. 109A
211. Suk. 51B
212. Suk. 53A
213. Sab. 130A
214. Sab. 30B
215. Beza 15B
216. Sanh. 110A
217. Sanh. 105A
218. Literally, an arguing spirit, an additional name of the Angel Gabriel who always interceded on behalf of Israel.

219. Sanh. 44B
220. B.M. 59B
221. Sanh. 105A
222. Pes. 49B
223. Ber. 17A
224. Lazarus, M. "Ethics of Judaism", p. 258-260
225. Ber. 34A
226. Ibid.
227. Kid. 46A
228. Yer. Shek. par. 5, Sec. 1
229. Sanh. 33A
230. Meila 17B
231. Taan. 20A & B
232. Mak. 24A & B
233. End of Kiddushin
234. Sab. 121B
235. Ber. 16B (appears also in Yer. Ber. Chap. 5, Sec. 2)
236. Sanh. 7B
237. Beza. 27B
238. Pes. 86B
239. Ber. 60B - 61A
240. B.M. 38B
241. B.B. 22A
242. B.M. 84A
243. Graetz, H., "History of the Jews", Vol. IV, p. 238, n. 6
244. B.K. 17B
245. B.M. 84A

245. B.M. 84A
246. Pes. 86B
247. Sanh. 11A
248. Ber. 31A
249. A.Z. 18B
250. Ber. 30B, 31A
251. Ber. 31A
252. Ber. 30B
253. Ibid.
254. DMAI. Chap. II; Mish. 3
255. Sab. 159B
256. Er. 65B
257. Olsvanger, I., "Royte Pomerantsen", p. XII

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adler, Hermann, art. "Jewish Wit and Humor" in "Nineteenth Century", March, 1893
2. Bible, Hebrew, ed. by Rudolf Kittel, Stuttgart, 1937
3. Bible, English, Jewish Publication Society Translation, Phila. 1917
4. Chotzner, Joseph, "Hebrew Satire", London & N.Y., 1911
5. Davidson, Israel, art. "The History of Purim Parody in Jewish Literature" in "The Purim Anthology" by Philip Goodman, Phila. 1949
6. Davidson, Israel, "Parody in Jewish Literature", New York, 1907
7. Disraeli, Isaac, "Works", in 2 Volumes, London & N.Y., 1859.
8. Drujanoff, A. "שירי חכמים ופזמונים" 3 Vol., Tel Aviv, 1938
9. Elzet, Judah, "שירי חכמים ופזמונים" Montreal, Canada, 1937
10. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Art. Humor, Chicago, London, 1942. Vol. 11
11. Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics, ed. by James Hastings, Art. "Humor" by John Reid, vol. 6, N.Y. 1914.
12. Ferkas, Josef, "Humor in Talmud & Midrash", "פנים אל פנים" Husiatyn, 1914
13. Frankel, Zecharia "שירי חכמים ופזמונים" Breslau, 1870
14. Freud, Sigmund, "Basic Writings", section "Wit and Its Relation to Unconscious", New York, 1938
15. Froeschels, Emil, "Philosophy in Wit", New York, 1948
16. Graetz, Heinrich, "History of the Jews", Phila. 1891
17. Isaacs, Abram Samuel, "Stories From the Rabbis", N.Y. 1893
18. Jastrow, Marcus, "Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature, N.Y., 1943.
19. Jewish Encyclopaedia, Ed. by Isadore Singer, articles, "Badhan" by H. G. Enelow, "Satire" by Israel Davidson, New York and London, 1905
20. Johnston, Charles, "Why The World Laughs", N.Y. & London, 1912.

21. Kohler, Kaufmann, "Studies, Addresses & Personal Papers", N.Y., 1931.
Art. "Jewish Wit and Humor", p. 395
22. Kohut, Dr. Alexander, art. "Wit, Humor and Anecdote in Talmud & Midrash" in "American Hebrew", Vol. 26 #13, May 7, 1886
23. Lazarus, Moritz, "Ethics of Judaism", Phila. 1900
24. Leacock, Stephen, "Humor: Its Theory And Technique", N.Y., 1935
25. L'Estrange, Rev. Alfred Guy, "History of English Humor with Introduction Upon Ancient Humor", London, 1878
26. Levenson, Sam, "Meet the Folks", New York, 1948
27. Libowitz, Nehemiah, "Death in Good Humor" *'פ'קויע פ'קאך אונד'*
Brooklyn, 1917
28. Libowitz, Nehemiah S. *'קאס' אונד'* N.Y., 1934
29. Libowitz, Nehemiah S. *'פ'קויע אונד'* N.Y. 1927
30. Mendelsohn, S. Felix, "Here's A Good One", New York, 1947, Intro.
by A. A. Brill
31. Mendelsohn, S. Felix, "The Jew Laughs", Chicago, 1935. Intro. by
A. A. Brill.
32. Newman, Louis I, Ed., "Talmudic Anthology", New York, 1947
33. Olsvanger, Immanuel, "Royte Pomerantsen", N.Y., 1947
34. Richman, Jacob, "Laughs from Jewish Lore, New York, 1932
35. Simon, Ernst, Art. "Notes on Jewish Wit" in "Jewish Frontier,"
Oct. '48, p. 42.
36. Stetson, Clifford R. "Humor in the Bible" in "Ohio Universalist",
Vol. 49 #2, Mar. Apr. 1937
37. Talmud Bavli, Vilna Edition, ~~1912~~ 1882-7
38. Talmud Bavli, English Translation, Edited by Isadore Epstein, London
1938-1949.

39. Talmud Yerushalmi, Krotoshin Edition, 1866
40. Teitelbaum, Elsa (Compiler) "An Anthology of Jewish Humor and Maxims", N.Y., 1945
41. Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia, Edited by Isaac Landman, New York, 1943.
Art. "Wit and Humor, Jewish" by Jacob Pinchas Kohn and Ludwig Davidson. Art., "Satire" by Alexander Kristianpoller
42. Wallach, Luitpold, "The Colloquy of Marcus Aurelius With The Patriarch Judah I" in JQR Vol. #31, 1940-41, p. 259 ff.
43. Waxman, Meyer, "A History of Jewish Literature, Vol I, N.Y., 1943
44. Wells, Carolyn, Ed., "The World's Best Humor", New York, 1923