

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF S. IMLAH

EDITED BY S. IMLAH

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF S. IMLAH.

Translated by S. IMLAH

of the S. IMLAH

General, Ohio, U.S.A.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SIMLAI.

by

HARRY L. KRONMAN.

Thesis Submitted for Graduation
at the Hebrew Union College
Cincinnati, Ohio, 1925.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

- I. Introduction.
- II. Biographical Notes.
- III. Stalel's Collection.

IV. Stalel's The Artist.

V. Stalel's Departure. FRIEDA

VI. Stalel's Return. IN

GRATEFUL LOVE.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

- I. Introduction.
- II. Biographical Notes.
- III. Simlai's Polemics.
- IV. Simlai The Agadist.
 - A. Simlai's Importance as an Amora.
 - B. Simlai's Teachings - An Appreciation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1. A. J. A. A. A. - Art. in ...
Marzen, 1875.
2. Becker, Wilhelm. - Die Agende der Palästinaevangelischen Anstalten.
Stuttgart, 1882.
3. Beck, David. - Art. in Monatsschrift für Geschichte und
Wissenschaft des Judentums, Vol. 19.
Leipzig, 1880.
4. De Smet, Nicholas. - History of the Jews.
New York, 1910.
5. ...
Bibliography.
Berlin, 1870.
6. ...
1. History of the Jews, Vol. 19, 1880.
2. Art. in Monatsschrift für Geschichte und
Wissenschaft des Judentums, Vol. 33, 1894.
7. ...
London, 1910.
8. Jellinek, M. - ...
Vienna, 1877.
9. ...
1. History of the Jews, Vol. 19, 1880.
2. Art. in Monatsschrift für Geschichte und
Wissenschaft des Judentums, Vol. 19.
Leipzig, 1880.
10. ...
Für Geschichte des
Jüdischen Volkes. Wien, 1904.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1. Atlas, Elazar. - Art in *שנה שנה, הגאס*,
Warsaw, 1885.
2. Bacher, Wilhelm. - Die Agada der Palestinensischen Amoräer.
Strassburg, 1892.
3. Baer, Samuel. - Art. in Monatschrift für Geschichte und
Wissenschaft des Judenthums, Vol. 29.
Krotoschin, 1880.
4. Deutsch, Gotthard. - History of the Jews.
New York, 1910.
5. Frankel, Z. - *כבוא הירושלמי* (Introductio in Talmud
Hierosolymitanum).
Breslau, 1870.
6. Graetz, H. -
A. History of the Jews, Philadelphia, 1893.
B. Art. in Monatschrift für Geschichte und
Wissenschaft des Judenthums, Vol. 33, Krotoschin, 1884.
7. Hyman, Aaron. - *תולדות דת ואמונה*, London, 1910.
8. Jellinek, Ad. - *גית החדש* Wien, 1877.
9. Rahmer, A. - Art. in Monatschrift für Geschichte und
Wissenschaft des Judenthums, Vol. 14,
Breslau, 1865.
10. Weiss, J.H. - *זר זר וזרשין* (Zur Geschichte der
"Judischen Tradition). Wilna, 1904.

12. - Pertinent Passages in

- A. Babylonian Talmud.
- B. Palestinian Talmud.
- C. Midrash Rabba.
- D. Midrash Tanchuma.
- E. Midrash Tanchuma - Ed. Buber, Wilna, 1885.
- F. Midrash Tehillim (Sho'cher Tov) - Ed. Buber,
Wilna, 1891.
- G. Midrash Mishle }
Midrash Samuel } Ed. Michael Wolf,
Lemberg, 1861.
- H. Lekach Tov (Tobia Ben Elieser). Ed. Buber,
Wilna, 1880.
- I. Pesikta Rabbati, Ed. M. Friedman, Wien, 1880.
- J. Pesikta Rab Kahana, Ed. Buber, Lyck, 1868.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

Abod. Zara -	Abodah Zara.
Baba Metz. -	Baba Metziah.
Berac. -	Bera'oth.
Deut. -	Deuteronomy.
Ex. -	Exodus.
Gen. -	Genesis.
Jer. -	Palestinian Talmud.
Kesub. -	Kesuboth.
Kidd. -	Kiddushin.
Koh. -	Koheleth.
Levit. -	Leviticus.
Meg. -	Megillah
Mid. Mischle -	Midrash to Proverbs.
Midr. Sam. -	Midrash to Samuel.
Num. -	Numbers.
Pes. -	Pesachim.
Pes. r. -	Pesikta Rabbati.
Pesikta -	Pesikta Rav Kahana.
Rabba -	Midrash Rabba.
Rosh. Hash. -	Rosh Hashomah.
Sch. Tov. -	Schocher Tov.
Tanch. -	Midrash Tanchuma.
Tanch. (B) -	Midrash Tanchuma, ed. Buber.
Yebam -	Yebamoth.

I. INTRODUCTION.

In the eventful days of the early third century (C.E.) there was born in Judaism, a life that was not destined to remodel, along heroic lines, the religion it loved so well, but which, nevertheless, was fated to leave the clear and indelible stamp of its vision and its originality for later generations to behold and admire. Rabbi Simlai, weighed in the centuried balance of history, may be but of slight importance, but his life presents us with a fascinating network of motives and desires that, more than charm, move us at times to a profound astonishment.

Before we begin to unravel the twisted skeins, let us look at the curtain of his times, against which - as a background - his figure stands out in bold relief.

By the year 200 (C.E.) the main streams of Jewish history had already forked into two disparate streams, and flowed thru two distinct - tho frequently connected - channels, Palestine and Babylon. And in order to understand the forces in which our subject moved and lived, we must follow the windings of each of these two streams.

First, let us consider that which was Palestine. With the sufferings of the Hadrianic persecutions receding more and more into oblivion, the Jews began to revive, and to manifest their revival by the consummation of the work which the persecutions had interrupted - the Mishnah. The spirit of bitter hatred for Rome gradually softened into a mutual understanding, until a genuinely friendly relationship

was attained.

Under Alexander Severus (222-235) the Jews fared very well indeed. That kindly Roman was in fact so well-disposed toward the Jews, that we find the Christians complaining that their religious relatives liked the Romans better than they did the Christians. Alexander himself was mockingly called "Archysynagogos" - "Leader of the Synagogue." And while the legends of his friendliness have undoubtedly been exaggerated by passing generations, there can be no disputing their factual basis.

It was the friendship of this kindly monarch that enabled the Patriarch Judah II (Judah Nesiah I) to bring to his office a greater influence than he might otherwise have possessed, and to retain for Palestinian Jewry the authority which was so steadily slipping from its hands. And it was this sympathetic treatment of our people which led them to abolish some (and attempt to nullify many more) of the laws - passed in earlier and more troublesome years - designed to create an impassable gulf between Jew and Pagan. A Synod, for example, had, (during the first rebellion against the Romans when racial hatreds were flaming), forbidden the people to use oil or food made by heathens. This was intended to stress the difference and to widen the gap between the two.¹ Palestine was not much concerned with such a decree for it worked no hardship on its inhabitants. *Ink?*
All the oil that was necessary for their purposes was produced

1. Graetz - Vol. II, pp.483, 484.

by their own lands, while Galilee was even able to export its surplus. But, with the Hadrianic war, came a decided change. Judaea was laid waste and its oil plantations razed. The rabbinical dictum now had a quite different aspect. The people, dependent for their daily uses on the oil which had formerly been produced at home, now found their sources of supply either greatly diminished or completely destroyed. Graetz tells us² that the natives frequently disregarded the law and used the heathen oil, despite the prohibition against its use. Happily, however, such a state of affairs was remedied by the sway of tolerance, and as a better relationship was fostered between Roman and Jew, the old - and narrow - restriction was repealed.³ Simlai played a prominent part in this liberalizing movement, as we shall have occasion to point out later. It was he, indeed, who carried the news of this important decision laid down by the Beth Din of Judah Nesiah I, to the distant communities.

This spirit of understanding between the Jews and their conquerors seemed to breed an atmosphere of liberality, for other reforms were attempted at this time⁴ and, even if they were not all achieved, the mere effort bespeaks a broadening attitude of mind.

It is unfortunate that Alexander Severus should not have been followed, upon his death, by a ruler equally

2. Ibid, p. 484.

3. Under Judah Nesiah I - cf. Jer. Sabbath 3d, Abodah Zara, 36a, 37a.

4. Graetz, Vol. II - pp.484, 485.

as wise and tolerant. His passing marked the beginning of a most turbulent period; a period whose very violence prophesied the doom of the mistress of the world. Anarchy and misrule contended for the throne, while emperor and usurper followed each other with amazing rapidity.⁵ And if Graetz does not seem to understand the aversion which the Jews cherished for the Palmyrene State (established by Odaenathus) it may be pointed out as a historical rule that whenever anarchy reigns, the Jews suffer. Thus ended what was for Judaism one of its happiest periods under the Roman regime.

The second historical stream - in Babylon - went thru channels that were curiously parallel to the windings of the parent stream in Palestine. Conditions in Babylon had been, for some time, particularly suited to the development of a strong Jewish group. The land was rich and fertile, offering many opportunities for employment which the immigrants were quick to seize.⁶ The variety of their occupations and the generous treatment by their rulers tended to the production of a keen, virile, progressive Jewish body. Parthian and Persian lords alike were tolerant and benevolent. Shapur I (242-271) was very friendly with Samuel, who was then the head of the Academy in Nehardai, and his friendship bred in the latter a wholesome respect for Persian customs.

The great mass of the people was in good circumstances .

5 - Graetz, Vol.II - pp.526 ff.

6 - Ibid, pp.503,504.

In the various phases of commerce and agriculture, they prospered so well that the payment of the poll tax and land tax which were assessed on them, caused them no difficulty. They had their own political chief (Resh Galutha, Exilarch), who was an officer of high rank of the Persian Empire, their supreme civil and criminal judge, with diverse executive powers. And while some of the Exilarchs may have proven both arrogant and ignorant, they were, for the most part, genuine leaders of the Babylonian Jews.⁷ In these pleasant conditions, the great schools, headed by men who had studied in Galilee under Judah I, grew and flourished. And as they increased in influence and power, they became a greater menace to the authority which the Palestinian Academies had come to prize so highly. For it was this authority which, in even inconsequential matters, established them in their right to legislate for all of Judaism.

The pleasant life of their brothers in the district on the east bank of the Euphrates, offering, as it did, every physical advantage, and growing as it was in religious importance, attracted many Palestinian Jews, a fact which must be kept in mind when we discuss Simlai's nativity and habitat. Great numbers left the barren, and sometimes devastated fields of Palestine where Christianity was making steady progress⁸ and with that hope which has

7. Graetz, Vol. II - pp. 507 ff.

8. Deutsch, p. 28.

become the heritage of our people, went to seek life in a more smiling land.

But (as had happened in Palestine), the period of happy development was temporarily interrupted when the Parthians, who had held the reigns of government for four centuries, were overthrown and the Neo-Persian dynasty was established.⁹ After defeating Artabanus IV (211-226), Ardashir, the Neo-Persian leader, fired with a zeal for the old Persian faith, made the Zend-Avesta once more the religious code. The Magi regained their former power and, with fanatical zest, carried out the prescriptions of their dualistic beliefs. Jews and Christians alike suffered from their attacks. On some of the Persian festivals they were not even permitted to have fires on their hearths. With the change of rule, the Jews were deprived of jurisdiction in criminal cases and were expelled from public office. Graetz, in one of his illuminating asides, mentions that the only source of comfort that was left to Jochanan, in Palestine, was that his fellow-Jews in Babylonia could bribe the Persians (who were poor and thus accessible). But this fanatical wave was a temporary one and, as it lost its edge, a better spirit once more became prevalent. This new tide of tolerance came under Shabur I, who, as we have already remarked, was on intimate terms with Samuel. It stimulated anew the study which had for a time fallen off,

2

9. Graetz, Vol. II - pp. 523 ff.

and with the encouragement of the physically beneficial environment, helped Babylonian Judaism to grow to that point where it completely overshadowed the mother country in social and religious significance.

But in this period of changing empires, there was another - a religious kingdom - which was beginning to give evidence of future power.¹⁰ The Christian Church had entered upon a new stage of development, and its growth figures prominently as an important factor in Simlai's life.

The Bishops of Rome, drawing on the powers which accrued to them by virtue of their residence in the capitol of the world, gradually created and incorporated the Catholic Church. The various sects of early Christians and gnostics were then either absorbed by this organized body or deprived - in defeat - of all attractive powers. And what became the recognized Christian Church, having begun as a revolutionary movement, followed the eternal lines and began to create a tradition of its own. When the Bishops of Rome had gained recognition as chief bishops and popes, they began to scrutinize the beliefs and traditions of the Church, and attempted to give firm foundations to the new dogmas which appeared. And it was quite natural that they should seek to base their claims - particularly in those things wherein they differed from Jewish belief - on passages or interpretations of passages in the Old Testament. The Church heads indulged in all kinds of allegorical

10. Ibid - pp.499-502.

fantasies in order to find proof for such new dogmas in the Bible. The rational foundation in the Scriptures of the Trinity (which had grown out of the "logos" and " *עצם אחד*" ideas) became an all-absorbing interest with them. And many of the Church fathers set themselves to a serious study of Hebrew, the better to be able to support their claims, and to harmonize the Old and New Testaments. 2

One such was Origen, renowned author of the Hexapla, who was a resident of Palestine during ~~the~~ long periods between 229 and 253.¹¹ He was most assiduous in his effort to bring the original Bible before his confrères, and it was he - undoubtedly - who figured in some of the debates which Simlai held with those who tried to refute the staunch Jewish ideal of unity. *probably*

This "Back to Scriptures" movement amongst the Christians, had a profound effect upon Jewish study.¹² Since the "Minim," as they are called, based their arguments on the Bible text, they caused a corresponding activity in the ranks of Judaism, for the rabbis were forced to refute them in the same way and with the same weapons which they, the Christians, used. It was a novelty for the Jewish leaders to have the war carried into their own territory. For some time the schools had been engaged with a minute Halachic exposition of the Mishnah¹³, but,

11. Ibid, pp. 488, 489.

12. Weiss, Vol. III - p. 116.

13. Graetz, 488, 489.

faced with a new crisis, many of the rabbis turned once more to an Agadic interpretation of Scriptures. And this effort to refute the Christians' claims resulted in a period of pronounced Midrashic activity. Some rabbis, in fact, who occupied themselves exclusively with this branch of study were known as " רביי דאגדה " - "Rabbis of the Agada." The practical need for their services caused them to flourish despite the intellectual value that was placed on pilpulistic Halacha. Simlai was one of them. 2

While Chanina b.Chama, Jochanan b.Naphacha, Resh Lakish and Joshua b.Levi, in Palestine, and Rami and Samuel, in Babylon, struggled thru the labyrinthine passages of the law, he opened his soul to a finer communion with a spiritual fancy. The laws have most of them gone, but Simlai's lofty interpretations of the principles of life, retain, even in our present changed life, the authority lent them by their innate beauty.

With the picture of his times before us, we may proceed to scan his life and his activities.

II. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Simlai¹⁴ was the son of a man named Abba. This Abba must have been a scholar of at least some repute, for we have an interesting story about his asking Samuel (who was himself a noted astronomer) a question concerning the calendar which the latter was unable to answer.¹⁵ Bacher points out, rightly, I think, that the very tone of his conversation implies that he must have had some recognized standing.¹⁶ For he arrogantly remarks - when Samuel admits his ignorance - "If you don't know this, there must be other things that you don't know." Whether Samuel was then young or old, ignorant or wise, Simlai's father could not have addressed him thus unless his own position were secure.

According to Hyman a passage in Baba Bathra informs us that Simlai had a daughter who was married to Tauchum b. Rabbi, but he fails to quote the exact passage.¹⁷ He brings, as further proof, the reading in Numbers Rabba 11:4 -

ר' תנחום ב"ר חתניה דר' שמלי

but it is doubtful whether Simlai had any family at all. Particularly since, as we shall point out later, the reading in Numbers Rabba is very likely a mistake. One who led the shifting life that Shamlai did, was not apt to burden

14. Traditionally שחלי, שחלי. His name may have been suggested by Ezra 2:46 (where we retain the reading שחלי). cf. also Nehemiah 7:48 (שחלי) and another form in Gen. 36:36 (שחלי).

15. Rosh. Hash. 20b

16. Bacher, Vol. I - p. 552.

17. Hyman, Vol. III, p.1152.

himself with family cares, and the chances are that Simlai lived without ever having married.

About Simlai's birthplace there is a great diversity of opinion, due to the directly contradictory passages in the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. Before venturing an opinion as to which is correct, let us glance at some of the varying theses.

In the Palestinian Talmud¹⁸ we find that Simlai, upon asking Jonathan to teach him Agada, is rudely rebuffed by that individual, who replies:- "I have a tradition from my fathers to teach Agada to neither Babylonians nor Southerners, for they are vain and ignorant. You are a Nahardean and you live in the South." (Lydda). The parallel passage in the Babylonian Talmud contains, however, a radically different statement.¹⁹ When Simlai asks Jonathan²⁰ to teach him "The Book of Genealogies," (ספר יוחסין), Jonathan questions him, and Simlai answers that he comes from Lydda, but lives in Nahardea. Jonathan again replies that one teaches neither Lyddians nor Nahardeans, and especially not Simlai, who comes from Lydda and lives in Nahardea. It can be seen then, that the two statements in regard to Simlai's birthplace are diametrical opposites. It is certain that he was known in both lands, but in which was he born? Herein lies the difficulty that has so puzzled

18. Jer. Pes.-32a

19. Pes.- 62b

20. Read " לודי " for " נחירי ", according to Bacher, Vol. I, p.60, n.4.

the various writers.

Bacher, while he agrees that Simlai belonged to both Palestine and Babylon, chooses to accept the reading in the Palestinian Talmud and acknowledges Nahardea as the place of his birth.²¹ Simlai, he shows, must have been born in the land where his father lived, namely Nahardea. Bacher deduces the place of Abba's dwelling from his conversation with Samuel, which we have already cited,²² implying that since Samuel was in Nahardea, the conversation must have taken place there. Bacher bolsters up his argument by showing that Simlai is referred to as "שמיאי לודא" - "Simlai the Lyddian"²³ and "שמיאי הדרומי" - "Simlai the Southerner" (i.e. - "the Lyddian").²⁴ These references, says Bacher, proved that he lived in Lydda, and since he belonged to both countries, he must therefore have been born in Nahardea.²⁵ From Nahardea, says this author, Simlai went to Lydda, where he attached himself as the personal servant to the aged Jannai,²⁶ and thence to Galilee where he performed the same services for the Patriarch Judah II (Judah Nesiah I)²⁷. Bacher's whole line of reasoning is quite arbitrary, but we shall withhold our comments until we have set forth the other attitudes on this question.

21 - Bacher, Vol.I, p.552

22.-Rosh. Hash. 20b

23. Abod. Zara 36a

24. Jer. Abod. Zara 41d

25 - Bacher, Vol.I, P.552, N .4

26 - Baba Bathra -111a

27 - Abod. Zara 37a.

Aaron Hyman has an altogether different opinion. Simlai, he claims, was the pupil and servant of Judah Nesiah I, and was also a friend of Judah Nesiah II.²⁸ That Simlai was the personal servant of Judah Nesiah I is made clear by the passage in Abodah Zara²⁹ where Simlai is pictured in conversation with that Judah Nesiah, whose Beth Din permitted the use of heathen's oil. And it is well known that this permission was granted under Judah Nesiah I. But another passage³⁰ tells us that both Simlai and Judah Nesiah quote Rabbi Joshua b. Levi. The Talmud is undecided as to whether this is so, or whether Simlai and Joshua b. Levi have both quoted in the name of Judah Nesiah. If the first version is true it must be Judah Nesiah II that is meant. If the second version is correct it must be Judah Nesiah I, who was the teacher of both Simlai and Joshua b. Levi. At any rate the doubt in the Gemorrah shows that Simlai could be identified in relationship with both Patriarchs. And, if this is true, he must have lived in Palestine from his early youth. In other words, he was born in Lydda. What, then, about his residence in Babylon? Hyman has an easy explanation for this; Simlai was sent,³¹ he says, by Judah Nesiah I (whose attendant he was), to carry the news of the "התר השמן" (the permission for

28 - Hyman, Vol. III, p. 1150.

29 - Abod. Zara, 37a.

30 - Becoroth 36b - ר' שמלאי ור' יהודה תרבי"ה משמיה דרבי'ל
אחרי ואחרי זה רבי שמלאי ורבי'ל תרבי"ה משום ר' יהודה נשיא אמרי

31 - Hyman, Vol. III - pp. 1150-51.

using the oil of the heathens") to Babylon. The first city enroute was Nisibis, where Isaac b. Samuel b. Moratha heard him publicly proclaim the new law, and hurried, with his report, to Samuel and Rav.³²

In this connection, Hyman finds an added argument. The passage in Abodah Zara goes on to state that, while Samuel accepts the decision, Rav at first refuses to do so and speaks very slightly of "Simlai the Lyddian," adding "I know the Lyddians. They evaluate things lightly." Such an intimate knowledge must have been obtained by Rav when he studied in Palestine. And certainly at that time Simlai must have been a young man living in his homeland, not having yet set out for Nahardea. Hyman then proceeds to evoke the passage in the Palestinian Talmud³³ where Rav and Samuel hold converse about the report of Simlai's announcement in Nisibis. (Rav was still in Nahardea, not having become, as yet, head of the school in Sora). Rav, here, says to Samuel, "While I was yet there (i.e., in Palestine), I knew who was instigating it. What does this Simlai, the Southerner, amount to, anyway ?" Simlai here again is quite plainly labelled as a Lyddian. And, before drawing his conclusions, the biographer calls our attention to one more passage,³⁴ in which Simlai

32 - Abodah Zara 36a.

33 - Jer. Sabbath 3d.

34 - Pes. 62b.

is reported as having been born in Lydda, but as having lived in Nahardea. He then proceeds to conclude that Simlai, born in Lydda, became the servant of Judah Nesiah I. The Patriarch sent him to Nisibis to proclaim the "הגדר השני" and from there, Simlai went to all the Jewish cities in Babylon - particularly to Nahardea, which had long been the most prominent Jewish settlement.³⁵ Simlai then returned to Palestine where he became the servant of Jannai.³⁶ (the passage in Baba Bathra³⁷ in which he finds his proof, portrays Jannai as speaking very disrespectfully to Judah Nesiah. Hyman comments that this must have been Judah Nesiah II, for Judah Nesiah I was leader of Jannai's whole generation and could never have been thus rudely addressed).

We come now to a still different opinion from those already mentioned; a much less orthodox opinion in that it denies the genuineness of a Talmudic passage. Professor Graetz makes the following points.³⁸ We know, he says, that Samuel prided himself on his ability to reckon the calendar,³⁹ and that, indeed, he sent a letter to R. Jochanan

35 - Hyman deduces from the fact that Simlai quotes Samuel on the question of fixing the new moon, that Simlai must have gone to Nahardea, Samuel's residence, for only at that place could he have had contact with him. Cf. Pesikta 54b; Pes.r. 78a (chapt. 15).

36 - Hyman, Vol. III, p. 1151.

37. Baba Bathra, 111a

38 - Monatschrift, Vol. 33, 1884 - pp. 46 ff.

39 - Rosh. Hash. 20b

in which he had figured out the intercollations for sixty years ahead.⁴⁰ What then, can be meant by the passage in Rosh Hashonnah in which Simlai's father exposes Samuel's ignorance ? Surely Samuel had not been idly boasting! Such was not his way. Moreover, why should Simlai (if Samuel was so unlearned in these matters) have quoted Samuel on the very question in which his father had put Samuel to shame ?⁴¹ The conversation between Samuel and Simlai's father, concludes Graetz, must be apochryphal! And in proof of such an assertion, he offers the following.

The Palestinians, he shows, objected strenuously to any fixing of the calendar by Babylonians, for such action deprived the rabbis of the mother country of their power.(It was thru this action that they expressed their authority over all the diaspora). Samuel, as a noted astronomer, was particularly feared and disliked in this respect. Indeed, the capture of his daughters is attributed directly to their father's sin in reckoning the calendar.⁴² This conversation, as reported in the Talmud, is wholly fictitious and was designed to damage Samuel's influence and to minimize his importance.

Furthermore, Graetz continues, the conversation.

40 - Chullin 95b.

41 - Pesikta 54b. ; Pes.r. 78a (Chap. 15).

42 - Jer. Kesub. 26c.

between Simlai's father and Samuel could never have taken place, since they never came into contact with each other. For while Simlai, (who was born in Lydda), went to Nahardea, we have no record of his father having gone, too. (And in case it might be claimed that Simlai's father had to accompany him because of his son's youth, the author points out that Simlai was in Palestine at least until manhood, for he was the attendant of both Jannai and Judah Nesiah I, making trips only at intervals to Nahardea). Thus we see that Graetz, too, fixes Simlai's birthplace as Lydda, and gives him only temporary residence in Babylon.

Another author offers a very ingenious solution to the whole puzzle.⁴³ Elazar Atlas, a keen and witty writer, takes violent exception to Graetz's article in the Monatsschrift. The question which Simlai's father asks Samuel - Atlas claims - is not, as Graetz terms it, the most elementary thing in fixing the calendar, but one that has been generally troublesome to students of all periods. Failure to answer it would not then brand Samuel as an ignoramus. From this point Atlas continues with a purely historical argument. He objects - and rightly - to the fact that Graetz blandly ignores the passage in the Palestinian Talmud⁴⁴ which makes Simlai a native of Nahardea. It is not scientific to thus lightly deny the authority of a written text. But Atlas

43 - Elazar Atlas (אליעזר אטלס) - שנה שניה, תרס"ה, - 1885 - pp.435 ff.

44 - Jer. Pes. 32a

himself is not interested in proving the truth of the statement which Graetz neglects. In fact, he supplies his opponent with the proof that Simlai was born in Lydda and not in Nahardea! Simlai, he shows, was the servant of Judah Nesiah I ⁴⁵ and also of Jammai, ⁴⁶ and we later find him preaching in Nisibis (which was in Babylon). ⁴⁷ Since he was then - in his youth - a servant to the rabbis in Palestine, he was doubtlessly born there, and later went to Babylon, as did many other Palestinians. ⁴⁸ He is designated as living in Nahardea, because only at rare intervals would he return to his homeland. Perhaps this explains why he wanted Jonathon to teach him the Book of Genealogies in three months. ⁴⁹ (He wished to return to Babylon and could spare no more time than that).

Having established Graetz's statement that Simlai was born in Lydda, Atlas, with the consummate artistry of the born debater, also agrees that Simlai's father may never have gone to Babylon with his son. But he is vitally interested in proving that Abba may, nevertheless, have had some contact with Samuel (or else the conversation between them is a forgery). So he shows that Samuel had been in Palestine, by quoting the fact that he was Rabbi's (Judah Hanasi's) physician. ⁵⁰ One difficulty remains, however; that

45 - Abod. Zara 37a.

49 - Pes. 62b.

46 - Baba Bathra, 111 a.

50 - Baba Metz. 85b.

47 - Abod. Zara 36 a.

48 - cf. above p.5.

is the fact that from Samuel's boast about being able to fix the calendar for the whole diaspora, we must infer that he lived in Babylon! It is here that Atlas propounds a very shrewd and not unlikely answer. Samuel's boast, he says, was made when he was a young student in Palestine, and when Simlai's father called him to account, he found himself possessed of all too insufficient a knowledge of the subject. But, goaded on by Abba's taunt, he set himself to a thorough study of the whole problem, and thru honest application, was later able to make good his word by sending to Jochanan his reckoning for sixty years ahead.⁵¹ And it was this older and wiser Samuel that Simlai (having met him in Babylon) quotes on this same subject.⁵²

In the presence of so many diverse statements by accredited and authoritative writers, it is rather presumptuous to venture any opinion whatsoever. Yet it is possible that each, one of them has some element of truth, which if combined properly with the others, will give us a clear picture of the situation.

It seems to me that Bacher is too arbitrary in his reasoning. He merely chooses the reading in the Palestinian Talmud (which makes Simlai a native of Nahardea) and then augments his argument with specious proofs. The fact that Simlai is referred to as "Simlai the Lyddian" and "Simlai the Southerner"

51 - Chullin 95 b.

52 - Pesikta 54 b; Pes.r. 78 a (Chap. 15).

in no way

proves that he was an inhabitant of Lydda - and consequently was born in Nahardea! Had Simlai been born in Lydda he could as well have been designated by the same terms. And, in fact, a man's nationality distinguishes him even after he has changed his allegiance. It is quite common for us to describe those who live among us by the country of their birth - E.G. - "the German" or "the Englishman." The innate weakness of Bacher's thesis is shown by the fact that Hyman interprets "the Lyddian" to mean exactly the opposite - i.e., - that Simlai was born in Lydda.

Hyman, it appears, is closer to the truth, altho he does not go far enough. He is content to allow Simlai but one pilgrimage - a rather short one - to Babylon. Atlas, with greater insight, has him remain in Babylon, and pictures him as making trips, at long intervals, back to Palestine. But the latter author errs in saying that Simlai went to Babylon after first having been servant to both Judah Nesiah I and Jannai. Simlai must have made his first trip to Babylon while he was still servant to Judah Nesiah I, for the news of the "הנה הנה" had very evidently not yet reached Rav and Samuel.⁵³ Had he not gone to Nisibis until after he had served Jannai, Rav and Samuel would undoubtedly have heard

53 - Only so can be explained the haste with which Isaac b. Samuel b. Maratha went to Rav and Samuel, who were both evidently surprised by the announcement. It was something new for they debated about it - cf. Jer. Abod. Zara 41d; Abod. Zara 36a; Jer. Sabbath 3d.

about the innovation, for when Simlai was attending Jannai, the latter was very old and blind,⁵⁴ and, as Hyman points out, Judah Nesiah II was then Patriarch.⁵⁵ Quite patently that was some time after the Beth Din's action.

What happened then, it appears to me, was this.

Simlai, born in Lydda, and educated in Palestine, attached himself (as already shown), as attendant and pupil to Judah Nesiah I. The Patriarch, when his Beth Din voted in favor of permitting the use of the heathen's oil, immediately despatched Simlai to Babylon to proclaim the revocation of the old law. Simlai, attracted by the generous nature of the country, stayed there for some time, quite naturally seeking out the oldest and largest Jewish community - Nabaddea. Later, however, he returned to Palestine and became the servant of Jannai, who by this time was very old. But the yearning for pleasant Babylon asserted itself again and he determined to return there. It may have been on this occasion that he was rebuffed so rudely by Jonathan⁵⁶. And if we accept the version in the Babylonian Talmud, the whole thing fits together, for here Simlai asks for instruction within a three months' period. The specification of a set time would then have been caused by his desire to make his departure at the end of that period. And Jonathan, knowing

54 - Baba Bathra, 111a.

55 - Hyman, Vol. III, p. 1151.

56 - Pes. 62b.

that Simlai had once lived in Nahardea, and that he intended returning there, would have been quite justified in saying, " *בביתך נהרדעא*" - "your residence is in Nahardea."

Finally, and in conclusion, Simlai's eager wish for the reforms in Palestine ⁵⁷ can well be put down to the fact that he was a native of that country, and so peculiarly affected by the needs of the people. The attempted reforms grew out of the people's actual needs, but it is doubtful if even so liberal a person as Simlai - being an alien - could have felt them so keenly and have worked for them so diligently.

With this understanding of the external plan of his life, we are well able now, to proceed to a consideration of some of the expressions and results of that life.

57 - Abod. Zara 37a.

III. SIMLAI'S POLEMICS.

The study of any series of disputative writings must be approached by way of the social, political, or religious setting in which we find them. Thus, before we broach this aspect of Simlai's life, we would recall those events already mentioned in our introduction.

The Catholic Church, it will be remembered, had become an organized body thru the efforts of the Bishops in Rome. It found, in Palestine, a healthy breeding place, and grew and flourished to such an extent that its activities - and perhaps its annoyances - caused many Jews to leave Palestine and emigrate to Babylon.⁵⁸ But, while it may have caused the Jews some physical discomfort, its greatest danger lay in quite another direction. The Church fathers, among them the famous Origen, sought to find substance for their new tritheistic beliefs in the writings of the Old Testament, thus to harmonize their new dogmas with the old. Had they succeeded, their faith, with all the glamour of things new, might have stolen from the Jewish fold a goodly number of converts. But the rabbis, ever alert to the dangers that threatened the weal of their people, came to the fore and showed how shallow and superficial were the Christian interpretations of the Hebrew text.

Notable among these defenders of Jewish belief was Simlai. And we have, in his name, many records of his verbal

58 - Deutsch, p.28; Hyman, Vol. III, p.1151.

encounters with Christians, or as they are termed in Talmud and Midrash, the "Minim" ("המנינים").

These propagandists, in order to carry their point, had to rely on Biblical sources, which they were far less adapted to use than were the Rabbis. Simlai, in particular, had a profound knowledge of Scriptures, and it was a comparatively simple matter for him to parry their childish interpretations of the text.

From the fullest account of these debates,⁵⁹ we learn that the Minim propounded six Bible passages to Simlai, hoping to prove (thru his inability to confute them) that God was conceived of as a plurality of Gods even in the Old Testament. They begin their questions in a way calculated to arouse and annoy the rabbis, namely, "כמה אלהות ברא את העולם" - "How many Gods created the world?"⁶⁰ And they cite six instances to prove that more than one God took part in such work (and, thus, that the trinity was implicitly recognized in the Old Testament).

I. The Minim point out the fact that in Genesis I:1 we find a plural denomination for God - בראשית ברא אלהים

II. In Genesis I:26, God, speaking in the first person, uses a plural form - נעשה אדם בצלמנו - implying thereby that others shared in His creative program.

III. In Joshua 22:22, moreover, we find the expression

59 - Jer. Berac. 12d

60 - Except in Deut. Rabba 2:8, where a more disarming formula is used - כמה ישויות - "How many powers."

"אל אלהים יהוה", and the Minim take this as a reference to the tripartite division of the Godhead.

IV. Psalm 50:1 likewise has this triple terminology -
"אל אלהים יהוה."

V. In Joshua 24:19 God is characterized by a plural adjective - "כִּי אֱלֹהִים קְדוּשִׁים הוּא."

VI. Finally, in Deuteronomy 4:7, He is again characterized by a plural form - "אלהים קרבים."

Simlai, with that clear and logical method that characterizes all his work, turns the Christians' methods upon themselves. He uses their own weapons to destroy their flimsy arguments, saying, "כל מקום שפקרו המינין בשויתן בידן," "Wherever (in a Biblical passage), the Minim seem to find a support for their scepticism (about the unity of God), their refutation is always nearby."⁶¹ One by one he dispraves their claims.

I. Simlai shows that the plural form "אלהים" in Genesis 1:1 is used with a singular form of the verb - "ברא."

II. The "נעשה אדם בצלמנו" in Genesis 1:26, he points out, is followed (verse 27) by "ויברא אלהים את האדם" again, a singular verb form.

III. With regard to the "אל אלהים יהוה" of Joshua 22:22, Simlai shows that it too is followed by the singular "הוא יודע."

IV. So with the "אל אלהים יהוה" of Psalm 50:1 which is followed by "זבחי יקרא ארץ."

V. As regards the plural modifier in Joshua 24:19, he points out that it is succeeded by the singular of the pronoun "הוא."

VI. Finally, Simlai shows that the singular suffix is

61 - Jer. Berac. 12d; Gen. Rabba 8:8

used (וְאֵלֶּיךָ) after the " אֱלֹהִים קָרְבָּי " of Deuteronomy 4:7.

2 after
מִיָּד קָרְבָּי 502

In all these answers, it will be noticed that Simlai does not venture beyond the clear and literal truth of the text. In no case does he have to invoke fanciful conjectures. He resorts to no possible implications of the various verses, but builds his arguments on the solid grounds of their explicit meaning. It is significant that the Minim are nowhere reported as having been able - or, as having even attempted - to penetrate his defense. His replies are always the seal to every question of debate.

Curiously enough, however, this passage in the Palestinian Talmud tells us that Simlai's disciples, while they permit their master to silence thus easily his Christian opponents, are themselves not so easily satisfied. On several occasions they exclaim, " לָמַדְנוּ מִפִּי רַבֵּנוּ שֶׁאֵין אֱלֹהִים חִסְדֵּי " - "You have disposed of them with a ready argument, but what answer will you give us?" ⁶² And thru Simlai's replies to his pupils, we catch an inspiring glimpse of his lofty spiritual mind. In giving a new explanation of the plural form in Genesis 1:26, Simlai draws on the meaning of Genesis 4:1 ("I have gotten a man - אִתִּי יְהוָה - with God") and draws the homily that God is a partner, with man and woman, to the birth of every human being; that just as neither alone can have child, so both together cannot beget unless

62 - Jer. Berac. 12d; Genesis Rabba 8:8.

God be actively associated with them. The spiritual value of such a statement is too obvious to need comment.

And so with his second explanation (of the three names of God) Simlai, revealing a knowledge of the social custom of his time, says that they are merely three forms of address. He compares it to the salutation of the Roman Emperor who was called Basileus, Augustus, and Caesar (all of which were synonymous). This gives us the evidence that Simlai was not restricted to a certain mode or form in his rational interpretations of the Bible text, but that, having been refused credence in one explanation, he could apply his same logical method in another way.

When his disciples question his explanation of the " אל אלהים יהוה " in Psalm 50:1, he gives them the same reasonable sort of answer, showing that the synonymous terms " אלהים," " בנין " and " ארכיטקטן " are frequently applied to one person.

Simlai himself does not answer the objection by his pupils to the sixth question. It is given in the name of R. Isaac, who quotes Judah, in the name of Acha.

We have various differing accounts of these debates of Simlai's, some more fragmentary than others, but all of them built about the same incidents. Thus one account⁶³ lacks questions 4 and 6, but since these are respectively parallels to questions 3 and 5, nothing is really lost. Another version⁶⁴ combines questions 1,2 and 6 in a continuous

63 - Gen. Rabba 8:8

64 - Deut. Rabba 2:8

conversation. Question 5 is found by itself in two passages.⁶⁵ In another text we find question 3 alone.⁶⁶ In only one instance⁶⁷ do we find another verse, (Deut 4:33) used in these debates and in this case Simlai answers again with a proof drawn from the singular form of the verb. The answer to the inquisitive pupils is here given in the name of R. Levi.

It is interesting to note that Jochanan, in debates similar to those in which Simlai participated, gave the same answers to questions 2 and 6 as did Simlai.⁶⁸ It is not at all impossible that he was influenced by Simlai who must certainly have been regarded as a technical master in this polemical work, altho Simlai may himself have drawn on current, popular interpretations.⁶⁹

Simlai's contribution must by no means be underrated, for, had Christianity been able to establish at this time, a Biblical foundation for the trinity, it is safe to say that its influence amongst Jews would have been so augmented as to have made it far more dangerous than it actually was. The literary and intellectual character of his work we will discuss in the next chapter.

65 - Tanch. מו"ק - chap. 4; Tanch (B) בראשית -chap.7

66- Seh. Tov to Psalm 50:1

67 - Ex. Rabba 29b

68 - Sanhedrin 38b

69 - cf. Gen. Rabba 22:4.

IV. SIMLAI THE AGADIST. HIS IMPORTANCE AS AN AMORA. AND AN APPRECIATION OF HIS TEACHINGS.

A. Simlai's Importance as an Amora.

The period directly preceding and continuing thru the third century was one of intense Halachic activity. The great teachers were concerned with the completion of the Mishnah, and (after its consummation), with its exposition.⁷⁰ But far from remaining within the scope of that legal code, the first generation of Amoraim (and Simlai is counted amongst them) set a new standard for those who followed. They began, in their interpretation of the Mishnah, what was ultimately to flower in the form of the Talmud (that was to bear the same relationship to the Mishnah as the Mishnah had had to the Bible). And while there were no violent controversies such as had obtained during the second generation of Tannaim, great emphasis was still laid on Halachic superiority. The rabbis yet regarded Pilpul as the highest form of scholarship.⁷¹ They looked with a tolerant scorn on all the "אמוראים גבול" - "the rabbis of the Agada," in some instances refusing to honor them with the title of rabbai, referring to them merely as the "אמוראים גבול" - "Masters of the Agada."

In such an atmosphere, Simlai, whose only claim to fame lay in his Midrashic ingenuity, in the richness of his imagination and the spirituality of his vision, could

70 - Graetz, Vol. II - pp.489,490.

71 - Weiss, Vol. III - pp.116,117.

not have hoped to achieve an authoritative rank. His interests lay not in a minute dissection of legal discussion, but in vitalizing and actualizing the ethical and spiritual concepts which he saw as the basis of all the detailed codes in Bible and Mishnah. He was a preacher, not a judge, a brave and courageous champion of the highest virtues, occupied with the human problems of his people and his times.

And while, as one of those disdained men of the Agada, he may have been looked down upon by his Halachic superiors, his eminence as a preacher is not denied. Every one of his Agadic statements in the Babylonian Talmud is introduced by " *אמר רבי שמלאי* " - "Rabbi Simlai preached." That he was an acknowledged leader in his own field is demonstrated by the fact that he is quoted, in Agadic matters, by such men as Elazar⁷² and Chiyya b. Abba.⁷³

It is quite natural, then, that we should expect but little of Halacha to be recorded in Simlai's name. In fact, the story is told that at a Pidyon Ha-Ben (redemption ceremony of a first-born male child) Simlai was unable to settle a minor question with regard to the blessings involved and had to take the problem to the school in order to ascertain the correct procedure.⁷⁴ The perpetuation of

72 - Sanhedrin 8a. (Bacher claims many old manuscripts do not contain this - Vol. I, p.554).

73 - Sanhedrin 106a. Here Simlai's name is mangled to " *אמר* " but the parallel passage in En Yaakob (Chap.11) reads, correctly, " *אמר רבי שמלאי* ."

*not parallel at
in the text.*

74 - Pes. 121b.

such an incident in the Talmud is sufficient evidence to us of how little esteemed was his Halachic ^{ability} ~~activity~~. Moreover, at the time when Simlai proclaimed the הרר השח in Nisibis, Rav refused to accept the decision because he thought Simlai was giving it in his own name, and not in the name of Judah Nesiah I. ⁷⁵ This action of Rav's is clearly indicative of his opinion.

Beside the fact that we have only one Halachic decision of Simlai's preserved in the Palestinian Talmud, ⁷⁶ his humble position in the legal school is vividly portrayed in that Tanchum b.Chizyah alone gives the tradition in such matters in Simlai's name. One of these passages is in reference to the pay of the "revisers" of the official manuscripts kept in the Temple. ⁷⁷ Another tradition given by

75 - Jer. Abod. Zara 4ld; Jer. Sabbath 3d.

76 - Jer. Kidd. 64d - A decision on the marriage laws, given in Antioch.

77 - Num. Rabba 11:8 - This reading is introduced by the phrase " ר' תנחום בר חייה ". Hyman, (Vol. III, p.1152), uses this to support his claim that Simlai had a daughter, who married Tanchum b. Rabbi (cf. above, p.10). But such an assertion must be denied in view of the evident corruption of the text. The parallel passage in Jer. Shekalim 48a has the correct form - " ר' תנחום בר חייה ". The mistake in Numbers Rabba 11:8 probably crept in, as Bacher points out (Vol. I, p.554, n.4) from the phrase ר' תנחום חתניה דר' אלעזר בר' אבינה which occurs a few lines before (Num. Rabba 11:7). The other passages in which the phrase is always " ר' תנחום בר חייה " support the verdict of a corrupt text.

Tanchum b. Chiyyah in Simlai's name has to do with the priestly blessing in those cities wholly inhabited by priests.⁷⁸ He also quotes Simlai with regard to the ban which a young disciple lays for the sake of his honor.⁷⁹ Certain it is then that Simlai had little or no authority as a Halachist, a fact which readily accounts for the paucity of legal passages cited in his name. But it is just as certain that he was recognized as a master Agadist! How, then, can we explain the comparatively small number of his sayings found in traditional literature? How should we interpret the fact that the Palestinian Talmud contains only one sermon of his?⁸⁰ How can we understand his failure to figure even as a bearer of past tradition?⁸¹ Finally, what about Jonathan's sharp refusal to teach Simlai Agada?⁸² (Bacher tells us, moreover,⁸³ that Jonathan was imitated by other rabbis who refused to have their names associated with Simlai's). What could have been at the bottom of this

78 - Jer. Berac. 9d; Jer. Gittin 47b.

79 - Moed Katan 16b

80 - Jer. Pea 21b - introduced by כד דרשה רבי שמלאי. In Pes. r. 115b (chap. 25) we have another version - כד דרשה בטבריא. Friedmann emends כד to כן but Bacher inserts רבי שמלאי, after כן, in accordance with the reading in Jer. Pea and shows that the text then reads smoothly. Bacher, Vol. I, p. 560, n.3.

81 - Sanhedrin 98a. In Sabbath 139a, the one instance where Simlai carries on the tradition of a Tanna (Eleazer b. Simon) his name is changed to read רבי תנא.

82 - Jer. Pes. 32 a

83 - Bacher, Vol. I, p. 554.

universal abhorrence for a man so admittedly gifted ? Why should they have so disdained him ? A closer view of Simlai's personality will reveal the answer. *two things.*

It is written in the life story of the human race that the leaders of any social group have always arrogated to themselves the right of deciding the conditions under which that group was to live. In things temporal, where physical compulsion can be resorted to, the punishment for disagreement is swift and certain. The rebel is clapped into jail; the dissenter is deported. But it must be remembered that every generation has its intellectual princes, too, who rule over their own world of the mind and who resent - as much as their co-rulers - any divergence from the path they have sanctioned. They have no prisons at their disposal, however, for while a man may be told that he must act in a prescribed manner, no one, not even the mightiest, can prevent him from thinking as he wishes. And here was Simlai, calmly disregarding the opinions of all the intellectual lights of his time, quietly ignoring the dialectic which they prized so highly, offering his finest thought on the altar of the Agada. How were they to punish him ? How were they to express their contempt for his work, if not by excluding from their tomes as many as possible of his Agadic utterances ? Simlai as one of the *אמרי אמת* was not considered as having so lasting an importance as those men who spent their lives splitting the hairs of pilpulistic discussion. He was at variance with his times

2/

and, like all great rebels, had to suffer.

But he paid the penalty for another reason, too. for Simlai was one of those who differed not only in the form, but in the content of his activities, from all the acknowledged leaders of his period; one of those fearless spirits who dared to be a liberal in a world that had set its stamp of approval on a rigid conservatism.

It was Simlai who, seeing the Jews weighted and burdened with a mass of ritualistic prescriptions, sought to condense and express them in broad ethical and spiritual principles.⁸⁴ And that, despite the constant efforts of all his great contemporaries to heap up added restrictions. It was he who saw the human needs of the people and agitated for such a reform as the permission to use oil made by the heathens. It was he, too, who (when this was achieved), expressed the hope of seeing such a liberal attitude extended to other things.⁸⁵ And Simlai it was who denounced, in no uncertain terms, the hypocrisy of his colleagues that allowed them to teach one thing and to practice another.⁸⁶

We can understand now, why it is that this fearless, outspoken individual, concerned with the active life about him, following the paths that separated him, frequently, from his contemporaries, should have been so discriminated against by them. We can comprehend why the rabbis, like all who

84 - Makkoth 23b; Gen. Rabba 8:15; Koh. Rabba 7:6

85 - Jer. Abod. Zara 41d; Abod. Zara 37a; Jer. Sabbath 3d.

86 - Deut. Rabba 2:12.

stand dogmatically for the conventional mode, suppressed - so far as they could - the lofty teachings that, could they but know it, would long outlive their minute and often petty discussions. Not that they were opposed to spirituality in itself, but Agadic effort simply did not conform with their idea of what constituted scholarship - particularly when it actively denied the value of most of their legal formulations. And, since he was judged by his own times, we must content ourselves with what must be but a small number of his teachings.

We must not be too harsh, however, in criticizing the rabbis. The mere fact that we have as many statements recorded as we have proves that they attempted to overcome their bias and retain those things which were of outstanding worth. Anthologists today are far less sympathetic with those who do not write according to their own particular standard. In this attempt at fairness lies what Bacher terms the "reliability and impartiality of Agadic tradition." ⁸⁷

Simlai, nevertheless, was not to be swayed from his purpose by the antagonism of his fellows. Having loved the Agada from his youth, he persevered in the face of even such a stinging insult as he received from Jonathan.⁸⁸ His courage had its results for we find that Jonathan's interpretation of Proverbs 13:23 is in direct answer to a question from Simlai. ⁸⁹

87 - Bacher, Vol. I, p.555

88 - Weiss, Vol. III, p. 117

89 - Gen. Rabba 49:15.

So the latter must ultimately have achieved some importance in the master's eye. This later admission, by Jonathan, of Simlai's authority is also shown by the fact that Jonathan debates with Samuel b. Nachman on the interpretation of Hosea 2:1.⁹⁰ In another setting, Samuel b. Nachman's opinion is given in Simlai's name.⁹¹ Jonathan must have credited it with some significance ~~as~~ he would never have troubled to argue the point. And we might cite one more instance to show that Simlai, while he was not highly respected, and may have been heartily disliked by his contemporaries, was not altogether unimportant. When Malkiyah came to his home and committed a misdemeanor, Simlai scolded him for it,⁹² a thing he could never have done had he not had some degree of recognized superiority.

Simlai was, then, a man, not of his own time, too soaring to be bound to earthy detail by the chains of his own generation; a personality not of a single period, but for all times, courageous, glowing, vivid. His importance is established not by contemporary opinion but by the lasting beauty of his work. What that beauty is, and how far-visioning its purpose, we shall be better able to grasp as we continue with the final division of this paper.

90 - Yoma 22b

91 - Num. Rabba 2:18

92 - Sabbath 46a.

B. SIMLAI'S TEACHINGS - AN APPRECIATION.

As has been repeatedly stated in the preceeding pages, Simlai was primarily a preacher, appealing to the great mass of the people, and not restricting himself to intellectual intercourse with the men of the schools. To be successful, any dissertation that is directed to a heterogeneous audience must be logical and keen. And if it is to sustain the interest of its auditors, it must have sufficient of poetical flight to illustrate and enhance its thesis. Simlai's preachments contain all these desirable elements. They are clearly defined, resting on the logical meaning of the texts on which they are built. They are terse and to the point, but contain that imaginative note that gives them so spiritual a color; a generous combination of the real and the unreal, each substantiating the other.

Because of the great number of Simlai's interests, it is difficult for us to sharply mark off and label his teachings. But we find, upon a close analysis, that most of them can be assigned to one of three categories.

- I. The essentials of the Good Life. Man's relation to God.
- II. The practical duties of religion.
- III. Israel's relation to the world.

We shall consider, in turn, that portion of his Agada which falls into each group.

I. The first essential of the Good Life, according to Simlai, is sincerity. Those who do not practice as they preach prostitute their own teachings and render them futile and useless. Simlai scores those who preach against lending on interest, against stealing and thieving, yet indulge in all these practices themselves.⁹³ Sincerity, according to Simlai, would prevent such incongruity between practice and preachment. Moreover, he points out, it avails nothing in the end. And he gives the example of Moses, detected in an insincerity by God.⁹⁴ The parable is striking. Moses, thru his dishonesty, gets a full measure of material satisfaction, but the greatest pleasure, entrance into Canaan, is denied him. Sincerity of purpose is as vital a thing as honesty of action!

And the idea that mere physical satiety can in no way compare to spiritual satisfaction is admirably presented in another form.⁹⁵ The world, which was created in six days, can in no way equal the importance of the Torah which was given to Israel in forty days. From this we can induce the second element in the Good Life - spirituality. For the Torah has ever been synonymous with the high spiritual and intellectual life of man as contrasted with his mere bodily existence.⁹⁶ In this simple note, we

93 - Deut. Rabba 2:12.

94 - Sota 14a

95 - Pes. r. 110a (chap. 21)

96 - R. Jochanon also had this "forty to six" comparison of the Torah and the world. Cf. Levit. Rabba 30:1; Shir Rabba 8:7; Tanch.(B) * * * - Chap. 19; Pesekta 178b

see next
page

can see again why Simlai, endowed with such a lofty vision, was not content to spend his days in Halachic debate!

but intellectual life like spiritual life in the Torah

Another principle inherent in the finest type of living is to be able to live in harmony with one's fellow-men; to recognize that all social intercourse is founded in a mutual admission of the importance of every member in the group. Simlai illustrates this from the life of Joseph, who says to his trembling brothers: " **אתם הויוך**

ואני הראש אין אדל גיבא לה ריש טב " - "Ye are the body and I am the head. If the body is gone, what good is the head?"⁹⁷ Simlai could not tolerate the exaggerated stress that some of the leaders lay on their own importance. He then deftly shows that society depends on all classes. Harmony comes from a tolerance for each other.

These three qualities, - sincerity, spirituality, and consideration are the characteristics *sine qua non* of the truly full life. They point the way to genuine happiness. It is interesting to note how Simlai constantly reveals and emphasizes the ethical content of Judaism. Thru these ethical principles does man achieve his highest goal - not thru subservience to an infinity of ritualistic observances! Simlai goes further still. He declares that man has been given a standard of action in God. Man has but to model himself, in his actions, according to the pattern provided, and he can easily reach the plane of a spiritual life. The Torah, Simlai shows, in its beginning, middle and

97 - Gen. Rabba 100:10. Bacher omits from this text - " **גוי' הראש לראש** " and changes " **אין** " to " **בין** " Bacher, Vol. I, p. 561, n.3.

end, pictures God in acts of charity - the most sincerely spiritual and considerate action which man can perform.⁹⁸ To clothe the naked, visit the sick and bury the dead - the attributes of conduct in Simlai's Utopia. Nor must it be overlooked that in his day, as indeed they are in smaller measure in our own time, these were the highest forms of social conduct and kindness. To imitate God in his acts of charity was Man's greatest end. And this God, claims Simlai, the Judge Supreme, is quite willing, in His effort to help man find the right way, to overlook and forget his faults and remember only the good and worthy deeds.⁹⁹ The king who was wroth with his wife for having lost his gift to her, is appeased when he is reminded of the trust (of equal value) which her father had deposited with him before his death. So God, who is wroth with Israel, is appeased by the virtues of Abraham. Simlai here pictures Israel as analogous to the queen. Israel, the bride of God. No more beautiful relationship could be imagined. Israel, beloved of God, forgiven its sins, for the merits of its progenitors.

But Simlai does not mean this relationship to generate into the casual acceptance which such a close union frequently breeds. Man, he says, should always

98 - Gen. Rabba 8:15; Tanch. פנחס - Chap. I, Tanch.(B) פנחס - Chap. I, Sch. Tov to Psalm 25:10. These are construed, for the most part, in Gen. 2:22, 18:1 and Deut. 34:6. Sota 14a substitutes Gen. 3:21 for Gen. 2:22. In Gen. Rabba 8:15, a fourth act is added on a basis of Gen. 1:28. In Koh. Rabba 7:6, Bemachyah is the author of a similar statement.

99 - Tanch. פנחס - Chap. 24. Another version in Ex. Rabba 44: 4 given by Abin in the name of Acha.

precede prayer with praise! ¹⁰⁰ And he cites Moses as his criterion (Deut. 3:24,25). Man, in his order, must always praise God, ¹⁰¹ Who created all.

But the Lord, while he is forgiving, does not overlook iniquity. Wherever there is a determined effort to shatter the moral structure of society, a plague comes into the world that destroys good and evil alike. ¹⁰² God is certain in His punishments, and men who sin force Him to act. (There is a genuine psychology at the bottom of this statement. The great evils caused by a few members of a social group, strike the whole group. They do not single out the erring individuals. This is at once the curse and blessing of gregarious life. For, while one man may cause many to suffer, each member of the group will be on the alert - for self-protection - to see that his fellow does not menace the lives of all. It enforces a moral policing). Those who not only themselves sin, but lead others to sin, lose even the right of trial which they might have had. God, while He is kind and merciful, has no patience with the seducer! ¹⁰³ So the serpent, who has beguiled Eve, is granted no hearing but is cursed forthwith by God, without even daring to make any plea, (though in reality it might have claimed that Eve should have obeyed God and not it).

100 - Abod, Zara 7b; Berac. 32a

101 - Gen. Rabba 8:1 (based on Psalm 148).

102 - Gem. Rabba 26:10; Levit. Rabba 23:9; Jer. Sota 17a.
Cf. also Tanch. *א-כ-א*, chap. 12

103 - Sanhedrin 29 a.

Simlai, however, does not conceive of God in this relationship of strict judge alone. The Lord repays good for good. Thus, Reuben is rewarded for saving Joseph's life by having the first refuge cities assigned to his territory.¹⁰⁴

Finally, the spirituality of Simlai's conception of the relation between God and man is revealed in his dramatization of a conversation between God and Isaac. God desires to punish Esau, but his father pleads with Him, and suggests that punishment in this life will mean but little. The greatest punishment will be Esau's inability to vision the glory of God in the world to come.¹⁰⁵

In this story of Simlai's we can see the kernel of what was to become a profound religious, philosophic belief - that punishment in the hereafter consists, not in being burned in a series of hells, but in being unable to establish a contact with the Infinite Spirit that is God. It is dangerous, of course, to project such an idea into Simlai's mind, for it is very easy to imagine, in past writings, the substance and meaning of later beliefs. But the whole spiritual outlook of the man was so exalted - as can be seen from the passages already quoted - that it does not

104 - Midr. Sam. Chap. 9, as a comment to Deut. 4:41. In Makkoth 10a, another explanation is attributed to Simlai, that in Deut. Rabba 2:21 is given in the name of Jose b. Chanina.

105 - Gen. Rabba 67:5. For the legend at the basis of Isaac's plea, cf. Tobija b. Eleazar (Lekach Tov) to Genesis 32:4. The basis of Jacob's fear (expressed in Lekach Tov) is given anonymously in Gen. Rabba 76:2.

not at all. Rabba's doctrine of future punishment is not at all. Rabba's doctrine of future punishment is not at all.

seem anachronistic to establish him in this lofty conception.

These fundamental ethical principles combined with an awareness of man's relationship to God, were for Simlai the highest peak of human endeavor. And if we but conceive of the fervency with which he espoused those principles, we will be better able to understand his attitude as regards the forms and minutiae of religion. It is entirely to be expected. Rules of religious conduct are evolved for those who need concrete guides to action. The truly spiritual man, like Simlai, is not dependent on them..

II. Let us look now at some of the passages in which is reflected Simlai's attitude toward the practical duties of religion. No finer example can be found than that very famous sermon in which Simlai, with a philosophic insight, shows the gradual concentration of numerous laws into broad, sweeping ethical principles. ¹⁰⁶ This sermon has rightly

106 ¹ ~~Mak~~ Makkoth 23b; Tanch. ~~Devarim~~ - chap. 9. In these two accounts, there is a divergence of opinion. The Talmud passage pictures David as establishing 11 principles, Isaiah 6, Micah 3, Isaiah (again) 2 and Amos 1 principle, as the essence of all the 613 commandments given by God to Moses. In the Tanchumah, David concentrates them into 11, Isaiah into 6, Micah into 3, Amos into 2, and Habukuk into 1. This reference ~~to~~ Amos as establishing 2 principles, Bacher claims, is probably the fragment of the Talmud reference to Isaiah 56:1, the mistake creeping in when the second reference to Isaiah was omitted. The chances are that Nachman b. Isaac's objection to Amos as the author of one principle, and his substitution of Habukuk (Makkoth 24a) in the Talmud version, was not part of the original reading, but was a later addition, (Bacher Vol. I, p. 559, n. 2).

become famous. Simlai begins with the statement that there were 613 commandments entrusted by God to Moses, 365 of them negative, equal in number to the days of the solar year, and 248 positive commandments, equal to the number of members traditionally counted in the human body.¹⁰⁷ Then he proceeds to show that they were gradually concentrated by David and various prophets, into an ever smaller number of principles, finally being reduced - all 613 of them - to one single rule of conduct. In this conception, Simlai was not unlike Hillel, who also expressed all of Judaism in a single rule, but Simlai dresses the thought historically and shows that it was the prophets, (and before them, David), who enunciated the fundamental principles that were the Alpha and Omega of the truly religious life. It is not that he wished to prove that the prophets invalidated the Mosaic Law, but that he desired to show how its spirit and purpose was retained and expressed by them in a few simple doctrines. For Simlai, the religious life was the ethical godly life, and the amassing of a tremendous store of petty, detailed restrictions did not make for it. His idea, derived from the prophets, was to lay down

2. The chronology is based on a popular idea that Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah were contemporaries - Seder Olam, Chap. 20; Pes. 87a, Baba Bathra 14b, Rashi to Hosea 1:2 Dr. A. Rahmer (Monatschrift, 1865, pp. 218 ff). shows that Hieronymus was familiar with this tradition.

3. The phrase [רָחוּק] is used to denote diminution - cf. Koh. Rabba 12:15; Jer. Berac. 5c.

107 - The Tanchuma passage omits the classification into positive and negative. The meaning of this smaller classification is this - "Each day says, 'commit no sin on me,' and each member of the body pleads, 'Do some good deed with me.'" cf. Mid. Mischle to Chap. 31, Pesekta 101a

the few basic, broad principles that are essential to the ideal life, and to let man work out his own destiny within their general outline.

A facetious commentator might remark that he was the precursor of our own Reform Movement. For, indeed, we have built along the same lines - the condensation of religious demands into the broad, philosophic, prophetic principles of life. A tribute to his vision, that we should so be seeking as he advised!

But one thing more remains to be said about this justly famous sermon. Graetz,¹⁰⁸ referring to the phrase (Makkoth 23b) הַדָּר שֵׁנִי - "Isaiah came again," translates it "Der zweite Jesaja" - "the Second Isaiah." Quite naturally, this is a mistranslation, for Simlai did not know about the second Isaiah, as Bacher notes,¹⁰⁹ but it interests us nevertheless. It is barely possible that Simlai may have felt some difference in style and content, between the earlier and later chapters in Isaiah, and sought to express this difference as one of attitude - whereby Isaiah, having formerly advanced six principles of conduct, now comes back and suggests two.

At any rate, the sermon stands out as a vigorous and intelligent objection to the religious detail with which he saw the people being flooded. A far-sighted plea for the genuine religion that lies back of all formulæ.

108 - Graetz - Vol. IV, p. 244. (*Geschichte des Judentums*, Leipzig, 1893)

109 - Bacher, Vol. I, p. 559, n. 1.

It must not be inferred, however, that Simlai, eager to see the spirit of the laws revealed in their formulation into principle, was willing to cast ruthlessly aside every formal expression of that principle. For we find that, in explaining the use of both זכור and שמור in the commandment of the Sabbath,¹¹⁰ he harmonizes them by saying "Be mindful of it (דוכריהו) before it has come and observe it (שומריהו) when it has actually arrived."¹¹¹ But even here, where Simlai counsels the observance of a ritual, he implies much more than a meaningless attendance upon empty detail. He urges that the Sabbath spirit sanctify every day of man's life, and that its memory be not crowded into but one day out of seven. This is a far different attitude from those who find one day of sanctimonious piety sufficient to balance the lack of religious fervor during the rest of the week.

Simlai, nevertheless, would never rigidly enforce an unnecessary detail of the law, when such enforcement spelled hardship for the community. It is told that when he taught in Tiberias that one should have a change of raiment for the Sabbath, his auditors wept and complained that their poverty had reduced them to only one set of clothing for Sabbath and week day alike. Whereupon, the

110 - Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12.

111 - Pes. r. 115b (Chap. 23) cf. the story of Shammai's attitude here and Baza 16a.

humane teacher wisely advised them to but make some change in their dress.¹¹² Again we see that it is the spirit and not the letter of the law which he wished to establish.

Finally, Simlai's opinion that laws and conventions which seek to express a spiritual idea are not static or inflexible, but that they can be ignored by men whose great inner experiences make them see God in their own way, is demonstrated in his sermon about Elijah.¹¹³ The prophet he says, dared to sacrifice on a high place (when such action was expressly forbidden) because a special and explicit revelation of God's word urged him to do so. Certainly we can deduce from this that Simlai put more trust in the great moral forces in man, ^{that motivate to conduct} than in all the legal codes which have been drawn up to direct and limit such conduct. For Simlai, the inspired man who feels God in his

*if this is spirit
that is letter?*

112 - Jer. Pea. 21b. This reading has *בגדיהם*. The correct form - *בגדיהם* - is found in Pes.r. 115b (chap.23), where Bacher reads *שחא* for *חן* and inserts *שחא* after *בגדיהם*. Cf Ruth Rabba 5:12, Sabbath 113b.

113 - Jer. Meg. 72c, Jer. Taanith 65d. In these two passages *דיבורא* is a mistake for *דיבורא*. Because of this mistake, Z.Frankel (in *מבוא ירושלמי* p.127a) names an Amora " *ר' שחא דיבורא* ", having wrongly joined the two words. Weiss (Vol.III, p.117,n.10) already shows the error. Pes.r. 125b (Chap.24) has the correct reading *אמר ר' שחא דיבורא אמר ליה דכח*. Sch. Tov to Psalm 27:5 has the correct reading also, but *שחא* is corrupted to *שחא*. Cf. Levit. Rabba 22:6, Num. Rabba 14:5; Tanch. *שחא* - chap. 28.

heart, needs no permission from man. His spiritual insight prompts him to act even if that act be contrary to custom.

To sum up, then, Simlai desired to see the enormous mass of legal religious detail compressed and formulated into sweeping principles of conduct. He stressed the actuality of the religious spirit, not a formal recitation in ritual. And while he admitted that certain fundamental practices and duties were essential to the religious life, he was unwilling to see them carried to the extreme where they detracted from the joy of living and brought added cares to those already burdened. We might repeat again - truly the essential elements of our own Reform Movement!

3. Simlai's conception of Israel's relationship to the world (as personified in the other nations) is strikingly illustrated by several of his sermons. In a comment on Amos 5:18, he makes his point by relating a clever little fable.¹¹⁴ The cock and the bat were both waiting for the dawn, when the cock turns to the bat and says "I wait for the light, for it is mine. As for you - of what good is it to you?" Samuel Back¹¹⁵ says: "This fable is the incarnation of Simlai's polemics against the proselytizers who were led on by blind zeal." But Bacher¹¹⁶ stresses rather another part of the fable and disclaims all reference of Christianity in it. In the allegory, he says, the awaited light means

114 - Sanhedrin 98 b

115 - Monatschrift 1880, p.71.

116 - Bacher, Vol.I, p.563, n.1.

the Messianic Era in which the nations of the world have no part. If we accept Bacher's opinion, and it seems more reasonable than the other, we see that Simlai considered Israel (despite its then unenviable position) as the most fortunate nation in the world. For Israel alone was to share in the spiritual bliss of the great redemption period. Israel alone had the powers that would enable it to enjoy the coming light.

This hopefulness of an ultimate balancing of the scales in Israel's favor can be easily understood. Simlai had not been able to understand why his people, whom he conceived in a most idealistic light, should be suffering while other nations who had contributed nothing to the spiritual life of humanity, should be triumphant and prosperous. This plaintive note of misunderstanding is evidenced when he pictures Israel as crying ¹¹⁷ "Oh Ruler of the Universe, because of his [Esau's] ¹¹⁸ three tears, Thou hast made him Lord of all the world. If Thou wouldst but look upon our humiliation, and see how we pour out our very lives, how much quicker [wouldst Thou bring us to Salvation]."

And as Simlai could see no hope for vindication in his own day, he too took refuge in that apocalyptic hope in which the Jews found solace, ¹¹⁹ Sometime, he believed,

117 - Sch. Tov to Psalm 80:6. This may be connected with Gen. Rabba 67:5. ^{הבוא} is used in both, and the import of Psalm 80:6 is explained by the ^{הבוא} of Gen. Rabba 67:5.

118 - Identified with Rome. Also cf. Rashi to Psalm 80:6.

119 - Sanhedrin 97b, where it is told that Simlai reckoned the extent of the present exile.

the situation would be reversed and Israel, now trodden by the nations, would be restored to her rightful supremacy. In a masterly sermon, (probably the most fully developed sermon in rabbinic literature), Simlai draws a vivid picture of that day. We shall repeat it in detail, for it is an admirable example of the imaginative faculty that so enlivens all his statements.¹²⁰

In the future, says Simlai, God will bring a Scroll of the Law and lay it in His lap and say: "Let those who have occupied themselves with it, come and take their reward." Immediately the nations rush in, pellmell. Then God says: "Let each nation come with its scribes." Rome comes first because of its importance, and God asks - "How have you occupied yourself with it?" Rome replies, "We have laid many roads, built many public baths, heaped up a great deal of gold and silver, all in order that Israel might devote itself to the Torah."

"Fools," says God, "all that you have done, you have done for your own sakes. You laid roads to set harlots on them; you built baths to enjoy yourselves in them. The gold and silver, moreover, are mine! Is there anyone among you who can make this (i.e. the Torah)¹²¹ known?" Rome then withdraws, abashed, and Persia enters the scene.¹²²

120 - Abod. Zara 2a to 3b.

121 - After Deut. 4:44 where *דעת* is used with *תורה*.

122 - Cf. Sabbath 33b, where in a conversation between Akiba's pupils, R. Judah praises Rome with these same phrases (adding *הם יקנו גסרים* which in the Talmud is given to Persia) and R. Simon b. Jochai traces its accomplishments to ignoble motives in the same manner as does the Talmud story.

God asks Persia, too, "How have you engaged in the work of the Torah?" and Persia answers, "We have built many bridges, captured many cities, made many wars, and all for the sake of Israel, that it might occupy itself with the Torah." Again, however, God answers: "You have done it all for your own sakes. You have built bridges to exact toll from them, and conquered cities to make them tributaries. Moreover, it is I who makes wars! Is there anyone among you who can make this (i.e., the Torah) known?" Persia, too, leaves, repulsed, and the same thing happens with all the other nations. None can answer in the affirmative. The nations then excuse their unfamiliarity with the Torah on the ground that they had not received it from God, as had Israel. "Is there anything Thou hast given us," they ask God, "which we have not fulfilled?"

God then asks, "How have you fulfilled the 'Seven Commandments?'" ¹²³ Whereupon the nations counter with the query, "How has Israel fulfilled them?" God offers to testify in Israel's behalf, but the nations rule Him out because a father cannot testify for a son, and God has called Israel His first-born. ¹²⁴ God then brings the Heaven and Earth as testifying to Israel's fulfillment of the laws, but the nations claim that their testimony likewise is invalid. ¹²⁵ So God brings, for the nations, non-Jewish

123 - The Noachian laws, supposed to have been revealed, before the Torah, to all peoples.

124 - Cf. Ex. 4:22

125 - On a basis of Jer.33:25. Cf. also the tradition which Resh Lakish quotes here (as a comment to Gen.1:31) that Heaven and Earth are dependent for their existence on Israel's acceptance of the law. Cf. Sabbath 88a, Tanach chap. I.

witnesses to Israel's fidelity. Nimrod who testifies that Abraham refused to serve idols; Laban, that Jacob refrained from robbery; Potiphar's wife, that Joseph would not commit adultery; Nebuchadnezzar, that Chanania, Mischael, and Azaria would not bow to his image, and Darius, that Daniel clung to his prayers. (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, also are named, but the purpose is not given. Perhaps it is to testify to the Jewish steadfastness in belief during suffering).

The nations, thus defeated, pray for another chance. They ask to be given the Law once more, promising now to observe it. God scornfully says, "You fools. He who has busied himself in preparation for the Sabbath will have food on the Sabbath. He who has not - why should he eat?" But He nevertheless gives them a trivial commandment to perform - the law pertaining to the "Sukkah." The nations then scatter and build booths on their roofs, but when the sun grows warm, they immediately give in and forsake them, while God, in His Heaven, mocks and laughs.

This powerful story reveals to us Simlai's fervent feelings as regards the nations of the world and their relations to Israel. The day would come when Israel, spiritual in all its sufferings, would be delivered by that spirituality; when all the physical, material resources of the other peoples would avail them nought. And the great preacher stresses herein the difference between Israel

and the others (showing, at the same time, a remarkable appreciation for the contributions to history made by the various nations of the world).¹²⁶ Israel is distinguished by its ability to see and understand spiritual truths. It is Israel alone, he implies, who can grasp and fulfill the meaning of the Torah. The others find their virtues in various constructive programs - all of them, however, materialistic, and therefore futile on the Judgment Day. Our present ability to scan and evaluate the contributions of the great world powers, can bring us to no clearer conception of their relationship to Israel than that presented us by Simlai. For, say what we will, Israel's greatest gift to humanity was - and remains - a spiritual one. We can but marvel at the perspicacity of this sage who looked so far into past and future!¹²⁷

There remain now, as we conclude this paper, a few of Simlai's statements that fall into none of the

126 - It is interesting to note how Simlai gauges the trend of world history. Rome he pictures as having reached its height, while he makes warfare an outstanding characteristics of the rising neo-Persians!

127 - The beginning of this famous sermon is inserted in Pesikta 185b - evidently, as Bacher points out, an insertion. Cf. Bacher, Vol.I, p.566,n.3. A digest of it is given by Jellinek in his Beth Hamidrash (VI, P.50) in the name of Chanina b.Papa. Tanch. n.g.c. Chap.9, has a similar digest in the name of Chama b. Chanina.

three categories which we have mentioned. Commenting on Genesis 3:6, Simlai tells us ¹²⁸ that Eve came to Adam with quiet, deliberate purpose, showing him that from a rational point of view, he ought to eat of the forbidden fruit. "Do you think," she asks him, "that another Eve will be created for you if I die?" Or that you will be able to continue alone in a desolate world?" Perhaps the author, unwilling to believe that man sins on easy pretext, wished to portray the powerful argument that is necessary to sway him. For Eve shows that Adam's fate is closely linked with hers, and that even if he does not eat, the result for him will be the same as if he does. Or perhaps Simlai suggests here the tremendous influence that love of woman plays in a man's life.

In another passage, ¹²⁹ Simlai takes the אֵלֶּיךָ יָקָרְךָ of Genesis 35:11 as a hint of the illegal sanctuary of the tribe of Dan.

With deep sympathy for woman, Simlai explains why the text in Leviticus 15:35 reads וְהָיָה בְּנִזְתָּהּ and not וְהָיָה בְּנִזְתָּהּ. ¹³⁰ Woman, he says, because of her very nature, must go thru more cleansing periods than man. ¹³¹ Therefore, the Torah uses the word נִזְתָּה which implies great

128 - Gen. Rabba 19:8

129 - Gen. Rabba 82:6

130 - Levit. Rabba 19:5

131 - Cf. Gen. Rabba 88:1; Yebam 47a.

suffering.

The verse in the Song of Songs 3:7, Simlai interprets as referring to the division of the Temple Service.¹³² Finally, in another passage,¹³³ Simlai shows a remarkable knowledge of the embryonic growth of the human being, describing rather accurately ~~the~~ position of the child while in the womb. Where he picked up such knowledge, and whether he made practical use of it, we have no means of determining.

This, then, was Simlai, passingly referred to as of the first generation of Amoraim. His life work can be endowed with no great authority. No massive code bears his name. His monument is one of spiritual value, at once more ethereal and lasting than the others.

132 - Num. Rabba 11:8; Shit Rabba 3:12

133 - Nidah 30b.