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A painting of a man with a long, dark beard and a striped shawl, looking upwards with a serene expression. The man's face is illuminated from the side, highlighting his features. The background is a dark, textured greenish-brown. The overall style is reminiscent of classical religious art.

**ANCIENT JEWISH
PROVERBS**

ABRAHAM COHEN

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Ancient Jewish Proverbs
by Abraham Cohen

First published in 1911

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Preface

The best modern collection of Jewish proverbs is *Rabbinische Blumenlese* (Leipzig, 1844), and *Zur rabbinischen Spruchkunde* (Wien, 1851), by Leopold Dukes. The original sayings are given in alphabetical order with translation and explanatory notes. Many Hebrew maxims of individual Rabbis are also included in his list. My indebtedness to Dukes' work is very great, although I frequently differ from him in translation and interpretation. I have also been able to fill up several *lacunae* in his book. Every Rabbinic reference has been examined and rectified where incorrect.

Not to have classified the proverbs under their subjects is a great drawback to the usefulness of Dukes' work. Dr. M. Lewin in his *Aramäische Sprichwörter und Volkssprüche* (Frankfurt, 1895) has attempted a classification. His collection is, however, very defective, seeing that the Midrashic sources have been all but ignored. He has, moreover, frequently copied the references from Dukes without verifying them. But the book is not without its use. His textual variants are of value. I have ventured a fresh classification based upon Dr. Lewin's, but with numerous deviations and, it is hoped, improvements.

Much assistance has been derived from Jastrow's *Talmudic Dictionary*, and the *Beth Vaad Lachachamim*, by Rabbi A. Hyman, has proved of good service in locating Rabbinic quotations. The English parallels, which I have tried to make as full as possible, are largely drawn from the *Book of Quotations* by W. Gurney Benham, section Proverbs, pp. 739-889.

The texts only are proverbs. In the comments I have quoted Rabbinic maxims and aphorisms, mostly Hebrew, illustrating the proverb in question.

Many may think that the usefulness of this work is greatly minimised by my not printing the originals. My reason for omitting them is that I desire to interest a class of reader which would, undoubtedly, be repelled by a book containing passages in an unknown language printed in strange characters. The original texts are certainly of the highest importance for the study of the language of Palestine, and I may at some future date prepare a critical edition of them. For the present my purpose will have been fulfilled, if this

little book imparts to the English reader some knowledge of the life and thought of the Jewish people, at the commencement of the present era.

A. C.

Manchester,
August 1911.

Editorial Note

The object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nation of another creed and colour.

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D = *Rabbinische Blumenlese*.

D^s = *Zur rabbinischen Spruchkunde*.

The number refers to the number of the proverb in these collections.

The asterisk denotes that the proverb is specifically cited as such in *one* or *more* of the references that are given.

The meaning of the references to Rabbinic works needs no explanation for those who are likely to make use of them.

Introduction

§1. Proverbs in General

The importance of a people's proverbs has long been recognised. Aristotle went to the trouble of making a collection of the popular sayings current in Greece at his time, and often quotes them in his works. In the early part of the second century B.C. the Hebrew sage Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) wrote, "Acquaint thyself with the proverbs [of the wise], for of them thou shalt learn instruction" (viii. 8). They have indeed much to teach us. They are the safest index to the inner life of a people. With their aid we can construct a mental image of the conditions of existence, the manners, characteristics, morals, and *Weltanschauung* of the community which used them. They present us with the surest data upon which to base our knowledge of *Volkpsychologie*.

The genuine proverb is not the elaborately thought-out sentence of an individual, but the commonly adopted expression of long and wide experience. Its literary form is usually crude, unpolished, and devoid of style, indicating that it obtained its currency among the lower classes, not the *littérateurs*. Hence the saying that proverbs are the "People's Voice" is true in more senses than one. It is the popular speech in so far as it reflects the popular mind, but also because it is an accurate record of the vernacular. This is a point of great importance. In attempting to form a conception of the language used by a community at a given time, it is not always safe to rely only upon the literature of that period. The literary language often differs considerably from the spoken, and therefore proverbs offer us the best material for forming an idea of how the people spoke in their everyday intercourse.

All nations have many proverbs in common,¹—*i.e.* a certain phase of human existence or a certain characteristic of the human being is dealt with, which is very much the same the world over. But each nation has its own distinctive way of giving expression to this common idea. From this fact springs another fruitful source of instruction. Why has a proverb such and such a form in one language and quite a different form in another? The answer to this question will always be found in the variety of conditions

under which different nations live. Proverbs among an agricultural community will contain references to nature, and proverbs among a mercantile community references to commerce. Therefore the illustrations used in popular sayings indicate to us the objects with which they who use them come most frequently into contact.

Except in rare cases, it is impossible to trace a proverb to its source. The “whence” or “how” of its origin is usually an unanswerable problem. It does sometimes happen that a proverbial phrase arises out of an incident the account of which has been preserved for us. We know, *e.g.*, how the saying “Hobson’s Choice” came into proverbial use, through Milton’s poem “On the University Carrier.” In the great bulk of cases, however, the origin is wrapped in obscurity. This is a natural consequence of the nature of the proverb, which has been well defined by Cervantes as “a short sentence founded on long experience.” It is the accidents of life and the idiosyncrasies of man that give rise to and obtain acceptance for the proverb, and not until it has passed from mouth to mouth and won approbation does it become recognised as such. The authorship of an individual saying is not of so much importance as the causes which gave it the form adopted by general consent. For the experiences of humanity are like the molten metal upon which each nation stamps the cast of its own characteristics, before they pass into currency as proverbs.

§ 2. Jewish Proverbs

We have so far dealt with proverbs in the abstract, and now we turn our attention to those of a particular people, the Jews. In Jewish literature the word for Proverb, *Māshāl* (Aramaic, *Mathlā*), has a wide meaning. It may signify (*a*) a proverb in our sense of the word, a popular saying; (*b*) the object against which the saying is directed—*i.e.* a by-word, taunt; (*c*) allegory; (*d*) parable, fable; (*e*) any poetical composition. When the Bible declares, “And he [Solomon] spake three thousand proverbs” (1 Kings iv. 32; Heb. v. 12) it clearly refers to “fables,” for it continues, “And he spake of trees...beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.” The “Book of Proverbs,” for instance, does not answer to the description of the folk-saying given above. It is a literary production containing moral aphorisms in poetical form.

Among the Hebrews, poetry consists not so much in metre as in parallelism. The verse is divided into two equal parts, each part expressing the same

idea in different words or expanding it. The opening sentences of the second chapter of *Proverbs* may be taken as an illustration:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words,
And lay up my commandments with thee;
So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom,
And apply thine heart to understanding;
Yea, if thou cry after discernment,
And lift up thy voice for understanding;
If thou seek her as silver
And search for her as for hid treasures;
Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord
And find the knowledge of God.

The parallelism is more striking in the original, but is also well reproduced in the English translation. Each half-verse, it is noticed, “resembles” (Heb. *māshal*) the preceding in thought.

It is thus obvious that the meaning of the word “proverb” as used in the title of the Biblical book is very different from that used above. The man in the street does not speak poetry, nor are such lines as those quoted of a character likely to become “flowing in the mouth of the people.” It is true that the whole of the Book does not consist of such connected poems. We often have long passages of disjointed maxims which are more like the true proverb. But even in these cases the poetical form is carefully preserved. As Professor Toy says, “None of the aphorisms, however—not even such as “go to the ant, thou sluggard,” or “answer a fool according to his folly”—are popular proverbs or folk-sayings. They are all reflective and academic in tone, and must be regarded as the productions of schools of moralists in a period of high moral culture.”²

In five places in the Bible we find the word employed in the narrower sense of a “short pithy saying in common and recognised use.” They are: —“Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Sam. x. 12); “As saith the proverb of the ancients, Out of wicked cometh forth wickedness” (*ibid.* xxiv. 13 [Heb. 14], see no. 70 below); “What is this proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged and every vision faileth?” (Ezek. xii. 22); “Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter” (*ibid.* xvi. 44, see no. 41 below); and “What mean ye that ye

use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (*ibid.* xviii. 2).

These are proverbs in the modern sense of the word, and we see from the Biblical references that they were in common use in ancient times.

Unfortunately no other examples from those days have come down to us.

After the Bible the next piece of proverbial literature is the Book of Ben Sira, to whom reference has already been made. This book resembles *Proverbs* in form and matter, and therefore need not occupy our attention. The only source from which we derive our knowledge of Jewish proverbs in post-Biblical times is the Rabbinic Literature.

§ 3. The Sources of Jewish Proverbs

The *Mishnah*—codification of the Jewish law—was completed at the beginning of the third century of the current era. It formed the subject for study and discussion in the numerous academies of Palestine and Babylon. For over three centuries did the master-minds of ancient Jewry devote their energies to the elucidation of the *Torah*, the written law, and also of the traditional law. Notices of their debates, teachings, and decisions were preserved orally until they were classified and systematised in the *Talmudim*. The "Proceedings" of the Palestinian schools were put into literary form at the beginning of the fifth century and of the Babylonian schools at the end of that century.

The *Talmudim* are consequently a kind of Hansard, providing us with reports of the academic gatherings. It might often happen in the course of his remarks that a Rabbi would emphasise a point or give force to his speech by quoting a common and well-known proverb. Or, since it was a general practice to derive every law from the Bible, the Rabbis tried as a pastime or mental exercise to find Biblical authority for many other matters besides, among them being the popular sayings. Hence in two important passages, *Baba Kama* 92^a—^b and *Sanhedrin* 7^a, we have a long list of genuine proverbs preserved. Scattered throughout the Rabbinic literature generally, we have pithy sentences introduced by such phrases as: "That is what men say"; "As men say"; "The proverb says"; "Created beings say"; "In the West (or, There, *i.e.* Palestine from the standpoint of Babylon) they say."

All these are clearly genuine proverbs. But even in these cases we not unfrequently find the identical saying quoted in other passages without the introductory formula—no doubt because they were so well known—which leads us to believe that the *Talmud* contains proverbs not specifically cited as such. If, for instance, in a Hebrew passage we come across an *Aramaic* sentence, in form and contents like a proverb, we may rest assured that we have there a genuine popular saying.

Another important source is the *Midrashim*. As early as the time of Ezra, the Reading of the Law was accompanied by an exposition (Neh. viii. 8). When the synagogue became a recognised institution, these Bible expositions occupied a prominent position in the service. In this way arose the weekly sermon, which not only interpreted the Scriptures, but was also employed as a medium for moral exhortation and religious instruction. In the course of these sermons the preacher would often use sayings which were current in the mouth of the people. At various times between the fifth and tenth century collections were made of these homilies, and many proverbs were thus committed to writing. These collections are called *Midrashim*, and although the date of their compilation is comparatively late they embody a good deal of early material.

§ 4. Language of the Proverbs

From the interesting narrative contained in 2 Kings xviii. we learn that in the beginning of the seventh century B.C. the only language understood by the general populace in Palestine was Hebrew. Aramaic was at that time only understood by the Court. Before many centuries had passed, however, the influence of this language upon Hebrew began to make itself felt, and during the time of the Babylonian captivity (586-536 B.C.) grew stronger and stronger. Recent discoveries have placed in our hands Aramaic documents belonging to Jewish colonies outside the Holy Land, dated the fifth century B.C. The post-exilic literature of the Jews shows clear traces of Aramisation both in vocabulary and grammatical construction. We even have long Biblical sections in that language: viz. Ezra iv. 8–vi. 18; vii. 12–26; Daniel ii. 4–vii. 28 (cf. also Gen. xxxi. 47; Jer. x. 11).

There is preserved an Aramaic *dictum* of José b. Joëzer, who flourished about the time of the Maccabean struggle—i.e. the middle of the second century B.C. (*Eduyoth* viii. 4). Slowly but surely Aramaic began to displace Hebrew as the vernacular of the Jews, until towards the end of the Jewish

State we find it in complete possession. The language spoken in Palestine about the time of the rise of Christianity was Aramaic.³ Thus Hillel, who was a contemporary of Herod, often frames his maxims in that language (cf. no. 177 below, and *Aboth* i. 13; ii. 7; iv. 7).

As a consequence we expect and find the proverbs used by the people in the Aramaic language. A few are found in Hebrew, but they are either late or were current among the more educated classes, who continued to use the "Holy Tongue." Numerous proverbs disclose dialectical differences from the normal Aramaic of Palestine or Babylon, some of them pointing to Galilee as the land of their origin.

§ 5. Age of the Proverbs

It has been mentioned that the Talmudic literature, where the Jewish proverbs are to be found, was completed at the end of the fifth century AD., and the *Midrashim* some hundreds of years later. But the date of the source in which a proverb occurs, or of the earliest Rabbi who quotes it, merely gives us the *terminus ad quem*. It provides us with no clue to the age in which the saying came into circulation.

The difficulty in dating a proverb with any degree of precision has been alluded to already. It is impossible to speak confidently on this matter, but it would scarcely be an exaggeration to assert that a large number, at any rate, of the proverbs in this collection was in use in the first century of the present era. An additional interest is given to them by this fact. They illustrate the life, manners, thought, and speech of the Jewish people in the most critical period of its existence, and as a consequence must prove helpful in the elucidation of the New Testament.

§ 6. Characteristics of Jewish Proverbs

The following collection is not a *florilegium*, but has been made as exhaustive as possible.⁴ We have not therefore a selection of the best of the recorded sayings used by the Jewish people nearly two thousand years ago, but a list of practically all that have been preserved. It is necessary to bear this in mind when attempting to pass judgment upon them.

The first point that will strike one on reading them through is the absence of the coarseness of speech so prevalent with Eastern peoples. One need only compare Burckhardt's "Arabic Proverbs" to perceive the contrast.

Allowance has, of course, to be made for the fact that the Rabbinic literature has preserved for us only a part of, and probably the best part of, the Jewish proverbs. In spite of this, however, one can scarcely fail to notice the purity of the language which is employed throughout.

The lofty standard of morality displayed in the proverbs also calls for commendation. It has been rightly said, "If the moral character of a nation is to be judged by its proverbs, only the best of them may go to form the verdict, only such as may be considered the product of gradual ethical growth."⁵ It is inevitable that all nations, however highly developed their culture may be, should have among their proverbs some which would be condemned by every right-thinking individual as improper.

Selfishness, *e.g.*, exists in all communities and is bound to find expression in their sayings. Exasperation at the fickleness of fortune is sure to find an outlet in some harsh proverbs. But it is a wise maxim of the Rabbis: "A man is not to be held responsible [for what he says] in the hour of sore trouble" (B. B. 16^b; D. 51).

For all that, the Jewish proverbs are remarkably free from sayings of this class. In very few cases—*cf.* nos. 213 and 282—was it found necessary to emphasise that the morality inculcated was not in accord with the general ethical teaching of Rabbinic Judaism. Against them might be set the fine thoughts expressed in nos. 29, 38, 59 ff., 80, 101, 124, 158, 176 ff., 182, 208, etc., etc.

Jewish proverbs display a keen insight into the psychology of the human mind and into human character generally. This may be seen in many of the sayings relative to family life, and in such sayings as nos. 65, 91, 96, 106, 125, 131, 136, 145, etc. It is rarely that we find this subject figuring so largely in popular proverbs, especially of ancient peoples.

One peculiarity which should not escape attention is this: "It is to be noted that the Talmudic proverb is generally expressed in concrete form, whereas proverbs in languages other than Hebrew favour abstract expressions."⁶ Instead of taking an experience which occurs to different classes of men under different aspects and generalising it, a concrete instance is selected as typical of them all. For instance, the idea "Familiarity breeds contempt" is expressed in the form "The pauper hungers without noticing it" (no. 13; *cf.* also 15, 23, 31, 63, 86, 88, 95, 108, etc.). This is not

peculiar to the Hebrews only, but to all Oriental peoples. Examples may be found in Burckhardt's "Arabic Proverbs" (nos. 17, 21, 37, 137, 255, 386, 506, 675, etc.) and in Christian's "Behar Proverbs" (cf. especially his Introduction). This indicates a fundamental difference between the psychology of the Oriental and Occidental.

That many of the proverbs originated in the villages and not in the large towns is evident from the numerous references to nature and agricultural work. Cf. nos. 2, 21, 54, 85, 90, 111, 113, 130, 216, 239, 276. Such sayings would on the whole belong to an early period, since it was only in the first centuries of the current era that it could be said: "As for ourselves, we neither inhabit a maritime country, nor do we delight in merchandise ...; but the cities we dwell in are remote from the sea, and having a fruitful country for our habitation, we take pains in cultivating that only."⁷ The proverbs connected with Trades will accordingly be comparatively late.

Historical incidents have given rise to proverbs, nos. 25, 44, 230 ff., 246, 269 f., 326; and in most cases we have not been supplied with the key to the details. A Biblical source is to be claimed for nos. 252, 257, 270, 280. There is one folk-saying, based on the Bible, that seems to have been in common use as early as the beginning of the second century AD. (in the time of R. Akiba, see Jalkut to Prov. § 958), and is worthy of quotation. "In the West (*i.e.* Palestine), when a man took to himself a wife people used to ask him "*Mätzā* or *Mōtzē*?" (Jeb. 63^b). The key to the question is the following two Scriptural verses; "Whoso hath found (*mätzā*) a wife hath found good" (Prov. xviii. 22), and "I find (*mōtzē*) woman more bitter than death" (Eccles. vii. 26). The question, then, means, "Do you find married life "good" or "more bitter than death"?" This is a good example of how the Bible became the source of popular sayings.

The proverbs reveal to us various habits and customs of the Jewish people at that period of their history. We see what pride they took in their personal appearance (no. 202), and how they strove to make their homes as beautiful as possible (nos. 203 f.). They were abstemious (no. 184), but not freed from superstition (no. 348).

Workmen were respected and idlers despised (nos. 156 ff.). Only in few instances do we find a class of workmen contemned—*e.g.* in the case of

weavers (nos. 23 f., 53, etc.).⁸ Such a proverb as no. 148 teaches us that it was a common practice to put by the family savings in jars.

A reference to this custom is perhaps to be found in 2 Cor. iv. 7. Nos. 73 and 99 could only have arisen in a country where snakes, and nos. 11, 15, 72, 76 where dogs were numerous. No. 150 throws light on the kind of food eaten by the poor.

Generally speaking, the close study of the proverbs of the ancient Jews must yield much information about the country in which they lived, their occupations, their habits, their thoughts and environment, with the result that we can form a truer picture of what they were like. Readers of Franz Delitzsch's *Jewish Artisan Life in the Time of Christ* will remember the fine use to which he puts Jewish proverbs in his attempted reconstruction of life in Jerusalem.

The unbiassed student, who approaches the consideration of these proverbs without preconceived ideas about Palestinian and Babylonian Jewry in the first five centuries of this era, will probably arrive at the conclusion that much that has been written upon that subject is based more on prejudice than fact.

The quotations collected in the following pages may offer a surer guide to a fair conception of the character of the Jewish people, and if this be so, lovers of the truth will accept the guidance. Above all, men need constantly to act upon the old proverb: "First learn, then form opinions" (no. 217).

1. Human Existence

§ 1. Youth and Age

1. Youth is a crown of roses; old age a crown of willows (Shab. 152^a; D. 323).

In the former case the “crown” is an adornment lightly worn; in the latter an unwelcome burden. The stages in the career of a man are summarised by R. Judah, the son of Tema, as follows: “At five years the age is reached for the study of the Scriptures, at ten for the study of Mishnah [cf. Introduction, § 3], at thirteen for the fulfilment of the commandments, at fifteen for the study of the Talmud, at eighteen for marriage, at twenty for seeking a livelihood, at thirty for entering into one’s full strength, at forty for understanding, at fifty for counsel; at sixty a man attains old age, at seventy the hoary head, at eighty the gift of special strength (Psalm xc. 10), at ninety he bends beneath the weight of years, at a hundred he is as if he were already dead and had passed away from the world” (Aboth v. 24).

*2. Every pumpkin is known by its stem (Ber. 48^a; D. 146).

One can usually detect in the young what they will be like later on. “The child is father of the man.” See the following.

3. While [the thorn] is still young it produces prickles (Gen. R. ch. ii. § 1; D. 549).

Used to illustrate “Even a child maketh himself known by his doings” (Prov. xx. 11).

*4. He who has issued from thee teacheth thee reason (Jeb. 63^a; D. 206).

The young can often teach their elders. The context of the proverb is as follows: There lived once a Rabbi who was married to a shrew. She would always do just the opposite of what her husband wanted. If he asked for peas she cocked him lentils, and *vice versa*. Their son, one day, in conveying his father’s wishes to his mother, stated the exact reverse, and in this way the old man obtained his desires. The father rebuked his son for his lack of filial respect, but for all that learnt from him how to manage his wife.

5. In old men there is no taste, in young no insight (Shab. 89^b; D. 413).

The old lack the imagination and enthusiasm of the young, but the young lack the shrewdness and prudence of the old.

*6. When we were young [we were esteemed] as men; now that we are old as school-children (B. K. 92^b; D. 331).

Many a person displays ability in his youth and is entrusted with duties above his age. When he grows old he is regarded as unfit for important work as children. Cf. "A man at sixteen will prove a child at sixty."

7. Two are better than Three; woe to the One which goes but never returns (Shab. 152^a; D. 303).

The resemblance to the riddle of the Sphinx is very striking. The question was: What is it that walks on four legs in the morning, on two at midday, and on three in the evening? The answer is: Man, who crawls on all fours as an infant, walks on two legs in his prime, but with the aid of a stick in his old age. The "One" that goes but never returns is Youth.

8. For something I have not lost am I searching (Shab. 152^a).

The old man walks with bent figure, as though looking for something he had dropped.

*9. Many old camels carry the hides of young ones (Sanh. 52^a; D. 534).

A similar Hebrew saying is: "Many colts die and their skins are turned into covers for their mothers" (Lev. R. ch. xx. § 10; D. 262). Many old men survive the young. Cf. "Old camels carry young camels' skins to the market."

*10. An old man in the house is a snare in the house; an old woman in the house is a treasure in the house (Erach. 19^a; D. 537, p. 217).

An old man is more peevish and helpless than an old woman. Cf. "An old man is a bed full of bones." True as this proverb may be in fact, the Rabbinic literature has many passages which show how much importance was attached to the Biblical law "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man" (Lev. xix. 32). Thus the young are exhorted to reverence the aged who are broken in mind through physical

weakness, even as the fragments of the broken tables of the law were considered worthy of being preserved in the Ark (Ber. 8^b).

*11. Shake the salt off and throw the meat to the dog (Nid. 31^a; D. 571).

When the soul leaves the body what remains is worthless. The soul is the preservative of the body in the same way as all salt is a preservative for meat.

§ 2. Poverty and Wealth

*12. Poverty follows the poor (B. K. 92^a; Hul. 105^b; D. 181).

The numerous disadvantages which result from his lack of means constantly remind the poor man of his poverty.

*13. The pauper hungers without noticing it (Meg 7^b; D. 406).

On the principle “Familiarity breeds contempt.”

*14. When the barley is consumed from the pitcher, strife knocks and enters the house (B. M. 59^a; D. 335).

Cf. the English proverb “When poverty comes in at the door love flies out through the window.”

*15. The dog in his hunger swallows dung (B. K. 92^b; D. 394).

In the time of extreme necessity everything can be of use. Cf. “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Prov. xxvii. 7).

*16. Sixty pains afflict the teeth of him who hears the sound of his neighbour [eating] but himself hath nothing to eat (B. K. 92^b; D. 649).

(“Sixty” is used in Rabbinic writings to denote a round number.)

*17. When a man is in straitened circumstances, he recalls the comfort of his father’s house (Lam. R. to i. 7; D. 332).

Palestinian proverb. See the following.

*18. When the bride is hungry, she recalls the seven days of her marriage feast (Lam. R. to i. 7; D. 338).

The Babylonian parallel to the preceding. The marriage festivities usually lasted a whole week. (I have adopted Buber’s reading *tikhapan*; the editions

have *tispōn*, which yields no sense.)

*19. What is beneath thine head is thine (Gen. R. ch. lxix. § 4; D. 472).

You can only be sure of that which is actually in your possession.

*20. While the fat one becomes lean, the lean one expires (Lam. R. to iii. 20; D. 553).

By the time the oppressor of the poor, who battens on them, is brought to justice, his victims are dead through starvation.

*21. Two *kabs* of dates—one *kab* of stones and more (Jom. 79^b; D. p. 15).

There is no such thing as unalloyed pleasure. Half of the sweet date at least consists of the stone, which is of no use and has to be thrown away. Cf. “No corn without chaff.” The *kab* is a dry measure.

*22. Poverty befits the Jew as a red leather trapping a white horse (Ḥag. 9^b; D. 312).

Even privations can serve a useful purpose, in hardening a person against troubles. The Jew is a proof of this.

*23. A year of scarcity will change a weaver [for the better] if he be not proud (Ab. Zar. 26^a; D. 200).

Others translate “If a weaver is not humble, his life is shortened by a year,” which is by no means to be preferred to the rendering of Jastrow I have adopted. The meaning is, Adversity has its uses if we are willing to grasp them. One is reminded of Shakespeare’s lines:

Sweet are the uses of adversity
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
As You Like It, Act II. Sc. i.

All work connected with weaving was despised as being unmanly, and therefore men engaged in this occupation were always of the lowest strata of society. It was forbidden to listen to their songs (Sotah. 48^a).

24. Even the wool-scraper is a prince in his own house (Meg. 12^b; D. 599).
Cf. “Every dog is a lion at home”; “A man’s house is his castle.”

25. On the dunghills of Māthā Meḥasyā, and not in a palace at Pumbedīthā (Kerith. 6^a; Hor. 12^a; D. 116).

Two names of Babylonian cities famous for their Rabbinic academies. At one time Māthā Meḥasyā was more renowned than its rival, and this proverb may refer to its superiority. Others explain it as a reference to the fact that this city escaped the misfortunes which befel the Jews in Babylon during the fifth century AD., and the proverb therefore means, Better is poverty combined with security than riches combined with danger and anxiety.

26. Better is it to eat putrid fish [in peace] than the luxurious dish of the imprisoned (Kerith 6^a; Hor. 12^a; D. 299).

(The wording is doubtful, but this seems to be the most probable meaning.) Cf. the preceding, and “Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith than a house full of feasting with strife” (Prov. xvii. 1), and “A bean in liberty is better than comfort in prison.”

27. At the door of shops brothers and friends are numerous; at the door of misery there are no brothers and no friends (Shab. 32^a; D. 1).

To a similar effect is “The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends” (Prov. xiv. 20). Cf. “The rich never want kindred”; “No one claims kindred with the poor”; “Poverty parteth fellowship.”

*28. Thy friend is dead! believe it; thy friend has become rich! believe it not (Git. 30^b; D. 281).

Misfortunes are more frequent than good fortune, therefore bad tidings deserve more credence. There is a play on the words for “believe” (*’ashar*) and “become rich” (*’ith’ashshar*) which cannot be reproduced in translation.

*29. From one who has inherited, not from one for whom men plunder, [accept gifts]. (Cant. R. to vii. 7; D. 503).

The “one for whom men plunder” is a king or governor. Ill-gotten wealth brings no happiness, whatever its source may be. Cf. “Better a penny with right than a thousand without.”

30. He who eats the fat tail [’alyethā*] will have to hide himself in the garret [*’ilīthā*]; who eats cress [*kāḳūlē*] may rest quietly by the dunghills

[*kiklē*] of the town (Pes. 114^a; D. 203).

Palestinian proverb. The “fat tail” was a rare and expensive luxury, and one who indulges in it may have to conceal himself from his creditors. On the other hand, the man who lives parsimoniously and within his means can expose himself in the most conspicuous parts of the town. (Note the play of words.)

*31. He whose stomach is full increaseth deeds of evil (Ber. 32^a; D. 499).

Wealth breeds insolence. Cf. the Hebrew saying “A lion growls not in a den full of straw but in a den full of meat” (*ibid.*, D. 54); and “They were filled and their heart was exalted” (Hosea xiii. 6), “But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked” (Deut. xxxii. 15).

*32. The stomach carries the feet (Gen. R. ch. lxx. § 8; D. 409).

Cheerful prospects stimulate a man’s energies. Similarly it is said “The heart carries the feet” (Jalkut to Gen. § 123; D. 311).

*33. Room can always be found for a delicacy (Erub. 82^b; Meg 7^b; D. 613).

34. A man’s *Zuzim* do his brokerage for him (B. M. 63^b; D. 271).

If you have ready cash, you can dispense with the aid of middlemen. The general application is: The wealthy man can attain his ends more easily than the poor man. The *Zuz* is a small silver coin, a fourth of a Shekel in value—*i.e.* about 7*d.*

35. One cannot compare him who sees an empty basket and is hungry to him who sees a full basket and is sated (Gen. R. ch. lxxv. § 13; D. 414).

Although neither eats anything, yet the sensations of the two will be different.

36. None is poorer than the dog and none richer than the pig (Shab. 155^b; D. 439).

The latter eats anything and is easily contented.

37. Let one use a precious goblet for one day and on the morrow let it be broken (Ber 28^a; D. 462).

To be wealthy a short time is better than never.

38. If thy sieve be stopped up, knock on it (Gen. R. ch. lxxxix. § 2; D. 482).

In prosperity one tends to become forgetful of promises and duties, and it requires strenuous means to bring them to one's mind. Cf. no. 136 below.

2. Family Life

§ 1. Woman: her Characteristics

*39. A Woman spins even while she talks (Meg. 14^b; D. 136).

Quoted as a comment on the conversation between David and Abigail, 1 Sam. xxv. A woman does not miss an opportunity of working for her desired ends. Even in the midst of idle chatter she has her mind fixed on what she is aiming at. Abigail, *e.g.*, during her conversation with David, asked him to remember her when he prospered, thus putting into his mind the germ of the idea that she would not be averse to marrying him, should she be free. This proverb is often quoted as meaning that women are industrious (so, *e.g.*, Delitzsch, *Jewish Artisan Life*), but the context is clearly against this interpretation.

*40. The goose bends its head while walking, but its eyes wander about (Meg. 14^b; B. K. 92^b); D. 639).

Similar to the preceding proverb.

*41. Ewe follows ewe; as the acts of the mother so are the acts of the daughter (Kethub. 63^a; D. 615).

The proverb is applied in the Talmud to a specific case. The famous Rabbi Akiba had married his wife Rachel [play on the word for “ewe”=Raḥēlā] when he was a poor shepherd. Later on their daughter followed the mother’s example by marrying Ben Azzai when he was unknown and poor. Cf. “Behold every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother so is her daughter” (Ezek. xvi. 44).

42. No cow is [considered] a gorer until her calf is a kicker (Gen. R. ch. lxxx. § 1; D. 440).

The mother is judged by the character of her daughter, on the principle “Children are what you make them.”

*43. [A descendant] of princes and rulers, she became a prostitute for bargemen (Sanh. 106^a; D. 506).

There is no depth of depravity to which a woman cannot sink. (Some render the last word “carpenters.”)

*44. What does Schwilnai want among the reeds and bulrushes? (Sanh. 82^b; D. 159).

The name occurs only in this connection, and is usually explained as referring to a woman who had become proverbial for her gross immorality. The proverb is applied to a woman whose movements give cause for suspicion. (The textual reading is uncertain; cf. Lewin, p. 61.)

*45 A woman of sixty, like a girl of six, runs at the sound of wedding music (Moed K. 9^b; D. 177).

Matrimonial matters never lose their interest for women, whatever their age.

46. Pride is unbecoming in women (Meg. 14^b; D. 418).

Cf. “Modesty is the beauty of women.”

*47. As she slumbers the basket falls (Sanh. 7^a; D. 238).

Laziness on the part of a woman is disastrous to the welfare of the home. The figure is of a girl carrying a basket on her head. Cf. “By slothfulness the roof sinketh in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaketh” (Eccles. x. 18).

§ 2. Marriage and the Household

48. Descend a step in taking a wife; ascend a step in choosing a friend (Jeb. 63^a; D. 526).

By marrying into a higher rank, one runs the risk of being looked down upon by one’s wife and her relatives. Advantage, on the other hand, is to be derived from the association with one’s superiors.

49. I do not want a shoe larger than my foot (Kid. 49^a).

I do not want a husband from a rank higher than my own. Cf. “Marry above your match and you get a good master.”

50. Haste in buying land; hesitate in taking a wife (Jeb. 63^a).

“Marry in haste, repent at leisure.”

51. It is better to dwell mated than in widowhood (Jeb. 118^b and often; D. 302).

Jastrow renders: "It is better to dwell in grief than in widowhood," *i.e.* a woman prefers an unhappy married life to single bliss. The ancient Jews held marriage in very high esteem, considering it in fact a religious obligation; and men were exhorted to marry at an early age. From the passage quoted in the comment on Proverb No. 1, it will be seen that the age at which a man should marry is fixed at eighteen, whereas the age for his earning a livelihood is two years later. The explanation is that the bridegroom used to live in the house of his bride's father during the first years of his marriage. On the basis of the Biblical statement "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. ii. 18), the Rabbis said, "The unmarried man lives without prosperity, without a helpmate, without happiness or blessing" (Jeb. 62^b; Gen. R. ch. xvii. § 2).

52. If her husband be [as insignificant as] an ant, her seat is placed among the noble women (Jeb. 118^b; Keth. 75^a; D. 227).

Every woman feels elevated in social status by marriage. To be left unmarried was regarded at that time as the greatest calamity that could befall a woman.

53. Though the husband be a flax-beater, [his wife] will call him to the threshold and sit with him (Jeb. 118^b; Keth. 75^a; D. 222).

A woman is proud to be seen possessed of a husband, however lowly his position may be.

54. If the husband is a grower of vegetables, she asks for no lentils for the pot (Jeb. 118^b; Keth. 75^a; D. 226).

A woman will not hesitate to marry a man engaged in the meanest of occupations, in order to avoid the stigma of being unmarried.

*55. If thy wife is short, bend down and whisper to her (B. M. 59^a; D. 137).

Never do anything without first consulting her. Even if you deem yourself her superior in intellect, do not stand on your dignity, but ask her advice. It is also said: "Honour your wives, for thus you enrich yourselves" (*ibid.*). The respect which was felt for the wife may be seen from such sayings as "A man whose first wife dies is as though the Temple had been destroyed in

his days” (Sanh. 22^a), “Whose wife dies in his lifetime, the world becomes dark for him” (*ibid.*), “He who loves his wife as himself and honours her more than himself...of him Scripture (Job v. 24) saith, “Thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace” (Jeb. 62^b).

*56. When our love was strong we slept on the breadth of a sword; but now that our love is not strong, a bed measuring sixty cubits is not sufficient for us (Sanh. 7^a; D. 351).

There is an Arabic saying, “The world is too narrow for them who hate each other,” which is similar to Ibn Gabirol’s “The space of a needle’s eye suffices for two friends, whilst the universe itself can scarcely contain two enemies” (*Choice of Pearls*, ed. Asher, no. 281).

*57. For seven years there was a quarrel between the male and female gnat; for said he to her, Thou didst once see a man from Māhūzā bathing and then wrap himself in towels, and thou didst alight upon him and sting him, but didst not inform me (Hul. 58^b; D. p. 11).

Trivial matters are often sufficient to cause serious matrimonial troubles. Māhūzā is the name of a famous town in Babylonia. “Seven,” like “sixty,” is used for a round number; so also in the Bible, cf. Psalm lxxix. 12; Prov. vi. 31; Matt. xviii. 22.

*58. With her rival and not with a rod (Jeb. 63^b; D. 149).

One can control a wife more readily by working on her feeling of jealousy than by using violence. Cf. “A woman is only envious of her companion’s thigh” (Meg. 13^a; D. 55).

59. Immorality in the house is like a worm on vegetables (Sot. 3^b; D. 273).

It ruins the beauty and stability of the home-life.

*60. He among the full-grown pumpkins and his wife among the young ones (Meg. 12^a, b Sot. 10^a; D. 41).

Unfaithfulness on the part of the husband leads to his wife’s unchastity. The Talmud quotes Job xxxi. 9 f. as a Biblical parallel. Cf. “If the wife sins, the husband is not innocent.”

61. Violence in a house is like a worm on vegetables (Sot. 3^b; D. 654).

Cf. no. 59 above and no. 101 below.

*62. The talk of the child in the street is that of his father or his mother (Suc. 56^b; D. 629).

The child merely repeats what it has heard at home. Be careful what you say before children. Cf. “The child says nothing but what it heard by the fire.”

*63. The Passover is celebrated within the house and the chanting is carried outside (Cant. R. to ii. 14; D. 575).

The happiness within a house penetrates into the outside world. Cf. “The luck of the house has come, the luck of the world has come” (Gen. R. ch. lxxi. § 9).

*64. The Paschal lamb is as large as an olive and the chanting breaks the roofs (j. Pes. vii. 12; cf. b. Pes. 88^b).

There are so many at table participating in the feast that, when the Paschal lamb is shared out, each person receives only as much as the size of an olive. But the greater the company, the greater the sound of jollification. (This proverb and the preceding are in all probability variants of the same saying.)

§ 3. Parentage and Relationship

*65. A father’s love is for his children, and the children’s love for their children (Sot. 49^a; D. 616).

One considers his children before his parents; they occupy the primary position in his thoughts.

66. I want a stick for the hand and a hoe for burial (Jeb. 65^b; Keth. 64^a; D^s. 40).

Applied to sons whose duty it is to support their parents in old age and provide for their honourable burial. The relationship between parent and child is beautifully summarised in the Talmudical saying: “There are three partners in the production of the human being, viz. the Holy One, blessed be He, the father and the mother. When men pay honour to their parents, God says, I ascribe it to them, as though I were in their midst and they honoured Me” (Kid. 30^b). It is the duty of every man to honour his parent by supplying him with food and drink, clothing him, and leading him about

(*ibid.* 31^b). A son can be compelled to support his father in his old age, even if he is so poor as to require to go and beg for the money (j. Peah i. 1).

*67. Parents who have no equals [for goodness] rear children unlike themselves (Cant. R. ch. i. § 6 to i. 1; D. 483).

Good father with bad children. The Biblical parallel is quoted: “In place of wheat there cometh forth thistles, in the place of barley noisome weeds” (Job xxxi. 40; this translation is the one demanded by the Rabbinical context, and differs from the R.V.). Cf. “Many a good cow hath a bad calf.” The bad son of a good father is also described as “Vinegar, the son of wine” (B. M. 83^b; D. 284).

*68. A branch bringing forth a fig (Cant. R. ch. i. § 6 to i. 1; D. 544).

Good son of a good father. Cf. “He is a lion the son of a lion” (B. M. 84^b; D. 131). (The meaning of the first word translated “branch” is doubtful.)

*69. From the thorn-bush comes the rose (Cant. R. ch. i. § 6 to i. 1; D. 504).

Good children of a bad father. Cf. “Thou art a lion the son of a fox” (B. M. 84^b; D. 131).

*70. What does the beetle (or, scorpion) beget? Insects worse than itself (Cant. R. ch. i. § 6 to i. 1; D. 480).

Bad father with worse children. Based on the still older proverb mentioned in the Bible: “From the wicked issueth forth wickedness” (1 Sam. xxiv. 13; Heb. 14); and cf. “And behold ye have arisen in the place of your fathers, a company of wicked men” (Num. xxxii. 14).

71. Foxes, sons of foxes (Ḥag. 14^a; D. 661).

Wicked sons of wicked fathers.

*72. Rear not a gentle cub from a vicious dog, much less a vicious cub from a vicious dog (Lev. R. ch. xix. § 6; D. 192).

Much is not to be expected from a child of evil parents even when it shows some good qualities. What, then, can be looked for from a child of evil parents who in youth follows their example?

73. The serpent breeds and casts [her young] upon the inhabitants of the town (Keth. 49^b; D^a. 52).

The first word is explained by Jastrow to mean “a bird of solitary habits.” The saying is descriptive of parents who neglect their children so that they become a public charge.

*74. Cursed be the breast that suckled such a man! (j. Kil. i. 7).

The notoriety of a person casts a shadow upon the fair name of his parents.

*75. Rear me! Rear me! the son of thy daughter am I (Sot. 49^a; D. 606).

One looks to a grandparent as much as to a parent for support when the latter is not forthcoming.

*76. If the dog bark at thee, go in; if the bitch bark at thee, go out (Erub. 86^a; D. 522).

You can endure a quarrelsome son-in-law but not a quarrelsome daughter-in-law.

*77. If thy sister’s son is a government official, do not pass him by when thou seest him in the market place (Jom. 18^a; D. 37).

One must beware even of relations. The official referred to is possibly the tax-gatherer, who was detested for his merciless extortions. He was classed legally with highway robbers and murderers (Ned. iii. 4).

3. Human Virtues

78. Truth stands, falsehood does not stand (Shab. 104^a; D. 592).

Elsewhere it is said, “Truth is the seal of God” (Shab. 55^a; Jom. 69^b; Sanh. 64^b; D. 287). “By three things is the [moral] world preserved: by truth, by judgment, and by peace, as it is said (Zech. viii. 16), “Speak ye every man the truth with his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates” (Aboth i. 18). “A lie is a foul blot in a man, yet it is continually in the mouth of the untaught” (Ecclus. xx. 24).

*79. Happy is he who hears and ignores; a hundred evils pass him by (Sanh. 7^a; D. 305).

Do not get vexed at every trifle and at once resent it. Ibn Gabirol says: “Who cannot bear one word will hear many” (*Choice of Pearls*, no. 95); “Who hears something unpleasant and preserves silence wards off what would prove still more objectionable” (*ibid.* no. 99); “By endurance one avoids still greater trouble” (no. 104).

80. When two quarrel, he who keeps silence first is more praiseworthy (Kid. 71^b; D. 349).

Palestinian saying. Worthy of quotation is: “There are four kinds of tempers: he whom it is easy to provoke and easy to pacify—his loss disappears in his gain; he whom it is hard to provoke and hard to pacify—his gain disappears in his loss; he whom it is hard to provoke and easy to pacify is a saint; he whom it is easy to provoke and hard to pacify is a wicked man” (Aboth v. 14). Cf. the English proverb “Be not the first to quarrel, nor the last to make it up.”

*81. A word for a *Sela*, silence for two (Meg. 18^a; D. 491).

Palestinian proverb. There is a mediæval Jewish saying, found also with most other peoples: “Speech is silver, silence golden.” A *Sela* was worth one sacred or two common Shekels = about 2s. 4d.

82. Silence is a healing for all [ailments] (Meg. 18^a; D. 541).

Cf. “Silence is good for the wise; how much more so for the foolish” (Pes. 99^a; D. 324); “All my days I have grown up amongst the wise, and I have found nought of better service than silence” (Aboth i. 17); “Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; when he shutteth his lips, he is esteemed as prudent” (Prov. xvii. 28); “My words may occasion regret, but my silence will avoid it” (Ibn Gabirol, no. 337); and in English, “No one ever repented of holding his tongue.”

83. Boldness is royal power without a crown (Sanh. 105^a; D. 286).

“Nothing venture, nothing have.”

84. Boldness avails even with Heaven (Sanh. 105^a; D. 285).

Cf. our saying “Heaven helps them who help themselves.”

*85. From the woods themselves it goes into the axe (Sanh. 39^b; D. 493).

The sense is clear, but the reading is doubtful. Another possible rendering is: “The axe goes into the wood from which [it originally came].” Dukes appositely quotes the following from the *Midrash* [see Introd. § 3]: “When iron was created, the trees began to tremble. The iron thereupon said to them, Wherefore do ye tremble? Let none of your wood enter into me, and not one of you shall be hurt.” The handle which enables one to use the axe for felling trees is obtained from the trees themselves.

*86. Sixty runners may run, but will not overtake the man who has breakfasted early (B. K. 92^b; B. M. 107^b; D. 648).

It is also recommended: “Rise early and eat, in the summer because of the heat, in winter on account of the cold” (*ibid.*). Cf. “Early start makes early stages,” “The early bird catches the worm.” On “sixty” see no. 16.

*87. The door which is not opened for charitable purposes will be opened to the physician (Cant. R. to vi. 11; D. 665).

There was a Hebrew proverb current in Jerusalem: “The salt of money is diminution” (Keth. 66^b; D. 498), to the last word of which [*.hasser*] there is a variant “benevolence” [*.hesed*]; i.e. by spending money in the relief of distress, we earn the Divine protection and blessing. To the same effect is the English proverb, “Giving to the poor increaseth a man’s store.”

Hospitality and benevolence are the supreme virtues of Orientals, and the Rabbinical sayings on the subject are extremely numerous. “Let thy house

be open wide, and let the poor be the members of thy household” (Aboth i. 5); “When a beggar stands at thy door, the Holy One stands at his right hand” (Lev. R. ch. xxxiv. § 9); “Even the beggar is not free from the duty of giving alms” (Git. 7^b); “Greater is the alms-giver than the bringer of sacrifices” (Suc. 49^b; j. Ber. ii. 1). The duty of supporting and comforting the poor applies to gentiles as well as to fellow-Israelites (Git. 61^a). Although the Rabbis continually emphasise that the money spent to help the needy will be repaid by increased prosperity, they do not fail to urge that true charity should be done for its own sake. The principle “Be not like servants who minister to their master upon the condition of receiving a reward” (Aboth i. 3) is applied also to moral duties. Thus they draw a sharp line of demarcation between benevolence and mere almsgiving, and distinguish them in the following manner: “In three respects is benevolence greater than almsgiving. The latter can only be performed with money, the former personally as well as with money; the latter can be given to the poor alone, the former to rich and poor alike; the latter only to the living, the former also to the dead” (Suc. 49^b).

88. With two dogs they killed the lion (Sanh. 95^a; D. 183).

“Union is strength.” Cf. “Many straws may bind an elephant.”

*89. The weasel and the cat held a feast on the fat of the unfortunate (Sanh. 105^a; D. 408).

“Union is strength.” When men combine forces they can overcome their common enemy. The proverb is quoted to point the moral of the following fable: Two dogs were once quarrelling, and suddenly one of them was attacked by a wolf. Then said the other to himself, If I do not help him now, the wolf will kill him and then turn his attention to me. So they both assailed the wolf and slew him.

*90. A myrtle standing among reeds still retains the name of myrtle (Sanh. 44^a; D. 108).

The good man remains good and is recognisable as such, even when he is in bad company. A later Jewish moralist, quoted by Dukes, declares: “The wise man is honoured even if his family is despised.”

91. Should the castle totter, its name is still castle; should the dunghill be raised, its name is still dunghill (Jalkut to Jer. § 264; D. 337).

A nobleman remains noble even in the days of distress, and the common man common even in the days of prosperity.

92. Whoever makes the round of his property every day finds a *Stater* (Ḥul. 105^a; D. 386).

Diligence always meets with reward. The *Stater* is a silver coin equal in value to four *Zuz* (see no. 24).

*93. In whom it is, in him is everything; in whom it is not, what hath he? He who hath acquired it, what lacketh he? In whom it is not, what hath he acquired? (Ned. 41^a; D. 211), Refers to Wisdom. A Palestinian saying. There is a similar proverb in Hebrew: “Lackest thou wisdom, what hast thou acquired? Hast acquired wisdom, what lackest thou?” (Lev. R. ch. i. § 6; D. 224). Ibn Gabirol says: “A body without knowledge is like a house without a foundation” (*Choice of Pearls*, no. 17); “Wisdom constitutes the noblest pedigree” (no. 24); “A man’s worth is estimated according to his knowledge” (no. 33); “The wise of the earth resemble the luminaries of Heaven” (no. 35). It would be no exaggeration to say that among the ancient and mediæval Jews there was an aristocracy of learning, not wealth.

*94. Better is one grain of hot pepper than a basketful of pumpkins (Meg. 7^a; Ḥag. 10^a; Jom. 85^b; D. 300).

Just as a grain of pepper imparts more flavour than a heap of vegetables, so a little keen reasoning is worth more than a great deal of useless learning.

*95. He ate the date and threw away the stone (Ḥag, 15^b; D. 88).

Palestinian saying. Refers to a man who can distinguish between the true and the false, the useful and the useless.

96. The cloak is precious to its wearer (Shab. 10^b; D. 492).

An article always has some value for its possessor, if for nobody else. Similarly the opinions held by a person are considered worth holding by him. Cf. “Every man praises his own wares.”

97. Better is the smith than the son of the smith (Sanh. 96^a).

The experience acquired during many years is of extreme value.

98. Who has eaten of the pot knows the taste of the broth (Jalkut to Deut. § 829; D. 467).

Experience is the best teacher.

*99. He whom a serpent hath bitten is terrified at a rope (Cant. R. to i. 2; D. 221).

A piece of rope lying on the ground resembles a snake. Cf. "Once bitten twice shy," "A burnt child dreads the fire."

4. Human Faults

100. Falsehood is common, truth uncommon (Shab. 104^a; D. 641).

Cf. no. 78. The Rabbis say, “The punishment of a liar is that he is not believed even when he tells the truth” (Sanh. 89^b).

*101. He who gives vent to his wrath destroys his house (Sanh. 102^b; D. 225).

Other sayings in Hebrew are: “The wrathful man is left with his wrath only, but the good man is permitted to taste of the fruit of his deeds” (Kid. 40^b f; D. 608); “The wrathful man is subject to all kinds of tortures” (Ned. 22^a); “The bad-tempered man is regardless even of the Divine Presence” (*ibid.* 22^b); “There are three classes of people whose life is scarcely life—viz. the (too sensitively) compassionate, the irritable, and the melancholic” (Pes. 113^b); “When a man gives vent to his wrath, if he is wise his wisdom leaves him, and if a prophet his prophetic gift departs” (*ibid.* 66^b); “By three things is a man recognisable: by his pocket [*kīs*], his cup [*kōs*], and his temper [*ka’as*]” (Erub. 65^b). Cf. also the English proverb “A hasty man never wanteth woe.”

102. Strife is like the aperture of a leakage; as [the aperture] widens so [the stream of water] increases (Sanh. 7^a; D. 241).

Cf. “He who sows discord will reap regret” (Ibn Gabirol, no. 616); “Beware of enmity, however insignificant; for the smallest insect has often caused the death of the greatest man” (no. 618).

103. [Strife] is like the plank in a bridge; the longer it exists the firmer it becomes (Sanh. 7^a).

Same as preceding.

104. When the kettle boils over, it overflows its own sides (Eccles. R. to vii. 9; D. 242).

The wrathful man only harms himself.

105. Whoever expectorates upwards, it falls on his face (Eccles. R. to vii. 9; D. 366).

Parallel to the preceding.

*106. A *Zuz* for provisions is not found, for hanging it is found (Ḥag. 5^a; D. 272).

This is the literal translation of the words, but its sense is obscure and variously explained. The context speaks of helping the distressed before it is too late, and therefore Streane's rendering, "Money for corn standing in the field is not found, for corn hanging up it is found" [*Hagiga*, p. 21], seems unsuitable. Dukes paraphrases: "One cannot find anybody to advance money when a bargain chances his way, but always a purchaser when he has to sell at a loss." The simplest and most probable explanation is that of Jastrow: "A *Zuz* for provision is not on hand, but for saving from hanging it is," *i.e.* charity often waits for extreme distress. Cf. "When a dog is drowning every one offers him a drink." To the same effect the Rabbis declare: "Greater is he who lends [in time] than he who performs an act of charity" (Shab. 63^a). So the English proverb: "He giveth twice that giveth in a trice."

*107. The camel went to seek horns, and the ears which it possessed were cut off (Sanh. 106^a; D. 198).

Through wanting too much one often loses what he has. Cf. the saying of a Rabbi: "He, who sets longing eyes on what is not his, fails to obtain it, and is also deprived of what he has got" (Sot. 9^a; D. 382). Parallel to English "To go for wool and return shorn."

*108. In Media a camel dances on a *Kab* (Jeb. 45^a; D. 199).

All sorts of extravagant and improbable stories are related of distant countries. Cf. the saying "Africa ever produces something new." Dukes quotes a later Jewish saying: "He who wishes to lie should take care that the testimony is afar off." (On the *Kab* see no. 21.)

109. Bad servants ask for advice after the deed is done (B. B. 4^a; D. 547).

Similarly "After death the doctor."

110. Stripped naked but wearing shoes (Sot. 8^b; Keth. 65^b; D. 632).

It is as absurd for any one to be shabbily dressed and at the same time bedecked with ornaments as it would be to wear shoes and nothing else. The moral application is: An outward show of virtue when the character is obviously vicious is worse than being a thoroughly corrupt person. The *Talmud* exhorts a man to make his interior harmonise with his exterior (Ber. 28^a).

111. Let the land become impoverished but not its owner (B. M. 104^b; D. 347).

People are short-sighted and look only for immediate profit without thinking of possible disadvantages in the future. The proverb is based on the policy of impairing the fruit-growing qualities of the soil through overproduction, rather than that its owner should suffer for the time being through the smallness of the crop.

*112. Hang the heart of a palm-tree around a sow, and it will act as usual (Ber. 43^b; D. 657).

The heart of a palm-tree was considered a rare dainty, but the pig, not appreciating its value, will trample it in filth. Cf. “The sow loves bran better than roses.” The general meaning is: It is difficult to wean a person from long-acquired habits. A Rabbi beautifully declares: “Sinful habits are first as fine as a spider’s web, but become finally as tough as cart-ropes” (Suc. 52^a).

113. Should the peasant become king, the scrip does not leave his neck (Meg. 7^b; D. 44).

Similar to preceding. Cf. “Apes are apes though clothed in scarlet,” and no. 91 above.

114. Throw a stick into the air and it will fall on its end (Gen. R. ch. liii. § 15; D. 275).

Old habits cling fast and are not easily broken.

115. Thou hast beaten with a stick; and as thou hast beaten shalt thou be beaten (Num. R. ch. xviii. § 18; D^s. 23).

“Measure for measure.” In Hebrew we find likewise: “In the measure in which a man measures is he measured” (Sot. 8^b; D. 162) and “In the pot in which they cooked shall they be cooked” (*ibid.* 11^a; D. 169). Cf. also: “Hillel once saw a skull floating on the surface of the water. He said to it,

“Because thou drownedst others, they have drowned thee, and at the last they that drowned thee shall themselves be drowned” (Aboth ii. 7).

116. The heart and the eye are the two agents of sin (j. Ber. i. 5; D. 430).

Also found in Hebrew, Num. R. ch. xvii. § 6.

117. If he gains, he gains a piece of coal; if he loses, he loses a pearl (j. Terum. viii. 5; D^a. appendix no. 1).

Proverbial of a man who sets out on a venture where the prize is trifling but the risk very great.

*118. When the ox falls, they sharpen their knives (Shab. 32^a; Lam. R. to i. 7).

Cf. “When the tree is fallen, all go with their hatchets.”

*119. When the ox falls, its slayers are many (Lam. R. to i. 7; D. 532).

Palestinian proverb. Cf. “He that’s down, down with him!”

120. The ass came and kicked away the lamp (Shah. 116^b; D. 134).

The judge of a certain lawsuit was presented with a golden lamp by the one litigant and with a Libyan ass (which was very highly prized) by the other. The verdict went in favour of the latter, and thus the proverb is a warning against bribery because there is always the danger of being outbid. It is also said of bribery: “A judge who accepts a gift, even if he be otherwise perfectly righteous, will not terminate his existence before he has become demented” (Keth. 105^b); “A judge who does not decide according to the truth causeth the Divine Presence to depart from Israel” (Sanh. 7^a); “A judge should always imagine that a sword is placed across his thighs and Gehenna yawns beneath him “ (*ibid.*).

121. From peddlers news, from rags vermin (Ber. 51^b; D. 502).

Dukes compares, “From garments cometh a moth, and from women wickedness”(Ecclus. xlii. 13).

*122. Before even the dying person has expired, his executor bestirs himself (B. B. 91^a; D. 551).

It is possible to be too cautious, and there is such a thing as indecent haste.

*123. From one house to another a shirt; from one land to another a life (Gen. R. ch. xxxix. § 11; D. 474).

He who removes from one house to another in the same town does so at a personal loss even if it be only the worth of a shirt; but to remove to another land involves sufficient worry and trouble to kill a person. Cf. “Three removals are as bad as a fire,” *i.e.* the household goods are completely ruined.

*124. The third tongue slays three: the speaker, the spoken to, and the spoken of (Erach. 15^b; D. 461).

Palestinian proverb. By “the third tongue” is meant slander, a phrase used often in the *Targum*, the Aramaic Version of the Bible, and also in Syriac. Slander is a vice most fiercely denounced in the Rabbinic literature. Some of the things said about the slanderer are: “He magnifies his iniquity as far as Heaven,” “He is worthy of stoning,” “The Holy One says, I and he cannot dwell together in the earth” (*ibid.*); “The retailer of slander and also the receiver of it deserve to be cast to the dogs” (Pes. 118^a).

125. Should not the whole enter, a half enters (Gen. R. ch. lvi. 4; D. 333).

Referring to slander, which always leaves some lasting impress on the mind of the hearer. Even if he professes to disbelieve it, he thinks to himself “There is no smoke without fire.”

*126. It is not enough for him that he squanders his own, but [he also squanders the wealth] of others (Eccles. R. to iv. 6; D. 422).

Said of a borrower. Cf. the following.

*127. He who borrows on interest destroys his own and others’ property (Lev. R. ch. iii. § 1; D. 214).

Cf. “Money borrowed is soon sorrowed.”

*128. Between the midwife and the travailing woman, the child of the poor perishes (Gen. R. ch. lx. § 3; D. 156).

Cf. “Between the shepherd and the wolf the lamb is torn asunder” (*Tanḥuma, Waēra*; D. 154). One often contributes as much to the disaster he is trying to avoid as does his opponent who is scheming to overwhelm him.

*129. She prostitutes herself for apples and distributes them among the sick (Lev. R. ch. iii. § 1; Eccles. R. to iv. 6; D. 193).

Doing evil for a good purpose, on the principle that the end justifies the means. Cf. “Steals the goose and gives the giblets in alms.”

*130. He who rents one garden will eat birds; who rents gardens, the birds will eat him (Lev. R. ch. iii. § 1; Eccles. R. to iv. 6; D. 202).

To attempt too much is often to lose all. Cf. also no. 173.

*131. A pot belonging to partners is neither hot nor cold (Erub. 3^a; B. B. 24^b; D. 588).

Each leaves it to the other to see to a matter, with the result that neither does. “Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

132. The shepherd is lame and the sheep in flight; at the door of the fold there are [harsh] words but in the stalls there is the reckoning (Shab. 32^a; D. 619).

Retribution comes eventually with full force, even when it seems at first to be only mild.

*133. When the shepherd is angry with his flock, he appoints a blind [sheep] as leader (B. K. 52^a; D. 336).

A saying current in Galilee. The proverb seems to correspond to our “Cutting one’s nose to spite one’s face.”

*134. Seven pits for the good man and one for the evil-doer (Sanh. 7^a; D. 621).

It is necessary to amplify the proverb thus: “There are seven pits open for the good man, but he escapes them all, whereas if there be only one for the evil-doer he falls into it.” The Biblical parallel is quoted: “For a righteous man falleth seven times and riseth up again: but the wicked are overthrown by calamity” (Prov. xxiv. 16). On the proverbial use of “Seven” see no. 57.

*135. Steal after the thief and thou too hast a taste (Ber. 5^b; D. 179).

“The receiver is as bad as the thief.”

136. In the hour of distress—a vow; in the hour of release—forgetfulness (Gen. R. ch. lxxxii. § 2; D. 175).

Cf. “Vows made in storms are forgotten in calms,” and no. 38 below.

137. A slain lion hast thou slain; ground flour hast thou ground; a burnt house hast thou burnt (Cant. R. to iii. 4; cf. Sanh. 96^b; D. 120).

There is nothing of which to boast in what you have done.

138. Art thou a hero? Behold a she-bear before thee; rise and overpower her (Gen. R. ch. lxxxvii. § 3; D. 36).

The braggart may be called upon to give proof of his prowess.

*139. When the endives are bitter the wine is sour (Lam. R. to iii. 42; D. 58).

Palestinian proverb (see Buber *in loc.*, and not as in the editions). The meaning is well expressed in another Rabbinic maxim: "One transgression draws another in its train" (Aboth iv. 2).

*140. If actions are wicked, they are bad for them who perform them (Lam. R. to iii. 42; D. 57).

Wickedness recoils on to the head of the perpetrator.

141. If our predecessors were angels we are human; if they were human, we are asses (Shek. v. 1; D. 107).

"The good old times." Cf. "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" (Eccles. vii. 10). The same proverb is to be found in Hebrew in Shab. 112^b. It is similarly said: "The nail of the former generations is better than the stomach of the later generations" (Jom. 9^b; D. 307), and "As the difference between gold and dust so is the difference between our generation and that of our fathers" (j. Git. vi. 7; D. 410).

*142. All flatter a king (Num. R. ch. x. § 4; D. 340).

*143. He who hangs up his provision-basket hangs up his sustenance (Pes. 111^b; D. 656).

An obscure proverb. Dukes quotes from the *'Aruch* (Talmudical Lexicon) that there existed a superstition in ancient times that it was unlucky to hang up the basket which was used for storing provisions. In his *Zur rabbinischen Spruchkunde*, no. 173, he offers another explanation: viz., one who asks too much of Providence endangers himself. By hanging up your provision-basket and waiting for something to turn up you run the risk of starvation. Cf. "One must not rely on miracles" (Pes. 64^b).

144. I am thy cook and thou permittest me not to partake of thy dishes (Lev. R. ch. xxviii. § 3; D. 477).

Applied to people who are ungrateful to those who have benefited them.

145. False witnesses are despicable to their hirers (Sanh. 29^a; D. 538).

Elsewhere it is said “A false witness is worthy of being cast to the dogs” (Pes. 118^a).

146. A proud man is unacceptable even to his own household (B. B. 98^a; D. 237).

Cf. no. 46. Other sayings are: “The proud man is possessed of a blemish” (Meg. 29^a; D. 236); “The son of David (the Messiah) will not come till the arrogant are consumed from Israel” (Sanh. 98^a). It was a favourite maxim of the great Hillel, “My lowliness is my exaltation and my exaltation is my lowliness” (Lev. R. ch. i. § 5). Another Rabbi exhorts us, “Be exceedingly humble of spirit, since the hope of man is but worms” (Aboth. iv. 4). And Ibn Gabirol says, “What is pride? It is a folly which they who possess it cannot throw off” (*op. cit.* no. 626).

147. When priests rob, who would swear by their gods or sacrifice to them? (Gen. R. ch. xxvi. § 5; D. 343).

The wrong done by eminent men lowers the cause which they represent.

*148. A *stater* in a flask cries Clink, clink (B. M. 85^b; D. 112).

The single coin in the flask is more audible than a large number of coins. Cf. “Empty vessels make the most noise.” For “stater” see no. 91.

*149. The ass feels cold even at the solstice of *Tammuz* (Shab. 53^a; D. 291).

I.e. in midsummer, *Tammuz* being the equivalent of the month of July. The proverb is applied to a blockhead, into whom it is impossible to drive any sense. To the same effect is: “To the wise man a nod [is sufficient], but the fool needs a fist” (D. p. 78). Cf. “A fool cannot be impressed, and the flesh of a corpse does not feel the knife” (Shab. 13^b; D. 77).

*150. That man has not eaten bread made from wheat all his days (Gen. R. ch. xv. § 7; D. 412).

Applied to an exceptionally ignorant man. He has never tasted the luxury of knowledge, in the same way as an extremely poor man never tastes such a

dainty as bread made from wheat.

151. He ran with ladder and rope but could not learn (Ned. 89^b; D. 610).

The figure is of a man who energetically provides himself with a ladder and rope wherewith to pull down the branches of a tree and pick the fruit.

Similarly there are men who do all in their power to acquire knowledge, but are unsuccessful. Cf. “Thou hast dived into the mighty waters [for pearls] and hast brought up a potsherd in thy hand” (B. K. 91^a; D. 581). Contrast the Rabbinic saying: “If a man says, “I have sought (wisdom) and found it not,” do not believe him” (Meg. 6^b).

*152. One man weeps without knowing why, another laughs without knowing why; woe to him who knows not to distinguish between the good and the bad! (Sanh. 103^a; D. 161).

153. Play the flute to noblemen [and they find it pleasant; play it] to weavers and they will not accept it (Jom. 20^b; D. 2).

Fools criticise where sages admire. On the “weaver” see no. 23.

*154. The sorcerer mutters but knows not what he mutters (Sot. 22^a; D. 617).

Applicable to people who repeat high-sounding phrases without knowing their meaning.

*155. Hast thou called to thy neighbour and he answered thee not, take a huge wall and throw it at him (B. K. 92^b; D. 602).

One has to use strong measures with a fool.

5. Occupations

§ 1. Work

156. Who hath not worked shall not eat (Gen. R. ch. xiv. § 10; D^s. 97).

The identical words are to be found in 2 Thess. iii. 10. The Rabbis were fond of quoting “When thou eatest the labour of thine hands, happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee” (Ps. cxxviii. 2), with the comment that the man who eats the fruit of his labour stands higher than the God-fearing man (Ber. 8^a). That work is a blessing is finely taught in the Talmudical legend which relates how Adam burst into tears when he was told that as a consequence of his disobedience the earth would henceforth produce thorns and thistles. “Shall I and the ass eat out of the same manger?” he cried. When, however, he was informed that by the sweat of his brow he could grow corn and eat bread, he was comforted (Pes. 118^a).

157. Hadst got up early, thou needest not have stayed up late (Lev. R. ch. xxv. § 5; D^a. 6).

If you had worked while young, there would be no necessity for you to work in your old age (Jastrow). Cf. “Leisure is the reward of labour.” Dukes renders the proverb quite differently: “Hast seen the dawn, thou hast not yet seen the dusk.” Man is ignorant of what the next step he has to take will bring him. Cf. “Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Prov. xxvii. 1), and “Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off” (1 Kings xx. 11).

158. Flay a carcass in the street and earn a living, and say not, I am a great man and the work is below my dignity (Pes. 113^a; B. B. 110^a; D. 579).

Other similar sayings are: “Great is work, for it honours the workman” (Ned. 49^b; D. 188), and “Make thy Sabbath [-table like that of] a weekday, but be not dependent upon others” (Shab. 118^a; D. 568). The Rabbis certainly practised what they preached, for there were no professional scholars in their day. We hear of great Rabbis being at the same time shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, builders, bakers, etc. The eminent Rabban Gamliel had as his favourite maxim: “An excellent thing is the study of the

Law combined with some worldly occupation, for the labour demanded by them both makes sin to be forgotten. All study of the Law without work must in the end be futile and become the cause of sin” (Aboth. ii. 2).

159. Seven years lasted the famine, but it came not to the artisan’s door (Sanh. 29^a; D. 622).

Cf. also “It is a father’s duty to teach his son a trade” (Kid. 29^a), and “He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him to steal” (*ibid.*). A man without a regular occupation was not permitted to act as judge or even give testimony (Sanh. 24^b).

160. If a swordsman he is no book-worm; if a book-worm he is no swordsman (Ab. Zar. 17^b; D. 46).

The occupations of the student and warrior clash with each other. Another reading of the proverb is: “If the sword the Book is not, if the Book the sword is not.” The Book is the Bible, and its teachings make for peace and good-will.

161. A physician afar off is a blind eye (B. K. 85^a; D. 111).

I.e. he is of no use. Jastrow translates, “If the surgeon is far off, the eye will be blind” (before he arrives).

*182. There is no faith in slaves (B. M. 86^b; D. 437).

Palestinian proverb. Elsewhere it is said: “Of the ten measures of sleep that came down into the world, slaves received nine and the rest of the world only one” (Kid. 49^b); “Slaves have no sense of shame” (Sanh. 86^a); “Their testimony is not accepted” (Mish. R. H. i. 8); “It is forbidden to teach a slave the Law” (Keth. 28^a). Harsh though these *dicta* sound, they were no doubt justified by experience. On the other hand, there cannot be any doubt that servants [there is only one word in Hebrew and Aramaic for “slave” and “servant”] were well looked after and protected by law. It is thus recommended, “Do not eat fine bread and give coarse bread to your servant, do not drink old wine and give him new wine, do not sleep on soft cushions and allow him only straw; hence people say, Whoever acquires a Hebrew slave, acquires a master over himself” (Kid. 20^a).

§ 2. Trade

163. Does a man buy and sell just to be called a merchant? (B. M. 40^b; B. B. 90^a).

The chief aim in trade is to make a profit. Cf. “A merchant that gains not, loseth.”

*164. Hast bought, thou hast gained; sell, and thou wilt lose (B. M. 51^a).

The art of trading consists in skilful purchasing.

Cf. “Buying and selling is but winning and losing.”

165. Loosen thy purse-strings, [then] open thy sack (Pes. 113^a; D. 643).

Receive payment before parting with your goods. Cf. a Scotch proverb “Ell and tell [= ready money] is good merchandise.”

*166. Behold the sack, the money, and the corn; arise and measure (j. Sanh. x. 1; D. 230).

Deal for cash only.

167. Vines purchase date-palms, date-palms do not purchase vines (B. K. 92^a).

The fruit of the vine is more valuable than that of the palm. Therefore devote your energies to the former, for it will prove more profitable.

168. A *Kab* from the ground and not a *Kor* from the roof (Pes. 113^a; D. 586).

Better is a small profit derived from the place where you dwell than a larger profit from afar off. You are saved worry, and there is no need to mount the roof of your house to look out anxiously for the arrival of your agents. Cf. “Buy at market but sell at home.” On the *Kab* see no. 21. The *Kor* was a larger dry measure.

*169. If on opening the door [in the morning] there is rain, set down thy sack, O ass-driver, and lie on it (Ber. 59^a; Taan 6^b; D. 163).

Morning rain is the sign of a fruitful season.

Provisions will be cheap, so do not carry thy produce to market, for the profits will be small. On the other hand, the *Talmud* bitterly denounces the men who inflate the price of food-stuff by withholding it from the market in the time of scarcity (B. B. 90^b).

*170. The beam sells for a *Zuz* in the town and for a *Zuz* in the forest (B. K. 11^a; D. p. 15).

The cost of transporting the timber does not materially affect the price.

*171. Ten parasangs for one *Zuz*, eleven parasangs for two (Ḥag. 9^b).

Cry of ass-drivers.

*172. Four [*Zuz*] for a large skin and four for a small skin (B. B. 5^a; D. 117).

The cost of tanning a skin, whether large or small, is practically the same. Make use of this fact to get the most possible for your money. In the context, the application is that the cost of guarding two contiguous fields is the same as that for one field. (This seems the most probable of the various translations and explanations of the proverb.)

173. A hundred *Zuz* [invested] in business, and every day meat and wine; a hundred *Zuz* [invested] in land, and salt and vegetables (Jeb. 63^a; D. 463).

The Jews seem at one time to have had a disinclination to acquire much land, possibly on account of the uncertainty of tenure in the time of persecution. Cf. the wording of proverb no. 130. The opinions on the question of landed property differ very widely. Ben Sira says: "Hate not laborious work, neither husbandry, which the Most High hath ordained" (Ecclus. vii. 15). The fact that "husbandry" is specially mentioned is in keeping with Ben Sira's general view, shared by the Greeks, that occupation with the soil led to boorishness. A Rabbi of the second century AD. gives it as his opinion that there could be no worse occupation than agriculture, and on seeing a field ploughed across its breadth he exclaimed sarcastically, "Plough it also long-wise, and still you will find that to engage in commerce is more profitable" (Jeb. 63^a). Rab, who lived in the third century, noticed the ears of corn being fanned by the breeze, and declared "However much you may fan, it is better to devote oneself to commerce" (*ibid.*). On the other hand, it is also said, "A man who does not possess a piece of land is not fit to be called a man" (*ibid.*); and another Rabbi adopts a middle course by advising "Let every man divide his money into three parts, and invest a third in land, a third in business, and a third let him keep by him in reserve" (B. M. 42^a).

174. A hundred bleedings for a *Zuz*, a hundred heads (hair-cuttings) for a *Zuz*, a hundred lips (moustache-trimmings) for nothing (Shab. 129^b; D. 464).

There are some occupations which are absolutely barren of profit. Although, as we have seen, work was considered a blessing, a distinction was naturally drawn between the different trades. “No trade,” says a Rabbi, “will ever pass away from the world; but happy is he who sees his parents engaged in a superior trade, and woe to him who sees his parents engaged in an ungainly occupation. The world cannot exist without a perfumer and a tanner; but happy is he whose occupation is that of a perfumer, and woe to him who is a tanner” (Kid. 82^b). Here the emphasis is laid on clean and pleasant work; but another Rabbinic passage regards the matter from a different point of view. “Let not a man teach his son to be an ass-driver, nor a camel-driver, nor a barber, nor a sailor, nor a shepherd, nor a shop-keeper, for their trades are those of thieves. Ass-drivers are mostly wicked, camel-drivers mostly honest, sailors mostly pious, the best of physicians is destined for Gehenna, and the most honourable of butchers is a partner of Amalek” (Mish. Kid. iv. 14). Also the professions which brought men into frequent contact with women were discouraged, such as the goldsmith, wool-carder, maker of hand-mills, perfumer, weaver, hairdresser, fuller, cupper, and bath-heater. None engaged in these trades could be elected to the office of king or high priest (Kid. 82^a).

*175. Fifty [*Zuz*] which produce [increase] are better than a hundred which do not (j. Peah viii. 8; D. 296).

A little which is used is of greater value than double which is lying unused.

6. Rules Of Conduct

*176. Be the cursed and not the curser (Sanh. 49^a; D. 652).

A similar exhortation is, “A man should always be of the pursued and not of the pursuers” (B. K. 93^a), and cf. “They who are oppressed and oppress not, who listen to insults without retorting, who act lovingly and are happy under trials—of them it is said (Judg. v. 31), “Let them who love Him be as the sun when it goeth forth in its might” (Shab. 88^b).

177. What is hateful to thyself, do not to thy fellow-man (Shab. 31^a; D. 223).

This negative form of the Golden Rule (cf. Matt. vii. 12) is ascribed in the *Talmud* to Hillel, who gave it to the would-be proselyte who wished to be taught the whole of the Law while he stood on one foot. It soon became famous and passed into proverbial use. It was earlier than Hillel, and is found in Tobit iv. 14 and in Philo.

178. Physician, heal thy lameness (Gen. R. ch. xxiii. § 4; D. 109).

Similar to Luke iv, 23. Cf. “Take the splinter from thine eyes! [And he answers] Take the beam from thine eyes!” (B. B. 15^b; Erach. 16^b; D. 309), which is identical with Matt. vii. 4, and “Improve thyself and then improve others” (B. B. 60^b and often; D. 604). That physicians were unpopular may be seen from the wording of this proverb and from the passage quoted on proverb no. 174. Ben Sira finds it necessary to write a special exhortation for men to “honour a physician” (Ecclus. xxxviii. 1 f.), and a Rabbi advises, “Do not dwell in a town where the chief man in it is a physician” (Pes. 113^a).

*179. Hast gone into the city, conform to its laws (Gen. R. ch. xlvi. § 14; D. 31).

Cf. “Man should never depart from established custom” (B. M. 86^b), “A man should never exclude himself from the general body” (Ber. 49^b), “The law of the State is law,” *i.e.* is binding on the Jewish inhabitant (Git. 10^b and often), “When in Rome do as Rome does.”

180. Go out and see how the people act (Ber. 45^a and often; D. 573).

Follow the majority. Cf. “Custom rules the law.”

181. Hast spoiled thy work, take a needle and sew (Gen. R. ch. xix. § 6; D^s. 149).

Do your best to right the mischief done by you.

*182. Whatever thou hast to thy discredit, be the first to tell it (B. K. 92^b; D. 500).

It will be worse for you if others tell it.

183. Be not choleric and thou shalt not sin (Ber. 29^b; D. 429).

A mediæval Jewish work declares: “Anger rusts the intellect so that it cannot discern the good to do it and the bad to avoid it.” Cf. nos. 101 ff.

184. Become not intoxicated and thou shalt not sin (Ber. 29^b; D. 428).

Other Rabbinic sayings on this subject are: “Wine leads both man and woman to adultery” (Num. R. ch. x. § 4); “One cup of wine is good for a woman, two are degrading, three make her act like an immoral person, and four cause her to lose all self-respect and sense of shame” (Keth. 65^a); “Enter wine, exit the secret” (Erub. 65^a; Sanh. 38^a); “Wine ends in blood” (Sanh. 70^a); “Wine brings lamentation into the world” (Jom. 76^b); “Who has drunk a quarter of a measure of wine may not expound the Law” (Keth. 10^b); “Nor should he recite his prayers, for the prayer of a drunkard is an abomination” (Erub. 64^a); “Priests should never drink wine” (Taan. 17^a bot.). Abba Shaūl]. said: “It was once my occupation to bury the dead, and I made it a practice to observe their bones. I have thus perceived that he who indulged in strong drink, his bones appeared to be burnt; if to excess, they were without marrow; but if in due measure, they were full of marrow” (Nid. 24^b). Dukes (*Zur r. S.*, no. 24) quotes “Where Satan cannot penetrate, he sends wine as his ambassador.” It is not to be inferred from these sayings, that total abstinence was commended. Quite the contrary. Why, ask the Rabbis, is the Nazirite [see no. 188] commanded to bring a sin-offering (Num. vi. 14)? Because he imposed upon himself the oath to abstain from wine, which is one of God’s gifts to man (Taan. 11^a). Wine was largely used, but in moderation. It of course figured in the religious ceremonies, but

it was enacted, “No blessing is to be pronounced over the cup of wine, unless it has first been mixed with water. Such is the opinion of R. Eliezer. The wise men, however, do pronounce the blessing over undiluted wine” (Mish. Ber. vii. 5).

*185. Cast no mud into the well from which thou hast drunk (B. K. 92^b; D. 148).

Against ingratitude. Cf. “It is a dirty bird that fouls its own nest.”

*186. Mix fodder for one ox, mix for many oxen (B. M. 69^a).

Cf. “In for a penny, in for a pound,” “As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.”

187. Be deliberate! Be deliberate! ‘Tis worth four hundred *Zuz* (Ber. 20^a; D. 521).

The proverb originated under the following circumstances: R. Ida, the son of Ahaba, once pulled a kind of head-covering only worn by non-Jewish women from the head of a woman, under the supposition that she was a Jewess. He was mistaken, and was fined four hundred *Zuz*. On asking the woman her name, she replied that it was *Methūn*, which also means “Be deliberate! Be not hasty!” There is a further play on the word, for it closely resembles another with the meaning “Two hundred.” Note that the word is repeated, bringing the total to “Four hundred,” the amount paid as a fine. Ibn Gabirol likewise says: “Reflection insures safety, but rashness is followed by regrets” (no. 114).

*188. Go away! Go away! O Nazirite, they say; do not approach even the neighbourhood of a vineyard (Shab. 13^a and often; quoted as a proverb in Num. R. ch. x. § 8; D. 441).

A Nazirite was one who had taken a vow to abstain from the produce of the vine (see Num. vi. 2 ff.) The meaning of the proverb is: Avoid even the circumstances which might possibly lead to wrong. The same idea is taught in the ancient Jewish doctrine “Make a fence round the Law” (Aboth, i. 1).

Cf. also “Keep far from what is foul and from what is like unto it” (Hul. 44^b).

189. Circumvent the wicked man lest he circumvent thee (Gen. R. ch. lxxv. § 1; D. 589).

*190. If thy comrade call thee “Ass,” put the saddle upon thy back (B. K. 92^b; D. 282).

Reliance can be placed on the frank criticism of a friend.

*191. If one person tell thee thou hast ass’s ears, take no notice; should two tell thee so, procure a saddle for thyself (Gen. R. ch. xlv. § 7; D. 96).

Where opinions agree there is more credence. Cf. “What everyone says must be true.”

*192. Before wine-drinkers [set] wine; before a ploughman a measure of roots (Sot. 10^a; D. 595).

Everything in its proper place. Cf. no. 112 above.

193. If a hundred pumpkins [cost] a *Zuz* in the city, still have some with you (Pes. 113^a; D. 465).

However cheap they may be in the city, take some with you when journeying there. Omit no precautions.

194. If thou goest up to the roof, take thy provisions with thee (Pes. 113^a; D. 540).

However short be the journey see that you are well provided with the requirement of your needs. Cf. “Though the sun shines, leave not your cloak at home.”

195. Even when the ox has his head in the [fodder-] basket, go up to the roof, and remove the ladder from under thee (Ber. 33^a; Pes. 112^b; D. 618)

Take all possible precautions. Oxen were greatly feared because of their liability to gore.

*196. To the tenth generation speak not contemptuously of a gentile in the presence of a proselyte (Sanh. 94^a; D. 194).

Have regard for his feelings. Cf. the next proverb.

*197. Should there be a case of hanging in one’s family record, say not to him, “Hang up this fish “ (B. M. 59^b; D. 213).

So in English, “Name not a rope in his house that hanged himself.”

*198. Leave the drunkard alone; he will fall by himself (Shab. 32^a; D. 624).

Retribution comes in its own time. Do not try to hasten it.

*199. Man ought to pray for mercy even to the last clod of earth [thrown upon his grave] (Ber. 8^a; D. 433).

Cf. “Even when a sharp sword is laid on his neck, a man should not withhold himself from [the hope of] mercy” (Ber. 10^a; D. 113). “Never say die.”

*200. In a field where there are mounds, talk no secrets (Gen. R. ch. lxxiv. § 2; D. 151).

Similarly: “The way has ears, the wall has ears” (Lev. R. ch. xxxii. § 2; D. 32), and the English proverb “Fields have eyes and woods have ears.”

*201. Whether innocent or guilty, enter into no oath (j. Shebu. vi. 5; D. 155).

Cf. “Accustom not thy mouth to swearing, neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One” (Ecclus. xxiii. 9).

*202. What is expensive for thy back, what is reasonable for thy stomach (B. M. 52^a; D. 569).

Spend much on your clothes, even if you have to stint yourself in food. Orientals attach great importance to their external appearance. Other sayings are: “R. Johanan called his garment, That which honoureth me” (B. K. 91^b; Shab. 113^b), “A scholar on whose clothes vermin are found is worthy of death” (Shab. 114^a), “To honour the Sabbath, let not thy Sabbath apparel be the same as thy weekday apparel” (Shah. 113^a), “The glory of men is their raiment” (*Derech Erets Zuta*, ch. x). Cf. proverb no. 265.

203. Spend according to thy means on eating, less on clothing, and more on dwelling (Gen. R. ch. xx. § 12; D. 458).

Contrast this with the preceding.

204. Diminish from thy food and drink and add to thy dwelling (Pes. 114^a; D. 574).

Similar to the preceding.

*205. Let thy grandson sell wax, and do not let thyself be troubled (Sanh. 95^a; cited as a proverb in Jalkut to Samuel, § 155; D. 168).

Do not concern yourself too much with the future. Do not stint yourself now, because it might affect the second or third generation. The same idea occurs in the following: “Sufficient is the trouble in its own time” (Ber. 9^b), with which is to be compared “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. vi. 34).

*206. If [thy wife] hath borne thee sixty in thy lifetime [but they have all died], of what use were sixty to thee? Bestir thyself and beget one who will be stronger than the sixty (B. B. 91^a; D. 150).

Do not lose courage even in the face of overwhelming disappointments, but persevere until you finally succeed. On “sixty” see no. 16.

*207. One should take grave notice of his master’s curses even when they are undeserved (Jalkut to Samuel § 142).

Teachers were held in extraordinary esteem by Jews, and were sometimes credited with the power of harming people by cursing them.

Cf. “The curse of a wise man is fulfilled even when undeserved” (Sanh. 90^b).

*208. Hast given [the poor] to eat and to drink, accompany them on their way (Gen. R. ch. xlviii. § 20).

Show respect to the poor, even when assisting them. The proverb is based upon Abraham’s treatment of his guests (cf. Gen. xviii.).

209. In the time of rejoicing, rejoicing; in the time of mourning, mourning (Gen. R. ch. xxvii. § 4; D. 174).

“To everything there is a season” (Eccles. iii. 1).

*210. While on thy way, to thine enemy make thyself heard (Sanh. 95^b; D. 3).

Seize the opportunity to retaliate on him, whenever and wherever it may present itself to you. The words can also bear the meaning “While on thy way, submit to thine enemy,” which offers a parallel to Matt. v. 25.

*211. He from whom a mantle has been confiscated by the court should go on his way singing (Sanh. 7^a; D. 220).

One should not resent the penalty inflicted by lawful judges.

*212. From thy debtor accept even bran in payment (B. K. 46^b; B. M. 118^a; BB. 92^b; D. 501). On the principle “Half a loaf is better than none.”

*213. According to the *Zuzim* dance (Midrash to Psalm xiv. 12; D^s. 94). In accordance with the payment so regulate the work. Truer to Jewish teaching is the maxim: “Be not like servants who minister to their master upon the condition of receiving a reward” (Aboth. i. 3).

214. If a man of Naresh has kissed thee, count thy teeth (Hul. 127^a; D. 535).

The town of Naresh in Babylonia had a bad reputation. The general meaning of the proverb is: Beware of a deceitful man, especially when he greets you effusively. One is reminded of Virgil’s line “Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.”

215. Let the reader of the letter be the one to break the news (B. M. 83^b and often; D. 601).

Having involved yourself in an affair, carry it out to a conclusion, however unpleasant it may be.

216. If the wheat of the city be rye-grass, sow of it (Gen. R. ch. lix. § 8; D. 289). Prefer what is home-grown, even if it be inferior to foreign produce.

217. First learn, then form opinions (Shah. 63^a; D. 434). This fine maxim occurs also in Hebrew form in Ber. 63^b; Ab. Zar. 19^a (D. 454).

218. When the horn is sounded in [the market of] Rome, son of a fig-dealer, sell thy father’s figs (Ber. 62^b; D. 603).

Another possible rendering is: “The horn is sounded in Rome: “Son of a fig-dealer, etc.” If thy father is away, act in his absence. Do not let the opportunity pass.

219. While thou art hungry eat; while thou art thirsty drink; while the cauldron is still hot pour out (Ber. 62^b; D. 550).

Do not procrastinate.

220. While thy fire is burning, go cut up thy pumpkin and cook (Sanh. 33^b; D. 12).

Seize the opportunity as it occurs to you.

221. While the sandal is on thy foot, tread down the thorns (Gen. R. ch. xlv. § 12; D. 552).

Parallel to the preceding.

222. If thou hast dates in the fold of thy garment, run to the brewery (Pes. 113^a; D. 658).

Having gathered the dates in the fold of thy cloak, run at once and have them brewed. Do not waste time. In the East, beer (called by the Arabs *Nabidh*) was brewed from dates.

223. While yet the sand is on thy feet dispose of thy wares (Pes. 113^a; D. 11).

Cf. in English “ Expedition is the soul of business,” and generally the meaning is the same as the preceding.

*224. He who has a lawsuit should go to a judge (Sanh. 3^b; D. 466).

Do not waste time, but have your wrongs attended to by the properly constituted authorities without delay.

225. He who is in pain should go to the doctor (B. K. 46b; D. 216).

Same as preceding.

7. Vagaries Of Fortune

226. This world is like pump-wheels whereby the full become empty that the empty shall become full (Lev. R. ch. xxxiv. § 9; D. 246).

Cf. “It is a wheel that revolves in the world” (Shab. 151^b; D. 196), “The wheel has revolved” (Jalkut to Ruth § 601), and “The world is a staircase; some are going up and some are coming down.”

*227. In the place where the master of the house once hung up his weapons, there the shepherd hangs up his scrip (B. M. 84^b; Sanh. 103^a; D. 141).

Palestinian proverb. The wheel of fortune revolves constantly, and inferiors usurp the place of their betters.

228. The sow pastures with ten [young ones] and the lamb not even with one (Gen. R. ch. xlv. § 23; D. 288).

Fortune does not always smile on those who deserve it most.

229. They eat and we say Grace (Ber. 44^a; D. 81).

We have the work and they the enjoyment. Cf. “One beats the bush and another catches the bird.”

*230. Shechem married [Dinah] and Mabgai was circumcised (Mac. 11^a; D. 631).

Palestinian proverb based on the incident narrated in Gen. xxxiv. *Mabgai* is the name of a Samaritan town, and is used here generally of the people living under the rule of Shechem. The thought of the proverb is the same as that of the preceding.

*231. Tobiah sinned and Sigud is beaten (Mac. 11^a; cf. Pes. 113^b; D. 306).

The Babylonian equivalent of no. 230.

*232. Shilo sinned and Joḥanan is punished (Gen. R. ch. xxv. § 3; D. 630).

Same as preceding.

233. If I had not removed the potsherd for thee, thou wouldst not have discovered the pearl under it (B. M. 17^b; Jeb. 92^b; Mac. 21^b; D. 45).

One is reminded of Samson's words: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle" (Judg. xiv. 18). Lewin quotes an English proverb, "It's good to pluck flowers in your neighbour's garden." One does the work, the other reaps the reward.

*234. The wine [belongs] to the master, but the credit [goes] to the butler (B. K. 92^b; D. 295)."

Credit is not always given where it is rightly due.

235. The common soldiers do the fighting, and the officers claim the victory (Ber. 53^b; Nazir 66^b; D. 190).

Same as preceding.

*236. When the maker of stocks sits in his stocks, he is paid out of his own work (Pes. 28^a; D. 537, p. 218).

(This is the reading in the MSS., *saddāā besaddéh*, adopted by Jastrow. The editions read *saddānā bisedanéh*: "When the smith sits at his anvil, he is paid out of his own work," *i.e.* he often receives blows from the instruments which he himself had fashioned.) The meaning of the proverb is illustrated by the phrase "Hoist with his own petard."

*237. If the arrow-maker is killed by his arrow, he is paid out of his own work (Pes. 28^a; D. 195).

Same as preceding.

*238. In the same ladle which the carpenter fashioned will the mustard burn [his mouth] (Pes. 28^a; D. 405).

Same as preceding.

*239. Together with the shrub the cabbage is beaten (B. K. 92^a; D. 143).

The good suffer together with the bad when a calamity overtakes a community, just as when in pulling up shrubs a cabbage is also sometimes uprooted. On the other hand, it is pointed out that rain benefits the wicked as well as the righteous (Taan. 7^a).

*240. To the fox in his time one has to bow (Meg. 16^b; D. 660).

"Every dog has his day."

241. Not the mouse but the hole is the thief (Git 45^a; Kid. 56^b; Erach. 30^a; D. 425).

Circumstances often determine a man's actions. Similarly: "The breach [in the wall] invites the thief" (Suc. 26^a; D. 578). Cf. "Opportunity makes the thief." "An open door may tempt a saint."

242. Should [opportunity] fail the thief, he conducts himself like an honest man (Sanh. 22^a; D. 297).

A contrast to the preceding proverb.

*243. A woman accustomed to miscarriages is no longer troubled by them (Keth. 62^a; D. 219).

Everything, even troubles and misfortunes, is lightened by frequent occurrence. Cf. "Familiarity breeds contempt" and proverb no. 13.

*244. The thief is not put to death after two or three [offences] (Sanh. 7^a; D. 135).

Because punishment does not overtake the culprit in the early stage of his career of crime, let him not imagine that he will escape altogether. Cf. "God stays long, but strikes at last."

245. Are the maid's acts of stubbornness many, they will [all be dealt with] by one chastisement (Shab. 32^a; D. 662).

Similar to preceding. Cf. "Punishment is lame, but it comes."

*246. Through Kamtsa and Bar Kamtsa was the Temple destroyed (Lam. R. to iv. 2; Git. 55^b; D. 158).

Small causes lead to great consequences. The story is told that a man of Jerusalem was arranging a banquet and sent an invitation to Kamtsa, one of his friends. Unfortunately it was delivered in error to Bar Kamtsa, his enemy, who accepted it. On discovering the mistake, the host wished to drive him out of the house, and refused the latter's offer to pay for whatever he ate. Thereupon Bar Kamtsa went to the Roman Emperor, and, to revenge the insult, denounced the Jews as traitors. This act ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple. Cf. "Little chips light great fires," "Little strokes fell great oaks."

*247. The ox ran and fell, so they place a horse in its crib (Sanh. 98^b; D. 611).

Although in the East horses are highly prized and not used for agricultural work, still in the time of need they too have to be trained to that kind of labour. In the context the proverb is used for a special case. It is applied to Israel, who, having stumbled, was displaced from his crib (Palestine) and other nations permitted to take possession of it.

*248. Hast hired thyself to him, comb his wool (Jom. 20^b; D. 133).

If one has undertaken a duty, he must fulfil even the unpleasant parts which are involved. Wool-combing was usually done by women, and therefore despised by men. See no. 23. Cf. “Money taken, freedom forsaken.”

*249. Seven years lasted the pestilence, but not a man died before his year (Jeb. 114^b; Sanh. 29^a; D. 623).

Everything is predestined and nothing hastens the decree of Providence. The ancient Jews, like all Orientals, were fatalists and firm believers in Predestination. It is, *e.g.*, said “Forty days before the creation of a child a supernatural voice [*Bath Kōl*] proclaims, “The daughter of so-and-so for so-and-so, the house of so-and-so for so-and-so, the field of so-and-so for so-and-so” (Sot. 2^a; cf. Moed K. 18^b); “Even the appointment of the overseers of wells [an insignificant office] is ordained from heaven” (B. B. 91^b); “No man pricks his finger below, unless it has been decreed above, for it is said (Psalm xxxvii. 23) “A man’s goings are established of the Lord” (Ḥul. 7^b). Such beliefs were due mainly to the cultivation of astrology. Thus we read: “Existence, offspring, and sustenance depend not upon personal merit but upon the *Mazzāl*, *i.e.* horoscope.” (Moed K. 28^a); “The *Mazzāl* makes wise and rich” (Shab. 156^a); although some maintained that Israel was not affected by astrological influences (*ibid.*). But several of the mediæval Rabbis, *e.g.* Maimonides, repudiated all such notions. Cf. the English proverb, “The fated will happen.” On “seven” see no. 57.

250. If the stone falls on the pot, woe to the pot; if the pot falls on the stone, woe to the pot; in either case, woe to the pot (Esth. R. ch. vii. § 10; D. 530.)

The weak always suffers. A proverb in the identical terms is current in Spain, borrowed in all probability from the Jews. Cf. the following Hindu

saying: “Whether the knife fall on the melon, or the melon on the knife, the melon suffers.”

251. Any piece of coal which does not burn at the [required] time will never burn (j. Maas. Sh. v. 3; j. Bets. ii. 4; j. Hag. ii. 3; D. 365).

What does not occur at the moment when it can be of service is useless.

*252. In the place of beauty disfigurement (Shab. 62^b; D. 290).

Based on Isaiah iii. 24.

*253. From the camel the ear (Shebu. 11^b).

The camel has small ears in comparison with its bulk. For all that, be satisfied if you can get even the ears as your share of the camel.

254. A young pumpkin [now] is better than a full-grown one [later on] (Suc. 56^b); Keth. 83^b; Temur. 9^a; D. 147).

Cf. “Better an egg to-day than a hen to-morrow.”

*255. Better one bird tied up than a hundred flying (Eccles. R. to iv. 6; D. 301).

Cf. “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

*256. A scorpion met a camel [and stung her], and she pushed it aside with her heel. Whereupon [the scorpion] exclaimed, By thy life, I [hope next time] to reach thine head! (Jalkut to Psalms § 764; D. 565).

The camel should have killed the scorpion and saved herself from the possibility of revenge. The disdainful neglect of something deemed at the time insignificant may later on have serious consequences.

8. Social Life

§ 1. Man as a Social Unit

*257. If thou wilt lift the load I will lift it too; but if thou wilt not lift it, I will not (B. K. 92^b; D. 40).

One usually desires another to share the risk of an undertaking rather than bear all the responsibility alone. Co-operation and mutual assistance are essential factors in social life. Cf. the case of Deborah and Barak: "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go" (Judg. iv. 8).

258. Thy friend hath a friend and thy friend's friend hath a friend (BB. 28^b, and often; D. 280).

Men are so interrelated that no secret, if communicated to a second person, can be kept for long. For the same reason news spreads quickly. Similarly Ibn Gabirol teaches: "Disclose not that to thy friend which thou wouldst conceal from thine enemy" (no. 315); "The sage was asked,

How keepest thou a secret? He replied, I make my heart its tomb" (no. 318).

259. If the body is taken away, of what use is the head? (Gen. R. ch. c., § 9; D. 70).

The welfare of the upper classes is bound up closely with that of the lower.

260. The head follows the body (Erub. 41^a; D. 182).

Similar to the preceding proverb.

*261. Let the grape-clusters offer supplications on behalf of the leaves, since, but for the leaves, the grape-clusters could not exist (Hul. 92^a; D. 315.)

Even the greatest of men cannot dispense with the services of the lower classes, but are to a large extent dependent upon them. It is consequently their duty to consider the condition of the poor, since it affects them also.

*262. Smite the gods, and the priests will be terrified (Ex. R. ch. ix. § 9; D. 487).

The mob relies upon the leaders; if they fall, the rest are soon scattered.

263. If the house has fallen, woe to the windows (Ex. R. ch. xxvi. § 2; D. 529).

When disaster overtakes a community, its individual members suffer inasmuch as they form an integral part of the whole.

*264. When one band is broken, two are broken (Lev. R. ch. xiv. § 3; D. 130).

The world is a complex unit, so that one part affects another. The ruin of one man, for instance, usually involves many others besides himself.

*265. In the city my name, out of the city my dress (Shab. 145^b; D. 165).

“The coat makes the man.” In the place where I dwell my name is sufficient to command respect and recognition for me, but where I am unknown I am judged only by my outward appearance. Cf. “For man looketh on the outward appearance” (1 Sam. xvi. 7), and the Rabbinic exhortation “Look not at the flask but at what it contains” (Aboth. iv. 27).

*266. It is not as thou sayest, but as we say in the learned circles (Jalkut to Psalms § 755; D. 421).

A similar maxim is to be found in Hebrew: “It is not as thou sayest but as thy colleagues say” (Sanh. 19^a). The individual opinion is worthless as against the generally accepted opinion of experts.

267. Unhappy the province whose physician suffers from gout and whose chancellor of the exchequer is one-eyed (Lev. R. ch. v. § 6; D. 561).

The welfare of a community depends upon the fitness and efficiency of the governors.

*268. What is in thine heart concerning thy friend is in his heart concerning thee (Sifrē to Deut. i, 27; ed. Friedmann p. 70^a; D. 478).

§ 2. Comradeship, Good and Bad

*269. Either friendship or death (Taan. 23^a; D. 16).

The saying occurs in connection with the well-known story of the Talmudic Rip van Winkle—Honi Ha-mäaggel (“the circle-drawer”), who fell asleep for seventy years. On waking up he went to his former home, and thence to the house of study where he had once been so famous. But nobody believed

him when he disclosed his identity, and he thereupon prayed for death. Ibn Gabirol expresses the same idea thus: "A friendless man is like a left hand without a right hand" (no. 255). Cf. the English proverb, "Who finds himself without friends is like a body without a soul."

*270. Either friends like Job's friends or death (B. B. 16^b; D. 43).

Job's friends proved their loyalty by visiting him in the time of his trouble. That is the kind of friendship to seek and cultivate, not the kind described in proverb no. 27. Cf. "He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction: but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24).

271. Approach the perfumer and thou wilt be perfumed (Shebu. 47^b; D. 600).

There is a Hebrew proverb to the same effect: "Attach thyself to honourable people and men will bow to thee" (Gen. R. ch. xvi. § 3; D. 243). Cf. "Keep good men company and you shall be of the number."

272. The governor took us [by the hand] and the scent came into the hand (Zeb. 96^b; D^s. 15).

Same as preceding.

273. On account of the teacher the pupil has eaten (Jom. 75^b).

The honour merited by one person is reflected on others who associate with him.

*274. Carry wood behind the owners of property (B. K. 93^a; D. 180).

In the company of wealthy men there is an opportunity of making money. Similar to the English saying, "Live with a singer, if you would learn to sing."

*275. The servant of a king is like a king (Gen. R. ch. xvi. § 3; D. 545).

Parallel to the preceding proverbs. This saying also occurs in Hebrew form in Shebu. 47^b.

*276. The degenerate palm goes among the unfruitful reeds (B. K. 92^b; D. 488).

“Birds of a feather flock together.” The context quotes as Biblical parallels: “Esau went to Ishmael” (Gen. xxviii. 9), “There were gathered vain fellows to Jephthah” (Judg. xi. 3), and also “Every beast loveth his like and every man loveth his neighbour” (Ecclus. xiii. 15; xxvii. 9). Cf. also “The crow associates with the raven only because they belong to the same species” (Hul. 65^a; D. 415), “We carry mud to mud, and the fine to what is fine” (j. Kid. iii. 13; D. 484). A later moralist has: “Wouldst know all about a man? Ask who his companion is.”

*277. Should there be two dry logs and a fresh one together, the dry logs set the fresh one on fire (Sanh. 93^a; D. 664).

Bad company spreads infection. Wicked companions demoralise the good. Cf. “Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbour” (Suc. 56^b).

*278. The pencil splits the stone; a rogue knows his companion (Ab. Zar. 22^b; D. 497).

Each rogue fears the other because of bitter experience in the past, in the same way as the stone fears the pencil which marks the place where the chisel is to cut.

*279. [A dog] attaches itself to one because of the piece of meat which is thrown to it (B. M. 71^a; Ab. Zar. 22^b; D. 235).

Friendship merely for self-interest is to be avoided. Ibn Gabirol declares: “There are three kinds of friends—the friend who will help thee by personal acts and with money, he is faithful; the friend who gets from thee what he needs and would sacrifice thee for the slightest self-interest, he is faithless; and the friend who only makes an outward show of loving thee and whose desire from thee is greater than thy desire from him—trust not in his love” (no. 263).

*280. The man in whom I trusted lifted up his staff (or, fist) and stood against me (Sanh. 7^a; D. 185).

The Talmud quotes the Biblical parallel: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Ps. xli. 9).

*281. Do not a favour to a bad man, and no harm will come to thee (Gen. R. ch. xxii. § 8).

Have no dealings at all with the wicked. Cf. “Avoid evil and it will avoid thee.”

*282. If thy friend’s son die, bear [part of his grief]; if thy friend die, break away [from grief] (Gen. R. ch. xcvi. § 5; D. 495).

Share your friend’s sorrows, because he will sympathise with you when you are in distress. But when he is dead, what is the use of grieving? He can no longer be of any service to you. It need scarcely be pointed out that the egoistic spirit of this proverb does not accord with Rabbinic ethics. Contrast the saying “Greater is benevolence than monetary charity since it can be performed towards the dead as well as the living” (Suc. 49^b; D. 562).

*283. The large and small measures roll down and reach Sheol; from Sheol they proceed to Tadmor (Palmyra), from Tadmor to Meshan (Mesene), and from Meshan to Harpanya (Hipparenum) (Jeb. 17^a; D. 587).

“The large and small measures” indicate instruments of fraud, and thus symbolise the dregs of society. All the lowest and vilest types of humanity flock to the above-mentioned places in Babylon.

9. Colloquialisms

284. Cut off his head and shall he not die? (Shab. 75^a and often; D. 576).

Used of an act which is followed by unavoidable consequences. A man cannot protest that he did not intend such results as must inevitably follow from his acts. There is a Hebrew saying to the same effect: "Break the cask but preserve the wine!" (B. B. 16^a).

285. How can a barren ass pay me back? (B. B. 91^a; D. 339).

Used of a man from whom nothing can be expected.

286. They make an elephant pass through the eye of a needle (B. M. 38^b; D. 509).

Applied to subtle dialecticians. The figure is also used in the New Testament: "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye," etc. (Matt. xix. 24).

287. Man is never shown a golden date-palm or an elephant passing through the eye of a needle (Ber. 55^b).

Proverbial for things which are impossible.

288. When you will have eaten a *Kor* of salt with it (Shab. 4^a; Erub. 36^a and often; D. 442).

Parallel to the saying: "Putting a thing off to the Greek Kalends," which never occur. On *Kor* see no. 168.

289. As much as a fox carries off from a ploughed field (Nid. 65^b; Jom. 43^b; D. 334).

Spoken of a project which yielded very trifling results.

290. Thy guarantee needs a guarantee (Suc. 26^a; Git. 28^b; D. 566).

Applied to an unreliable authority. Maimonides quotes this saying as being "well known among the Arameans," for which there is a variant "Arabs" (*Guide for the Perplexed*, Part I. ch. lxxiv.).

291. A basket full of books (Meg. 28^b; D. 582).

Said of a man possessed of much learning, but ill-arranged and devoid of method. There is a mediæval expression, “An ass carrying books” (D^s. 44), which is applied to an ignorant man who has a library.

292. This is an arrow in Satan’s eye (Suc. 38^a; Kid. 30^a, 81^a; D. 215).

Descriptive of a good act or an act which is a preventive against wrongdoing.

293. Smell at his flask (Shab. 108^a; B. B. 22^a; D. 653).

Others translate: “Strike on his flask,” to hear how it rings. In either case the meaning is the same: Test his intelligence.

294. White pitchers full of ashes (Ber. 28^a).

Applied in the first instance to bad pupils. But generally it refers to dignified posts unworthily filled.

295. White geese who strip men of their cloaks (Git. 73^a).

Men in responsible positions—vested with the *white* mantles of honour—who abuse their office for their selfish ends.

*296. Like a *Zuz* above and like a *Stater* below (Suc. 22^b; D. p. 15).

The origin of the proverb and its primary application are alike obscure. In its context it refers to the sun’s rays penetrating through a hole as small as a *Zuz* and leaving on the background a circle of light as large as a *Stater* (see on no. 92). Perhaps the general meaning is: Small causes have large results (cf. no. 246).

297. Of what use is a torch at midday? (Ḥul. 60^b; cf. Shab. 63^a; D. 642).

Proverbial of something superfluous. Cf. Young’s “Hold a farthing candle to the sun.”

298. The sun sets of itself (Naz. 64^b; Pes. 90^b; D. 638).

Said of things which occur on their own account and need no human assistance.

299. The pitchers [go] to the stream; where [go] the potsherds? (Ber. 58^a; D. 298).

Said of one who aims at something of which he can make no use. The proverb is well illustrated by the following: "A hen and a night-owl were once awaiting the dawn. Said the hen to the night-owl, "The light is for me; of what use is it to you?" (Sanh. 98^b).

300. May thy strength be firm! (D^s. 20).

This expression is found very frequently in Hebrew and Aramaic. and is still used by Jews as the equivalent of "Thank you!"

301. Am I then fastened to you by a *Kab* of wax? (Sanh. 29^a; D^s. 5).

An assertion of independence. On *Kab* see no. 21.

*302. He went to Cæsarea and he still had [some of] his victuals with him (Gen. R. ch. lxxviii. § 8; D. 248).

Proverbial for a quickly accomplished task.

303. Like [a fish] from the sea into the frying-pan (Kid. 44^a; D. 401).

Proverbial of extraordinary promptness in performing a matter.

*304. He was involved in a lawsuit, but he had not the standing of a foot (Jalkut to Gen. § 6).

Exactly like the English saying, "He hadn't a leg to stand on."

305. Go and teach it outside (Erub. 9^a; Jom. 43^b).

We cannot accept your version. Cf. the common saying, "Tell it to the marines."

*306. Carry vegetables to the town of vegetables! (Menah. 85^a; D. 447).

Used sarcastically. Similar to the English proverb, "Carry coals to Newcastle." It is also said, "Thou art carrying straw to Ephraïm" (*ibid.*), "They carry brine to Apamæa and fish to Acco" (Ex. R. ch. ix. § 6). This proverb is put into the mouth of Pharaoh's magicians when Moses threatened to work his wonders in Egypt, the land of wonders.

307. Thou hast added water, add flour also (Gen. R. ch. lxx. § 7; D. 29).

Used of a person who is constantly asking questions, but rarely ventures to add anything more substantial to the conversation or discussion.

308. He made him ride upon two horses (B. B. 152^a; Keth. 55^b; D. 121).

“He made assurance doubly sure.”

309. A raven flew by! (Bets. 21^a; Hul. 124^b; D^s. 127).

A colloquialism used when asked a perplexing question which you wish to evade.

310. A raven that brings fire to its nest (Gen. R. ch. lxxv. § 19; D. 554).

Based on the fable of the raven that brought fire to its nest to warm its young, but the fire burnt them all. The proverb is thus used of a man who injures others with the best of intentions.

311. A mouse lying on *denars* (Sanh. 29^b; D. 556).

Descriptive of a miser. The “*denar*” (= denarius) is both a silver and a gold coin.

312. He threw a hatchet at it (R. H. 13^a; D. 628).

He shattered his arguments.

313. You all expectorate with the same spittle (Shab. 99^b; Nid. 42^a; D. 342).

You have all obtained your opinions from the same source.

314. Like a log for an image (Keth. 86^a; B. K. 98^b; D. 348).

Proverbial for something that is exactly suitable for the purpose in view.

315. Like taking a hair out of milk (Ber. 8^a; Moed K. 28^a; D. 402).

Descriptive of something extremely easy to perform.

316. Like a blind man at a window (B. B. 12^b; Nid. 20^b; D. 403).

Used of a man who just hits on the right thing by chance.

317. Like warm water on a bald head (Keth. 39^b).

Proverbial of something pleasant.

318. Dust into the mouth of Job! (B. B. 16^a).

An exclamatory remark, meaning “Hold your tongue!”

319. I see here a *Yod* [enlarged into] a city (Kid. 16^b).

The *Yod* is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and is thus used proverbially for something diminutive, as in the phrase “One jot or tittle”

(Matt. v. 18). With the proverb may be compared “They make a mountain out of a molehill.”

320. I kindled a fire before thee (Erach. 31^b).

My claim is prior to thine, inasmuch as I have previously done something to establish it.

321. I ate vegetables before thou didst (Erach. 31^b).

I am older than thou.

10. Miscellaneous

*322. He who eats the *progamia* eats also of the wedding-feast (j. Shebiith iv. 8; Jalkut to Prov. § 944; D. 205).

The *progamia* are the festivities prior to the celebration of the wedding. Cf. “He who prepares the *progamia* eats of the wedding-feast” (Lev. R. ch. xi. § 2).

*323. He who eats of the palm’s heart will be beaten by the stick [of the withered palm] (Lev. R. ch. xv. § 8; ch. xvi. § 7; D. 204).

If you enjoy the sweets of office you must not shirk its obligations. Cf. “Here is the palm’s heart and here the stick; you have eaten the heart, therefore be smitten with the stick” (Jalkut to Esther § 1056). On the heart of the palm-tree see no. 112 above.

324. The native on the ground and the stranger in the highest heavens! (Erub. 9^a; Jom. 47^a; B. K. 42^a; D. 153).

More deference is usually paid to a stranger than to a fellow-townsmen, Of, “A prophet is never honoured in his own country” (Matt. xiii. 57). A similar thought is contained in: “Woe! Woe! The sojourner drives out the master of the house” (Lam. R. Proem. 22).

325. How little does he whom the Lord aideth need to grieve or worry! (Jom. 22^b; D. 400.)

Similar to the English proverb, “The grace of God is gear enough.”

326. All that God does is done for the best (Ber. 60^b; D. 452).

This saying is illustrated by the following incident. R. Akiba was once on a journey, and met with a series of what appeared to be misfortunes. His request for a night’s lodging was refused by the inhabitants of the town, and he was compelled to sleep in the fields. He had with him a cock, an ass, and a lamp. A gust of wind came and extinguished the light; a wolf devoured the cock; and a lion carried off his ass. The next morning he discovered that the town had been plundered by robbers and all the inhabitants killed. He then perceived that there was a good purpose in all his misfortunes; for the light of the lamp, the crowing of the cock, or the braying of the ass might have

revealed his presence to the brigands. The Talmud also relates that there lived once a man named Nahum, “the man of Gamzu,” whose favourite motto was

“Also this [*Gam zu*] for good” (Sanh. 108^a; D. 197). Some think that his name is to be attributed to his motto; but others are of the opinion that he belonged to a town called Gimzo, S.E. of Lydda (2 Chron. xxviii. 18).

*327. The thief on the point of breaking into[a house] calls on God [for help] (Ber. 63^a; D. 191).

(This proverb is not to be found in the editions. The *'En Ja'akob* and MSS. have it; cf. Rabbinowitz, *Dikduke Sophrim, ad loc.*).

328. Grind with the teeth and thou wilt feel it in thy heels (Shab. 152^a; D. 212).

Good nourishment strengthens the body.

329. The steps of the ass [depend upon] barley (Shab. 51^b; D. 523).

Good nourishment is necessary for good labour.

330. Loosen thy sack and put in bread (Shab. 152^a; D. 645).

Open thy mouth and eat well, for nourishment is essential to the well-being of the body.

331. A fence is fenced in, and a breach is broken (j. Peah. i. 1 end; j. Kid. i. 9; j. Shebu. i. 6; D. 539).

The good are helped by God to remain good, and the bad are allowed to continue in their evil ways. The same idea is taught elsewhere in the Talmud: “The man who comes to defile himself has opportunities given him, and the man who comes to purify himself is helped [to gain that end]” (Shab. 104^a, and often; D. 139), “In the way in which one wishes to go, he is led” (Mac. 10^b; D. 142)

332. It is good for the year that *Tebeth* should be a widow (Taan. 6^b; D. 489).

This saying is dependent for its explanation upon another: “Rain is the consort of the earth” (*ibid.*). A rainless *Tebeth* (January) points to a good harvest. It is also stated that “A rainfall after the expiration of the month of *Nisan* (April, *i.e.* the time when the corn begins to ripen) and during the

feast of Tabernacles (October, the feast of ingathering) is a curse” (Taan. 2^b).

333. The physician who accepts no fee is worth no fee (B. K. 85^a; D. 110).
Cf. “What costs nothing is worth nothing.”

*334. If you have not seen the lion you have seen his lair (Targum Sheni to Esth. i. 2; ed. Munk p. 10; D^s. 13)

From the magnificence of his lair you can form an idea of what the occupant is like.

335. Whatever song he may sing, it will not enter the ear of the dancer (Lam. R. Proem. 12; D^s. 60)

A reference to Prov. xxv. 20. It is useless to try to impress anybody who is not in the mood to consider your words seriously.

336. A dog away from its accustomed place barks not for seven years (Erub. 61^a; D. 395).

In strange surroundings one loses self-confidence.

*337. According to the camel is the load (Keth. 67^a; Sot. 13^b; D. 455).

The greater the man the greater his responsibility.

*338. If the lawsuit has been adjourned overnight, the case is at an end (Sanh. 95^a; D. 176).

After the first heat of the quarrel has subsided, reconciliation is not so difficult.

339. In proportion to the ingenuity is the error (B. M. 96^b; D. 457).

Cf. “The higher the mountain, the deeper the valley,” and “The higher up, the greater fall.”

*340. The *Shittim* wood has no other use than to be cut down (Ex. R. ch. vi. § 5; D. 505).

This (acacia) wood is excellent as timber, but the tree is not fruit-bearing. Everything has its use and should be utilised for that purpose.

*341. According to the garden is the gardener (Gen. R. ch. lxxx. § 1; D. 456).

“Cut the coat according to the cloth.”

342. According to the ox is the slaughterer (Gen. R. ch. lxxv. § 11; D. 459).

Same as preceding proverb.

*343. Hast shaven the gentile and he is pleased, set fire to his beard also, and thou wilt never be finished laughing at him (Sanh. 96^a; D. 201).

He who submits to indignities will have to suffer worse insults in future.

*344. One says, “I will buy that poor man a garment,” but does not buy it, or “I will buy him a mantle,” but does not buy it (B. M. 78^b).

Said of a man who promises much but does not keep his word. So also it is stated: “Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay” (Eccles. v. 5); “The righteous promise little and perform much, whereas the wicked promise much and do not perform even a little” (B. M. 87^a); “Promise little and do much” (Aboth. i. 15).

345. Thy goodness is taken and thrown over the thorny hedge (Shab. 63^b and often; D. 640).

Acts of kindness or good advice which come too late are valueless.

346. Fever is more severe in winter than in summer (Jom. 29^a).

In Shab. 66^b we are given a long and elaborate account of remedies for the cure of fever.

*347. As the day raises itself so the sick man raises himself (B. B. 16^b; D. 39).

An invalid feels easier during the day than during the night. The proverb is quoted in connection with the legend that the patriarch Abraham wore a precious stone suspended from his neck, and everybody suffering from an illness obtained relief by looking at it. When Abraham died, God placed this virtue in the course of the sun.

348. A dream which has not been interpreted is like a letter unread (Ber. 55^b).

Other sayings on this subject are: “Dreams are a sixtieth part of prophecy” (*ibid.* 57^b); “Three kinds of dreams are fulfilled: one experienced in the morning; one dreamt by a friend concerning him; and a dream interpreted in

the midst of a dream” (*ibid.* 55^b). There is a good deal in the Talmud about the omens which are to be drawn from dreams: *e.g.* ”Whoever sees a serpent in a dream is assured of his sustenance; if bitten by it, it is doubled; if killed, it is lost” (*ibid.* 57^a), “All sorts of liquids seen in a dream are a good omen, with the exception of wine” (*ibid.*). An attempt seems to have been made to break the people from their belief in dreams, as may be seen from such statements as: “A man should not despair of mercy, even when the master of dreams tells him that he will die on the morrow; for it is said (Eccles. v. 7), “In the multitude of dreams and vanities and many words [fear not], but fear thou God!” (Ber. 10^b), “Neither a good dream nor a bad dream is wholly fulfilled” (*ibid.* 55^a), “The interpretation of the dream, not the dream itself, is fulfilled” (*ibid.* 55^b), “Dreams cause neither prosperity nor ill-fortune” (Git. 52^a).

*349. Sixty iron weapons they hung on the sting of the gnat (Hul. 58^b; D. 647).

Insignificant objects can cause great harm.

*350. Every man carries his worth in his basket (j. Peah. i. 1, about the middle; D. 364).

Introduced with the words “Well do the millers say.” Each man has his own way of displaying his merit.

THE END

Notes

[←1]

Cf. Analogous Proverbs in Ten Languages, by Mrs. E. B. Maur (London, 1885).

[←2]

“Book of Proverbs,” International Critical Commentary, Introduction, p. xi.

[←3]

A heated controversy raged over this question for a long time, but the statement made above has been conclusively proved by Professor Dalman in his *Die Worte Jesu* (1898), and *Aramäische Grammatik* (1905). For a recent summary of the Language-problem the reader is referred to Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Eng. Trans. 1910), pp. 269-75.

[←4]

Proverbs of only linguistic interest have been omitted. They may be found in Dukes, pp. 14 *f.*, and Lewin, pp. 82 *f.*

[←5]

Lazarus, *Ethics of Judaism* (Eng. Trans.), vol. i. p. 65.

[←6]

Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. x. p. 227.

[←7]

Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, I. 12.

[←8]

Trade guilds seem to have had their own proverbs, since we read of millers' proverbs (see no. 350), and fullers' (Suc. 28^a; BB. 134^a).