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The Book of Delight and Other Papers

Israel Abrahams

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PREFACE

The chapters of this volume were almost all spoken addresses. The author has not now changed their character as such, for it seemed to him that to convert them into formal essays would be to rob them of any little attraction they may possess.

One of the addresses—that on "Medieval Wayfaring"—was originally spoken in Hebrew, in Jerusalem. It was published, in part, in English in the London *Jewish Chronicle*, and the author is indebted to the conductors of that periodical for permission to include this, and other material, in the present collection.

Some others of the chapters have been printed before, but a considerable proportion of the volume is quite new, and even those addresses that are reprinted are now given in a fuller and much revised text.

As several of the papers were intended for popular audiences, the author is persuaded that it would ill accord with his original design to overload the book with notes and references. These have been supplied only where absolutely necessary, and a few additional notes are appended at the end of the volume.

The author realizes that the book can have little permanent value. But as these addresses seemed to give pleasure to those who heard them, he thought it possible that they might provide passing entertainment also to those who are good enough to read them.

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS

CAMBRIDGE, ENG., September, 1911

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[Transcriber's Note: Index not included in this e-text edition.]

"THE BOOK OF DELIGHT"

Joseph Zabara has only in recent times received the consideration justly due to him. Yet his "Book of Delight," finished about the year 1200, is more than a poetical romance. It is a golden link between folk-literature and imaginative poetry. The style is original, and the framework of the story is an altogether fresh adaptation of a famous legend. The anecdotes and epigrams introduced incidentally also partake of this twofold quality. The author has made them his own, yet they are mostly adapted rather than invented. Hence, the poem is as valuable to the folklorist as to the literary critic. For, though Zabara's compilation is similar to such well-known models as the "Book of Sindbad," the *Kalilah ve-Dimmah*, and others of the same class, yet its appearance in Europe is half a century earlier than the translations by which these other products of the East became part of the popular literature of the Western world. At the least, then, the "Book of Delight" is an important addition to the scanty store of the folk-lore records of the early part of the thirteenth century. The folk-lore interest of the book is, indeed, greater than was known formerly, for it is now recognized as a variant of the Solomon-Marcolf legend. On this more will be said below,

As a poet and as a writer of Hebrew, Joseph Zabara's place is equally significant. He was one of the first to write extended narratives in Hebrew rhymed prose with interspersed snatches of verse, the form invented by Arabian poets, and much esteemed as the medium for story-telling and for writing social satire. The best and best-known specimens of this form of poetry in Hebrew are Charizi's *Tachkemoni*, and his translation of Hariri. Zabara has less art than Charizi, and far less technical skill, yet in him all the qualities are in the bud that Charizi's poems present in the fullblown flower. The reader of Zabara feels that other poets will develop his style and surpass him; the reader of Charizi knows of a surety that in him the style has reached its climax.

Of Joseph Zabara little is known beyond what may be gleaned from a discriminating study of the "Book of Delight." That this romance is largely autobiographical in fact, as it is in form, there can be no reasonable doubt. The poet writes with so much indignant warmth of the dwellers in certain cities, of their manner of life, their morals, and their culture, that one can only infer that he is relating his personal experiences. Zabara, like the hero of his romance, travelled much during the latter portion of the twelfth century, as is known from the researches of Geiger. He was born in Barcelona, and returned there to die. In the interval, we find him an apt pupil of Joseph Kimchi, in Narbonne. Joseph Kimchi, the founder of the famous Kimchi family, carried the culture of Spain to Provence; and Joseph Zabara may have acquired from Kimchi his mastery over Hebrew, which he writes with purity and simplicity. The difficulties presented in some passages of the "Book of Delight" are entirely due to the corrupt state of the text. Joseph Kimchi, who flourished in Provence from 1150 to 1170, quotes Joseph Zabara twice, with approval, in explaining verses in Proverbs. It would thus seem that Zabara, even in his student days, was devoted to the proverb-lore on which he draws so lavishly in his maturer work.

Dr. Steinschneider, to whom belongs the credit of rediscovering Zabara in modern times, infers that the poet was a physician. There is more than probability in the case; there is certainty. The romance is built by a doctor; there is more talk of medicine in it than of any other topic of discussion. Moreover, the author, who denies that he is much of a Talmudist, accepts the compliment paid to him by his visitor, Enan, that he is "skilled and well-informed in the science of medicine." There is, too, a professional tone about many of the quips and gibes in which Zabara indulges concerning doctors. Here, for instance, is an early form of a witticism that has been attributed to many recent humorists. "A philosopher," says Zabara, "was sick unto death, and his doctor gave him up; yet the patient recovered. The convalescent was walking in the street when the doctor met him. 'You come,' said he, 'from the other world.' 'Yes,' rejoined the patient, 'I come from there, and I saw there the awful retribution that falls on doctors; for they kill their patients. Yet, do not feel alarmed. You will not suffer. I told them on my oath that you are no doctor.'"

Again, in one of the poetical interludes (found only in the Constantinople edition) occurs this very professional sneer, "A doctor and the Angel of Death both kill, but the former charges a fee." Who but a doctor would enter into a scathing denunciation of the current system of diagnosis, as Zabara does in a sarcastic passage, which Erter may have imitated unconsciously? And if further proof be needed that Zabara was a man of science, the evidence is forthcoming; for Zabara appeals several times to experiment in proof of his assertions. And to make assurance doubly sure, the author informs his readers in so many words of his extensive medical practice in his native place.

If Zabara be the author of the other, shorter poems that accompany the "Book of Delight" in the Constantinople edition, though they are not incorporated into the main work, we have a further indication that Zabara was a medical man. There is a satirical introduction against the doctors that slay a man before his time. The author, with mock timidity, explains that he withholds his name, lest the medical profession turn its attention to him with fatal results. "Never send for a doctor," says the satirist, "for one cannot expect a miracle to happen." It is important, for our understanding of another feature in Zabara's work, to observe that his invective, directed against the practitioners rather than the science of medicine, is not more curious as coming from a medical man, than are the attacks on women perpetrated by some Jewish poets (Zabara among them), who themselves amply experienced, in their own and their community's life, the tender and beautiful relations that subsist between Jewish mother and son, Jewish wife and husband.

The life of Joseph ben Meïr Zabara was not happy. He left Barcelona in search of learning and comfort. He found the former, but the latter eluded him. It is hard to say from the "Book of Delight" whether he was a woman-hater, or not. On the one hand, he says many pretty things about women. The moral of the first section of the romance is: Put your trust in women; and the moral of the second section of the poem is: A good woman is the best part of man. But, though this is so, Zabara does undoubtedly quote a large number of stories full of point and sting, stories that tell of women's wickedness and infidelity, of their weakness of intellect and fickleness of will. His philogynist tags hardly compensate for his misog-

ynist satires. He runs with the hare, but hunts energetically with the hounds.

It is this characteristic of Zabara's method that makes it open to doubt, whether the additional stories referred to as printed with the Constantinople edition did really emanate from our author's pen. These additions are sharply misogynist; the poet does not even attempt to blunt their point. They include "The Widow's Vow" (the widow, protesting undying constancy to her first love, eagerly weds another) and "Woman's Contentions." In the latter, a wicked woman is denounced with the wildest invective. She has demoniac traits; her touch is fatal. A condemned criminal is offered his life if he will wed a wicked woman. "O King," he cried, "slay me; for rather would I die once, than suffer many deaths every day." Again, once a wicked woman pursued a heroic man. He met some devils. "What are you running from?" asked they. "From a wicked woman," he answered. The devils turned and ran away with him.

One rather longer story may be summarized thus: Satan, disguised in human shape, met a fugitive husband, who had left his wicked wife. Satan told him that he was in similar case, and proposed a compact. Satan would enter into the bodies of men, and the other, pretending to be a skilful physician, would exorcise Satan. They would share the profits. Satan begins on the king, and the queen engages the confederate to cure the king within three days, for a large fee, but in case of failure the doctor is to die. Satan refuses to come out: his real plan is to get the doctor killed in this way. The doctor obtains a respite, and collects a large body of musicians, who make a tremendous din. Satan trembles. "What is that noise?" he asks. "Your wife is coming," says the doctor. Out sprang Satan and fled to the end of the earth.

These tales and quips, it is true, are directed against "wicked" women, but if Zabara really wrote them, it would be difficult to acquit him of woman-hatred, unless the stories have been misplaced, and should appear, as part of the "Book of Delight," within the Leopard section, which rounds off a series of unfriendly tales with a moral friendly to woman. In general, Oriental satire directed against women must not be taken too seriously. As Güdemann has shown, the very Jews that wrote most bitterly of women were loud

in praise of their own wives—the women whom alone they knew intimately. Woman was the standing butt for men to hurl their darts at, and one cannot help feeling that a good deal of the fun got its point from the knowledge that the charges were exaggerated or untrue. You find the Jewish satirists exhausting all their stores of drollery on the subject of rollicking drunkenness. They roar till their sides creak over the humor of the wine-bibber. They laugh at him and with him. They turn again and again to the subject, which shares the empire with women in the Jewish poets. Yet we know well enough that the writers of these Hebrew Anacreontic lyrics were sober men, who rarely indulged in overmuch strong drink. In short, the medieval Jewish satirists were gifted with much of what a little time ago was foolishly styled "the new humor." Joseph Zabara was a "new" humorist. He has the quaint subtlety of the author of the "Ingoldsby Legends," and revelled in the exaggeration of trifles that is the stock-in-trade of the modern funny man. Woman plays the part with the former that the mother-in-law played a generation ago with the latter. In Zabara, again, there is a good deal of mere rudeness, which the author seems to mistake for cutting repartee. This, I take it, is another characteristic of the so-called new humor.

The probable explanation of the marked divergence between Zabara's stories and the moral he draws from them lies, however, a little deeper. The stories themselves are probably Indian in origin; hence they are marked by the tone hostile to woman so characteristic of Indian folk-lore. On the other hand, if Zabara himself was a friendly critic of woman, his own moralizings in her favor are explained. This theory is not entirely upset by the presence even of the additional stories, for these, too, are translations, and Zabara cannot be held responsible for their contents. The selection of good anecdotes was restricted in his day within very narrow limits.

Yet Zabara's reading must have been extensive. He knew something of astronomy, philosophy, the science of physiognomy, music, mathematics, and physics, and a good deal of medicine. He was familiar with Arabian collections of proverbs and tales, for he informs his readers several times that he is drawing on Arabic sources. He knew the "Choice of Pearls," the Midrashic "Stories of King Solomon," the "Maxims of the Philosophers," the "Proverbs of the Wise"; but not "Sendabar" in its Hebrew form. His acquaintance

with the language of the Bible was thorough; but he makes one or two blunders in quoting the substance of Scriptural passages. Though he disclaimed the title of a Talmudic scholar, he was not ignorant of the Rabbinic literature. Everyone quotes it: the fox, the woman, Enan, and the author. He was sufficiently at home in this literature to pun therein. He also knew the story of Tobit, but, as he introduces it as "a most marvellous tale," it is clear that this book of the Apocrypha was not widely current in his day. The story, as Zabara tells it, differs considerably from the Apocryphal version of it. The incidents are misplaced, the story of the betrothal is disconnected from that of the recovery of the money by Tobit, and the detail of the gallows occurs in no other known text of the story. In one point, Zabara's version strikingly agrees with the Hebrew and Chaldee texts of Tobit as against the Greek; Tobit's son is not accompanied by a dog on his journey to recover his father's long-lost treasure.

One of the tales told by Zabara seems to imply a phenomenon of the existence of which there is no other evidence. There seems to have been in Spain a small class of Jews that were secret converts to Christianity. They passed openly for Jews, but were in truth Christians. The motive for the concealment is unexplained, and the whole passage may be merely satirical.

It remains for me to describe the texts now extant of the "Book of Delight." In 1865 the "Book of Delight" appeared, from a fifteenth century manuscript in Paris, in the second volume of a Hebrew periodical called the *Lebanon*. In the following year the late Senior Sachs wrote an introduction to it and to two other publications, which were afterwards issued together under the title *Yen Lebanon* (Paris, 1866). The editor was aware of the existence of another text, but, strange to tell, he did not perceive the need of examining it. Had he done this, his edition would have been greatly improved. For the Bodleian Library possesses a copy of another edition of the "Book of Delight," undated, and without place of issue, but printed in Constantinople, in 1577. One or two other copies of this edition are extant elsewhere. The editor was Isaac Akrish, as we gather from a marginal note to the version of Tobit given by Joseph Zabara. This Isaac Akrish was a travelling bookseller, who printed interesting little books, and hawked them about. Dr. Steinschneider

points out that the date of Isaac Akrish's edition can be approximately fixed by the type. The type is that of the Jaabez Press, established in Constantinople and Salonica in 1560. This Constantinople edition is not only longer than the Paris edition, it is, on the whole, more accurate. The verbal variations between the two editions are extremely numerous, but the greater accuracy of the Constantinople edition shows itself in many ways. The rhymes are much better preserved, though the Paris edition is occasionally superior in this respect. But many passages that are quite unintelligible in the Paris edition are clear enough in the Constantinople edition.

The gigantic visitor of Joseph, the narrator, the latter undoubtedly the author himself, is a strange being. Like the guide of Gil Bias on his adventures, he is called a demon, and he glares and emits smoke and fire. But he proves amenable to argument, and quotes the story of the washerwoman, to show how it was that he became a reformed character. This devil quotes the Rabbis, and is easily convinced that it is unwise for him to wed an ignorant bride. It would seem as though Zabara were, on the one hand, hurling a covert attack against some one who had advised him to leave Barcelona to his own hurt, while, on the other hand, he is satirizing the current beliefs of Jews and Christians in evil spirits. More than one passage is decidedly anti-Christian, and it would not be surprising to find that the framework of the romance had been adopted with polemic intention.

The character of the framework becomes more interesting when it is realized that Zabara derived it from some version of the legends of which King Solomon is the hero. The king had various adventures with a being more or less demoniac in character, who bears several names: Asmodeus, Saturn, Marcolf, or Morolf. That the model for Zabara's visitor was Solomon's interlocutor, is not open to doubt. The Solomon legend occurs in many forms, but in all Marcolf (or whatever other name he bears) is a keen contester with the king in a battle of wits. No doubt, at first Marcolf filled a serious, respectable rôle; in course of time, his character degenerated into that of a clown or buffoon. It is difficult to summarize the legend, it varies so considerably in the versions. Marcolf in the best-known forms, which are certainly older than Zabara, is "right rude and great of body, of visage greatly misshapen and foul." Sometimes he

is a dwarf, sometimes a giant; he is never normal. He appears with his counterpart, a sluttish wife, before Solomon, who, recognizing him as famous for his wit and wisdom, challenges him to a trial of wisdom, promising great rewards as the prize of victory. The two exchange a series of questions and answers, which may be compared in spirit, though not in actual content, with the questions and answers to be found in Zabara. Marcolf succeeds in thoroughly tiring out the king, and though the courtiers are for driving Marcolf off with scant courtesy, the king interposes, fulfils his promise, and dismisses his adversary with gifts. Marcolf leaves the court, according to one version, with the noble remark, *Ubi non est lex, ibi non est rex*.

This does not exhaust the story, however. In another part of the legend, to which, again, Zabara offers parallels, Solomon, being out hunting, comes suddenly on Marcolf's hut, and, calling upon him, receives a number of riddling answers, which completely foil him, and for the solution of which he is compelled to have recourse to the proposer. He departs, however, in good humor, desiring Marcolf to come to court the next day and bring a pail of fresh milk and curds from the cow. Marcolf fails, and the king condemns him to sit up all night in his company, threatening him with death in the morning, should he fall asleep. This, of course, Marcolf does immediately, and he snores aloud. Solomon asks, "Sleepest thou?"—And Marcolf replies, "No, I think."—"What thinkest thou?"—"That there are as many vertebrae in the hare's tail as in his backbone."—The king, assured that he has now entrapped his adversary, replies: "If thou provest not this, thou diest in the morning!" Over and over again Marcolf snores, and is awakened by Solomon, but he is always *thinking*. He gives various answers during the night: There are as many white feathers as black in the magpie.—There is nothing whiter than daylight, daylight is whiter than milk.—Nothing can be safely entrusted to a woman.—Nature is stronger than education.

Next day Marcolf proves all his statements. Thus, he places a pan of milk in a dark closet, and suddenly calls the king. Solomon steps into the milk, splashes himself, and nearly falls. "Son of perdition! what does this mean?" roars the monarch. "May it please Your Majesty," says Marcolf, "merely to show you that milk is not whiter than daylight." That nature is stronger than education, Marcolf

proves by throwing three mice, one after the other, before a cat trained to hold a lighted candle in its paws during the king's supper; the cat drops the taper, and chases the mice. Marcolf further enters into a bitter abuse of womankind, and ends by inducing Solomon himself to join in the diatribe. When the king perceives the trick, he turns Marcolf out of court, and eventually orders him to be hanged. One favor is granted to him: he may select his own tree. Marcolf and his guards traverse the valley of Jehoshaphat, pass to Jericho over Jordan, through Arabia and the Red Sea, but "never more could Marcolf find a tree that he would choose to hang on." By this device, Marcolf escapes from Solomon's hands, returns home, and passes the rest of his days in peace.

The legend, no doubt Oriental in origin, enjoyed popularity in the Middle Ages largely because it became the frame into which could be placed collections of proverbial lore. Hence, as happened also with the legend of the Queen of Sheba and her riddles, the versions vary considerably as to the actual content of the questions and answers bandied between Solomon and Marcolf. In the German and English versions, the proverbs and wisdom are largely Teutonic; in Zabara they are Oriental, and, in particular, Arabic. Again, Marcolf in the French version of Mauclerc is much more completely the reviler of woman. Mauclerc wrote almost contemporaneously with Zabara (about 1216-1220, according to Kemble). But, on the other hand, Mauclerc has no story, and his Marcolf is a punning clown rather than a cunning sage. Marcolf, who is Solomon's brother in a German version, has no trust in a woman even when dead. So, in another version, Marcolf is at once supernaturally cunning, and extremely skeptical as to the morality and constancy of woman. But it is unnecessary to enter into the problem more closely. Suffice it to have established that in Zabara's "Book of Delight" we have a hitherto unsuspected adaptation of the Solomon-Marcolf legend. Zabara handles the legend with rare originality, and even ventures to cast himself for the title rôle in place of the wisest of kings.

In the summary of the book which follows, the rhymed prose of the original Hebrew is reproduced only in one case. This form of poetry is unsuited to the English language. What may have a strikingly pleasing effect in Oriental speech, becomes, in English, indistinguishable from doggerel. I have not translated at full length, but I

have endeavored to render Zabara accurately, without introducing thoughts foreign to him.

I have not thought it necessary to give elaborate parallels to Zabara's stories, nor to compare minutely the various details of the Marcolf legend with Zabara's poem. On the whole, it may be said that the parallel is general rather than specific. I am greatly mistaken, however, if the collection of stories that follows does not prove of considerable interest to those engaged in the tracking of fables to their native lairs. Here, in Zabara, we have an earlier instance than was previously known in Europe, of an intertwined series of fables and witticisms, partly Indian, partly Greek, partly Semitic, in origin, welded together by the Hebrew poet by means of a framework. The use of the framework by a writer in Europe in the year 1200 is itself noteworthy. And when it is remembered what the framework is, it becomes obvious that the "Book of Delight" occupies a unique position in medieval literature.

THE GIANT GUEST

Once on a night, I, Joseph, lay upon my bed; sleep was sweet upon me, my one return for all my toil. Things there are which weary the soul and rest the body, others that weary the body and rest the soul, but sleep brings calm to the body and the soul at once.... While I slept, I dreamt; and a gigantic but manlike figure appeared before me, rousing me from my slumber. "Arise, thou sleeper, rouse thyself and see the wine while it is red; come, sit thee down and eat of what I provide." It was dawn when I hastily rose, and I saw before me wine, bread, and viands; and in the man's hand was a lighted lamp, which cast a glare into every corner. I said, "What are these, my master?" "My wine, my bread, my viands; come, eat and drink with me, for I love thee as one of my mother's sons." And I thanked him, but protested: "I cannot eat or drink till I have prayed to the Orderer of all my ways; for Moses, the choice of the prophets, and the head of those called, hath ordained, 'Eat not with the blood'; therefore no son of Israel will eat until he prays for his soul, for the blood is the soul...."

Then said he, "Pray, if such be thy wish"; and I bathed my hands and face, and prayed. Then I ate of all that was before me, for my soul loved him.... Wine I would not drink, though he pressed me sore. "Wine," I said, "blindeth the eyes, robbeth the old of wisdom and the body of strength, it revealeth the secrets of friends, and raiseth dissension between brothers." The man's anger was roused. "Why blasphemest thou against wine, and bearest false witness against it? Wine bringeth joy; sorrow and sighing fly before it. It strengtheneth the body, maketh the heart generous, prolongeth pleasure, and deferreth age; faces it maketh shine, and the senses it maketh bright."

"Agreed, but let thy servant take the water first, as the ancient physicians advise; later I will take the wine, a little, without water."

When I had eaten and drunk with him, I asked for his name and his purpose. "I come," said he, "from a distant land, from pleasant and fruitful hills, my wisdom is as thine, my laws as thine, my name Enan Hanatash, the son of Arnan ha-Desh." I was amazed at the name, unlike any I had ever heard. "Come with me from this land, and I will tell thee all my secret lore; leave this spot, for they know not here thy worth and thy wisdom. I will take thee to another place, pleasant as a garden, peopled by loving men, wise above all others." But I answered: "My lord, I cannot go. Here are many wise and friendly; while I live, they bear me on the wing of their love; when I die, they will make my death sweet.... I fear thee for thy long limbs, and in thy face I see, clear-cut, the marks of unworthiness; I fear thee, and I will not be thy companion, lest there befall me what befell the leopard with the fox." And I told him the story.

In this manner, illustrative tales are introduced throughout the poem. Zabara displays rare ingenuity in fitting the illustrations into his framework. He proceeds:

THE FOX AND THE LEOPARD

A leopard once lived in content and plenty; ever he found easy sustenance for his wife and children. Hard by there dwelt his neighbor and friend, the fox. The fox felt in his heart that his life was safe only so long as the leopard could catch other prey, and he planned out a method for ridding himself of this dangerous friendship. Before the evil cometh, say the wise, counsel is good. "Let me move him hence," thought the fox; "I will lead him to the paths of death; for the sages say, 'If one come to slay thee, be beforehand with him, and slay him instead.'" Next day the fox went to the leopard, and told him of a spot he had seen, a spot of gardens and lilies, where fawns and does disported themselves, and everything was fair. The leopard went with him to behold this paradise, and rejoiced with exceeding joy. "Ah," thought the fox, "many a smile ends in a tear." But the leopard was charmed, and wished to move to this delightful abode; "but, first," said he, "I will go to consult my wife, my lifelong comrade, the bride of my youth." The fox was sadly disconcerted. Full well he knew the wisdom and the craft of the leopard's wife. "Nay," said he, "trust not thy wife. A woman's counsel is evil and foolish, her heart hard like marble; she is a plague in a house. Yes, ask her advice, and do the opposite.".... The leopard told his wife that he was resolved to go. "Beware of the fox," she exclaimed; "two small animals there are, the craftiest they, by far—the serpent and the fox. Hast thou not heard how the fox bound the lion and slew him with cunning?" "How did the fox dare," asked the leopard, "to come near enough to the lion to do it?"

The wife than takes up the parable, and cites the incident of

THE FOX AND THE LION

Then said the leopard's wife: The lion loved the fox, but the fox had no faith in him, and plotted his death. One day the fox went to the lion whining that a pain had seized him in the head. "I have heard," said the fox, "that physicians prescribe for a headache, that the patient shall be tied up hand and