

# Scholarship and Kindness

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

A favorite weapon in the world of scholarship is the review. Some of the sharpest words ever spoken by one scholar about another are offered not over claret in the sitting room but in the pages of learned journals where each can prove his or her essential superiority to the one who wrote the offending book.

How enchanting to read, in the late historian Alexander Marx' essay about his great teacher, Solomon Schechter (a man who was known both for the depth of his scholarship and the sparkle of his wit) that "When a book or an utterance annoyed him, he was wont to sit down and write a review or an answer in caustic style and full of irony; but later he would revise it again and again until all polemical bitterness would be removed." Marx reports seeing two reviews that Schechter suppressed after meeting the authors of the books in question.

There were few scholars in the world in Schechter's time that came close to his broad range of knowledge and even fewer that had his fluent pen. That he drained his writings of bitterness before printing them is a wonderful lesson. Sometimes even in scholarship it is better to be measured and careful than cleverly cruel.