

## On Matthew v. 21-22.

PROF. JOHN P. PETERS.

IN the ordinary interpretation of this passage the ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω is supposed to refer to three clauses, thus: "I say to you (1) that every one who is angry with his brother is in danger of the judgment; (2) but whosoever saith to his brother, Raca, is in danger of the Sanhedrim; (3) but whosoever saith, Thou fool, is in danger of the gehenna of fire"; and that there is an accumulating, climactic development in the thought. I have translated the passage literally. There is no such climactic development, so far, certainly, as number 2 is concerned, but very much the reverse. Numbers 1 and 3 are parallel, but number 2 is on the same plane as the saying attributed to "them of old time." The proper interpretation of the passage is as follows: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, 'Thou shalt not murder, and whosoever murdereth is liable to the judgment.' But I say to you, that every one who is angry with his brother is liable to the judgment. And, It was said by them of old, 'Whosoever saith to his brother, Raca, is liable to the Sanhedrim.' But (I say) whosoever saith, Thou fool, is liable to the gehenna of fire."

It is a commentary on the sixth commandment. Our Lord says: Carrying out this commandment, they of old ordained that a man guilty of murder should on conviction be judged to death. I say that the man who harbors anger in his heart is liable to the same condemnation in the spiritual judgment. You ordain, also, carrying out the spirit of this law, that a man who calls another Raca, may be punished for libel by the Sanhedrim. I say to you that it is not the word Raca only, but any word of abuse, contumely, or contempt of which cognizance is taken in the tribunal of God, and which, being a breach of the spirit of the commandment, Thou shalt do no murder, brings the guilty man into danger of hell fire.

The Greek particles do not forbid the translation I have proposed, although not of themselves suggesting it. But on examination it will be observed that they are merely a translation of Aramæan particles; and in the Aramæan in which our Lord originally spoke the thought, with its poverty of particles, the simple conjunction would

inevitably have been used here, leaving the further connection to be determined by the sense and the parallelism. The latter is an important factor in the interpretation of all such passages, and to a Semitic, and especially a Hebrew, auditor, the parallelism would have determined the connection of parts in this passage without the least question. The instruction is couched in the form of antithetic parallelism, which the Jews used so freely in teaching principles.

I am indebted to the discussion upon this note, and especially to the Rev. Dr. Jastrow and the Rev. Mr. Bacon for the following additional points: (*a*) In Rabbinic teaching the law of libel was included under the principle, Thou shalt do no murder, as here suggested. (*b*) Our Lord would have been extremely unlikely to have enforced a command by a threat of the Sanhedrim, and the reference to the Sanhedrim would of itself show that he was quoting the Jewish law in force in His time.