

# ELIJAH, THE PROPHET OF FIRE

By

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## APPENDIX

A REMARKABLE expectation has ever been prevalent among the Jews as to Elijah's personal return as the Restorer of their nation.

No attentive reader of the Gospels can fail to be struck with the singular way in which the conviction seems to have riveted itself in the Hebrew mind at the time of our Lord's coming. Not only had John the Baptist's miracles, his very dress, appearance, and ascetic habits, led to the conclusion that the Prophet of Gilead had become again incarnate - preaching his old doctrine of Repentance, and laying the axe at the root of the tree - "**Art thou Elias!**" but when a mightier than John had set all men musing in their hearts, the common people spoke out their strongly-felt presumptions, that the long dream of centuries was at last fulfilled, and Elias was risen again, baptizing "**with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**"

As it is well remarked by a discerning writer, "His appearance in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration does not seem to have startled the disciples.' They were 'sore afraid,' but not apparently surprised. On the contrary, Peter immediately proposes to erect a tent for the prophet whose arrival they had been so long expecting. Even the cry of our Lord from the cross, [**Eli, Eli,**] containing as it did [345] but a slight resemblance to the name of Elijah, immediately suggested him to the bystanders, - '**He calleth for Elijah.**' '**Let be, let us see if Elijah will come to save him.**'" <sup>1</sup>

In the apocryphal book of JESUS the son of Sirach, we have the following address - "Thou, Elias, wast taken up in a whirlwind of fire, and a chariot of fiery horses, who wast ordained for reproof in its season, to pacify the wrath of the Lord's judgment before it broke forth into fury, and to turn the hearts of the fathers unto the sons, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Blessed are they that see thee, and shall be honoured on account of thy friendship; there shall we possess the true life."

It is added in a note by the same Bible expositor quoted above, with references to his authorities, "He is recorded [in the Talmud] as having often appeared to the wise and good rabbis-at prayer in the wilderness, or on their journeys-generally in the form of an Arabian merchant, (Eisenmanger, i. 11; ii 402-7.)

At the circumcision of a child a seat was always placed for him, that, as the zealous champion and messenger of the covenant of circumcision, (I Kings 19:14; Malachi 3:1,) he might watch over the due performance of the rite.

During certain prayers the door of the house was set open, that Elijah might enter and announce

the Messiah, (Eisenmanger, i. 685.) His coming will be three days before that of the Messiah, and on each of the three he will proclaim, in a voice which shall be heard all over the earth, peace, happiness, salvation, respectively, (Ibid. 696.) So firm was the conviction of his speedy arrival, that when goods were found and no owner appeared to claim them, the common saying was 'Put them up till Elijah comes,' (Lightfoot, *Exercit.*, Matthew 17:10; John 1:21.) [346]

The same customs and expressions are even still in use among the stricter Jews of this and other countries, (see *Revue des Deux Mondes*, xxiv. 131, &c.)

In a recent interesting and instructive volume, the writer, who was personally present in a house in Jerusalem at the annual celebration of the Passover, mentions, in a graphic description of the scene, "There were plates of lettuce and other herbs, and the bones of the roasted lamb, in dishes on the table; besides, the unleavened bread, and four cups of wine. Three of these, at certain parts of the ceremony, were passed round and partaken of by each individual, including the woman and baby; one cup of wine remained untouched, which was said to be for the prophet Elijah, - and we were told that, in most families, towards the end of the supper, the door of the room is opened, and all stand up, while the prophet is believed to enter and partake of the wine: among rich Jews this cup is frequently of gold, with jewels." <sup>2</sup>

Nor has the veneration for the person and name of the Prophet been confined to the Hebrew nation.

The Greek and Latin churches have delighted to honour him. The festival, or anniversary, of his ascension is still scrupulously observed by both, and a special service employed on the occasion. Monasteries and chapels, identified with his name, are found scattered through Oriental countries, from the solitary shrine amid the wild cliffs of Sinai, to the well-known monastery on Carmel, whose bare-footed friars own him as their patron saint, and the originator of their order. Even the Mohammedans hold his name in great repute. In their legends he is [347] represented as having drunk large draughts of the Fountain of Life, and so become immortal.

"He is called Kheder, which signifies verdant, because from that time he enjoyed a flourishing and immortal life. According to them he lives in a place of retirement, in a delicious garden, where is the Tree of Life, and where the Fountain of Life runs; by the help whereof his immortality is preserved. Here he awaits the second coming of JESUS CHRIST, at which he is to appear once more in the world" <sup>3</sup>

Dr Stanley mentions, in his reference to Sarepta, - the modern Sarafend, - that "close on the sea-shore stands one of those sepulchral chapels dedicated to 'EI-Khudr,' or 'Mar Elias.' There is no tomb," he adds, "inside; only hangings before a recess. This variation from the usual type of Mussulman sepulchres was, as we were told by the peasants on the spot, because EI-Khudr is not yet dead; he flies round and round the world, and those chapels are built wherever he has appeared. Every Thursday night and Friday morning there is a light so strong within the chapel that no one can go in" <sup>4</sup>

In connection with the name we have given this volume, we may add the following curious legend from a learned writer already quoted:- "The magi of Persia pretended that their master, Zoroaster, was one of the prophet Elijah's disciples. This fiction is founded on Elijah procuring FIRE from Heaven, and his being carried away in a fiery chariot: the disciples of Zoroaster

making the element of FIRE the principal object of their worship."

A book seems to have existed, although no longer extant, called "*The Revelation or Ascension of Elias*," from which, Jerome tells us, is borrowed the passage of Paul to the Corinthians, [348] (I Corinthians 2:9,) "**Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,**" &c., (Hieron. Ep. 101 ad Pammach.).

Origen, in his citation of them, tells us that these words were nowhere found but in "the secret books of Elias," (Hom. in Matthew 27:9.)<sup>5</sup>

The expectation of the coming of Elias is still devoutly and strongly cherished by the Jewish people.

Professor Hackett mentions, with reference to a spot visited in the course of his travels near the plain of Jezreel, that "within sight, on a neighbouring hill, was a pillar of stone which the Jews said was Elijah's seat, because he was accustomed to rest there as he journeyed through this region. He will come again a second time, they remarked to me, and will then change the pillar into gold." - (*Illustrations*, p. 154.)

The same belief in the return of the Prophet is shared by all Christians of the literalist school, and among those many whose views are worthy of all consideration and deference. While it appears presumptuous to build with any degree of certainty on the few fragmentary and enigmatical allusions on this subject, we cannot think that the explicit words of the prophet Malachi, "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.**" - Malachi 4:5, 6 - the last notes of the Old Testament prophetic harp, can, in any advent that has yet taken place, have received their complete and final fulfilment. The words of our blessed Lord, moreover, to His disciples at the close of the Transfiguration, in answer to their question, "**Why say the scribes that Elias must first come!**" would seem to give the impress of a higher authority still for the expectation. JESUS on that [349] occasion replied - "**Elias truly shall first come, and shall restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not; but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.**"

This answer was purposely expressed enigmatically: but most trustworthy commentators, ancient and modern.<sup>6</sup>

They explain it as referring to a twofold Elias, - two distinct precursors of CHRIST; the one being the Baptist, the herald of his first coming; who, however, though he came in the spirit and power of the older prophet, distinctly declared, in answer to the question of the priests and Levites, "**Art thou Elias!**" "**I am not;**" - an answer he never would have ventured to give had he been the prophet referred to by Malachi. (Their question was evidently founded on Malachi's prediction, - and to aver that this unequivocal negative returned to it was a mere evasion on the part of John, would be a supposition surely unworthy of the bold outspoken honesty of his character; ) - the other precursor of the second coming being none other than the Tishbite, who in a grand Gospel sense will fulfil Isaiah's prediction by preparing the way of the Lord, and making straight in the desert a highway for our God.

**"Behold the day cometh,"** [the day of which the Prophet of Fire will be the forerunner,] **"that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."** (Malachi 4:1) [350]

Nothing, indeed, can well be more explicit than the assertion of our Lord, (an assertion made, be it observed, after the Transfiguration, so that the predicted advent of His messenger could not have been fulfilled by His appearance on the mount,) **"Elias, (the real Elias, as if He said,) shall truly come."**

The scribes have been right in their supposition. And though I say unto you **"Elias is come already,"** it is only one in his spirit and power, - one who, despite all his fidelity, earnestness, and boldness, has failed to fulfil Malachi's predicted mission as "the Restorer of all Things." <sup>7</sup>

If the future restoration and conversion of Israel, (as it probably will, from the analogy of their early history,) be accompanied with miraculous agency, that glorious epoch may not impossibly be inaugurated by the personal appearance of the old Prophet, who would thus become the great instrument, under GOD, of **"turning (nationally) the hearts of the children to their fathers;"** - the morning-star of earth's grandest Reformation, - the harbinger of a brighter day than has ever yet risen upon the nations.

Befitting would be the summons and apostrophe to regenerated Israel from the lips of the PROPHET OF FIRE - **"Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!"** [351]

<sup>1</sup> See *Smith's Biblical Dictionary*, art. "Elijah.")

<sup>2</sup> Beaufort's *Syrian Shrines*, vol. ii., p. 266)

<sup>3</sup> See *Calmet*, *in loco*.

<sup>4</sup> *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> *Calmet*.

<sup>6</sup> *Chrysostom, Bernardino, Maldonatus, Calmet, Stier, Alford, &c., &c. Indeed the ancient writers are almost unanimous.*

<sup>7</sup> *"The double allusion is only the assertion that the Elias (in spirit and power) who foreran our Lord's first coming, was a partial fulfilment of the great prophecy, which announces the real Elias (the words of Malachi will hardly bear any other than a personal meaning) who is to forerun His greater and second coming." - Alford, in loc.*

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