that he spake unto them of John the Baptist” (Matt.  
xvii. 11-13). This passage is in no respect hostile to  
our views. Jesus distinguishes.1 In one view Elias  
*had come already:* in another, *he was yet to come*. The  
point which the apostles needed to have supplied in  
order, to quiet their minds, was the coming of Elijah  
which was *already past*. For they were fully persuaded  
of the future and literal coming of Elijah: they knew  
nothing of the past and figurative one. The latter, after  
the Saviour’s words, they understood to be fulfilled in  
John. Rightly enough did they so think. In our day, the  
reverse is the case, and men make the past and figurative  
coming of Elias to swallow up the future and literal  
coming of the prophet. Believe *both*, and all difficulty  
disappears. Jesus does not destroy the opinion of the  
scribes, that Elijah had yet to come. He confirms the  
belief by the pointed words—“Elias *is indeed coming  
first*, and *shall* restore all things.” This could not mean  
John, who was already dead. And these words of  
confirmation he puts *first*.  
 We dare not make the words of our Lord and His  
forerunner oppose one another in point-blank contradiction; as we must do, if we affirm that John the Baptist  
was Elijah the prophet, in such a sense that no other is  
to come in order to fulfil that prophecy. For what said  
John to those who came to inquire of him what position  
he occupied? “Art thou Elias?” said they. “And he  
saith, I AM NOT” (John i. 21). The angel said of him  
only, “He shall go before him *in the spirit and power of  
Elias*” (Luke i. 17). And our Lord calls him “Elijah”  
with a certain mark of discrimination, “*If ye will receive it*,” while He reaffirms the expectation of the  
advent of the Tishbite, by the words He adds, “This is  
Elijah, *who is about to come*.”  
  
1 This is seen more clearly in the Greek, where μέν and δέ offer  
to our notice the opposed clauses.