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SABATHIA Z'VI,

The False Messiah.

An Historical Sketch by Rabbi S. HORWITZ, of Petersburg, Va.

For the last two thousand years Israel in its deep Messianic yearnings has been again and again deceived by shrewd pseudo Messiahs, though a more thorough consideration and more earnest investigation would have easily undeceived them as to the claims of these political-personal Messiahs. Still Israel, in spite of her many disappointments, with somewhat heroic patience continues waiting and hoping, wishing and praying for a realization of the prophets' promise.

From the greater of these imposters that stained the pages of our history, let us pick out one, who in a most cowardly manner, and more shrewdly than all his predecessors played the part of a Messiah.

Sabathia Z'vi was a contemporary of his antipode and coreligionist Baruch Benedict Spinoza. While the former was admired and idolized for a long time by almost entire Judaism, the great thinker of Amsterdam, who was as sincere as the other was false was excommunicated and rejected by his own.

Sabathia Z'vi (Born 9th of Ab, 1626; died 1676,) hailed from Smyrna, Asia Minor, and was of Spanish extraction. His father, Mordchia Z'vi, first a dealer in poultry, but afterwards became agent to an English firm in Smyrna. Owing to his honesty and uprightness, he secured the confidence of his superior, and by degrees became wealthy and prosperous.

Sabathia who was the youngest of three sons was of a well-built stature, fair complexion, beautiful black hair, long beard, excellent voice, and somewhat of a genius, so that it was an easy matter for him to attract the attention of the vast number of his followers.

While young he shunned the games and company of his associates, would always prefer solitude. Up to his fifteenth year he studied under the Rabbi of Smyrna, who afterwards excommunicated him, studied the Talmud with very great diligence. At fifteen years he shut himself up in the house of his father, so as not to be disturbed by the noise of the busy outside world, and engaged himself with indefatigable zeal in the study of the Kabalah, so that at the age of eighteen he began to expound this mystical study in a peculiar, pleasant and music like manner. He was listened to by a great many, admired by all and was known already then as "the great Chacham."

At this time (his 18th year) he made his appearance as a teacher, and owing to the great number of scholars and listeners he was obliged to preach on the street. He did that with great pleasure and heeded not the mockeries of the by-standing Mohamedans. He fasted and bathed himself very often, as a sign of great piety and holiness.

At the age of 20 he married a beautiful Jewish maiden. His wife felt very unhappy in his company, and applied for a divorce. He cheerfully consented to divorce her, as it was not, he would remark, in conformity with his piety to live with such a wife.

At the age of 24, in the year 1648, he first announced his daring proclamation in the hearing of his numerous scholars, that he was the Lord's true anointed, the son of David, the true redeemer, and that he would soon liberate entire Israel from oppression of their enemies, both Christians and Mohamedans.

As a sign of his prophecy and messianic claims he pronounced the name of God, the great and holy Tetragrammaton as it is written down, and which has never been pronounced by any one before him with the exception of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

Being hindered in this Kabalistic action by the rabbis, who utterly opposed and persecuted these pseudo messiahs, he fled from Smyrna to Salonica, where at first he was the recipient of a great many honors and had a great many listeners. But there, too, he was persecuted by the rabbis and fled to Greece, from Greece to Cairo, Egypt. At last, in the year 1663, we find him in Jerusalem. There he felt himself safe, and continued with apparent sincerity his fasting and praying, and gave extensive instructions in the Kabala.

In Jerusalem he found in a certain German Jew, named Nathan Benjamin, a devout and enthusiastic listener to all his wild plans. This Nathan became his private secretary and prophet. He sent messengers all over the world, where Jews lived, to make preparations for the great Messianic day, which according to the Kabalistic figuring was destined to be in the year 1666, on which day the Sultan was to be dethroned and Sabathia Z'vi was to be made king over the whole world. Every proclamation was signed "I am the Eternal your God, Sabathia Z'vi." The news spread like wild-fire all over the globe.

For two years he continued his work that way in Jerusalem securing every day more and more followers. In the meanwhile his representatives assisted him greatly outside of Jerusalem. Prayers were adopted all over the globe for the welfare of the Lord's anointed and for the success of his mission. At last, being again disturbed by the rabbis of Constantinople, he left for his native place, Smyrna. This time he met with even greater success. The day of his arrival was celebrated with great pomp. No one dared to express any disbelief. So deeply were the people imbued with his messianic pretensions, that parents would marry off their children as young as ten years of age, so as to give, according to Kabalistic frenzy, a chance to save the as yet, unborn children. Thus it is stated that in Salonica 700 such pairs were married.

His second wife, Sarah by name, became so under peculiar conditions. When a child of six, at the death of her parents, who were murdered in cold blood, she was taken by the nuns and brought up in cloister. But Judaism was so deeply rooted in this child, that Christianity could find no access to her, and she remained faithful in her belief. Nevertheless her soul being nourished with fanatic dreams in the atmosphere of the cloister, she became more and more eccentric. Thus she grew up, and was very anxious to escape from its walls.

One day some Jews found her in the graveyard. Being surprised to find a young, fair-looking maiden of sixteen years in such a place and at such an hour they questioned her,

and received as an answer, that she was of Jewish extraction and that the night previously the spirit of her father came to her and took her out of the cloister, and left her at the grave-yard.

She was taken to Amsterdam where she found her brother. There she heard the news of the coming Messiah, and in her eccentric manner she kept on saying; "The Messiah will come and take me for a wife." Sabathia Z'vi heard of it, sent for her and married her. This second wife he treated like the first one. She, nevertheless, assisted him greatly in his wild plans, for by marrying her, belief in him was strengthened.

The crucial year was approaching. Sabathia Z'vi determined to carry out his prophetic dream to dethrone the Sultan and put the crown on his own head.

Before he started on his journey to Constantinople, he divided the whole earth among his twenty-six most faithful disciples. His older brother Elias Z'vi, he appointed king over kings his second brother, Joseph, was made king over Judea's Kings etc. Business of every sort was suspended. Whole days were spent in praying, and making preparations for the great event. He gave order to abolish all fast days, in place of which he ordained great festivals; for he stated since we are free we need not fast and mourn.

But the Sultan wearied of this impostor's actions, and gave orders to put a stop to the great excitement he was causing all over his dominions by seizing him and putting him in prison. But his imprisonment only increased the admiration and devotion of his followers. During two months of his incarceration people from far and wide thronged to pay their respects and honor this singular man. At last as a price of his release the Sultan demanded from a miracle, viz: if an arrow will pierce his body and he remain alive then he shall be permitted to go hence and carry out his mission. But he was too much of a coward to make a martyr of himself. He was not made of the stuff of which heroes are made. And in a trembling voice he answered that he was but a common Rabbi. He never claimed to be a Messiah.

The confession humiliating as it was, did not suit the Sultan. He wanted to show his dupes what a charlatan they believed in. So the Sultan said that as Sabathia proved to be a bad Jew, he must try to make him a better Mohamedan.

Sabathia consented to conversion and had the audacity to add that it had long been his ambition to become a Turk. And thus he continued his false mission in the mixed character of of a Turk-Jew.

As Mehmed Effendi, for as such he was known after his conversion, he had likewise his prophets and representatives. The Kabalists remarked Sabathia himself never became a Turk, it was but his body. His spirit was removed to Heaven and will soon reappear to carry out his mission.

Had Europe had in those times a class of people similar to those of the beginning of the Christian era the world would surely have received a new religion, some sort of a dualism, and Sabathia would have been looked upon as some sort of a divine being, as it was the case with the one who is now worshipped by