

PALESTINE UNVEILED

BY

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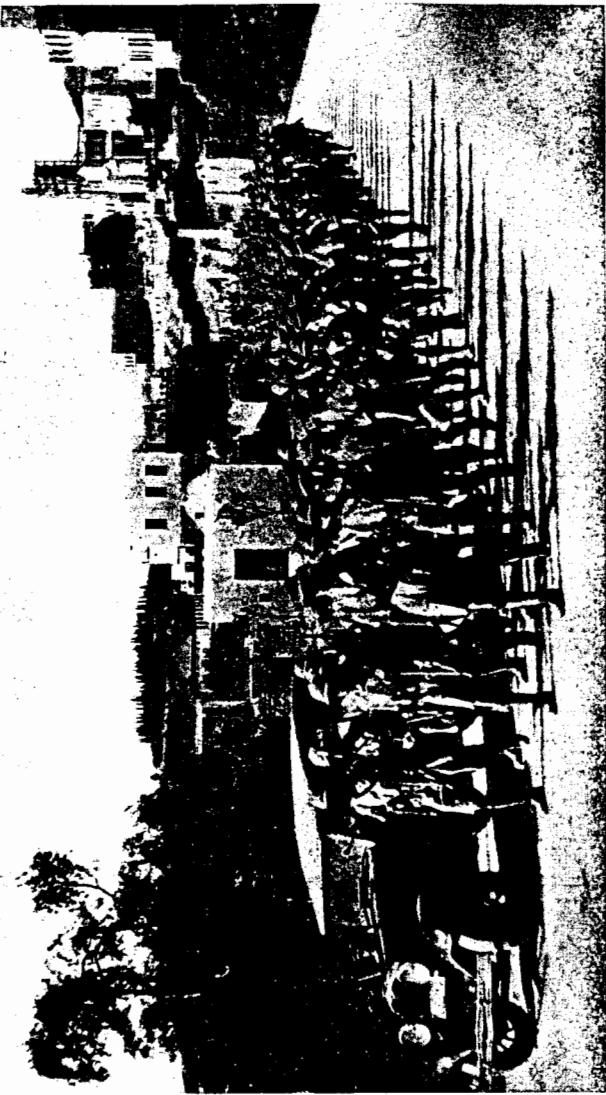


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BRITISH TROOPS MARCHING INTO NAZARETH TO QUELL DISORDERS

Church of the Annunciation in right background

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To
SARAH AARONSOHN
the martyr maid who died for Palestine
and a world unworthy of her sacrifice

through my bedroom window at another hill which Vespasian had assaulted, just as I was accustomed to seeing Eggardun every morning as I was dressing at home.

Thanks to the good Carmelites, and to Edgar, I was shown everything worth seeing around Haifa. One of the monks was going to the Monastery of the Sacrifice, and asked if I would like to go with him. I accepted on the spot, offering to pay the hire of the car, and carrying my point.

The monk spoke excellent English, and turned out to be the best of companions. Edgar told me that I need fear no interference from the Arabs so long as I was in the company of the man in the brown habit, scapular and cowl.

We drove down the long sloping road from the Hospice, and passed through the gates at the bottom, where tolls are usually charged, for this road was built long before the British occupation. It was the gift of a South American Republic, and is the property of the Carmelites. Then, passing through the German Colony we entered the town.

The German Colony is a beautiful place of tree-lined streets, well laid-out and clean, with substantial stone-built houses. These Germans came to Palestine during the last century, and the present inhabitants are the descendants of those who came here to wait, in prayer, hard labour and good works, for the end of the world. They have prospered mightily, not only from their farming activities, and the now valuable properties they own, but because, from the end of the War, this has been the quarter in which the British officials have

lived. Or, at least, did live, so I understand, until the new roads were built to the top of Carmel, and the better class moved up there, where it is cool and pleasant, far different from the stifling summer-heat of the city.

Haifa becomes meaner and uglier as you run along the eastern streets, which finally lead you on to Nazareth; but once you are clear of the last houses, it is as beautiful a road, at least as I saw it in early March, as any in my own West country. The slopes of Carmel go steeply upwards from the right, whilst a broad plain stretches away on the left, almost as far as the eye can see until it is abruptly stopped by the distant Ladder of Tyre.

Carmel's flanks were clad in a waving carpet of tall hollyhocks, as fine and stately as any that grow in our cottage gardens at home, but here flourishing wild and untended. Father Elias saw me looking at them.

"It is a good name your English one for the *Althæa Rosea*," he said. "Hollyhock, you call it, is it not? Have you ever thought why it has that title?"

I hadn't, though it has always been a very favourite flower of mine, and Janet's hollyhocks are as good as any in Dorset.

"Holly for 'holy'," said the monk, "and hock from a Saxon word, I believe, meaning a mallow. It was called Holy because it came from this Holy Land; some Crusader gardener must have taken seeds home from Carmel's flanks to sow in his own garden."

On the flat land between us and the mountain, and sweeping across the plain, lay a glory of scarlet and smoky blue flowers, which I mistook from the car to

be poppies, great masses and sheets of them, smouldering fiery-red, or lying like blankets of pearly-grey wood-smoke flattened to undulations of the green, grass-smothered land.

"No, they are not poppies," said my monk. "They are what you call anemones, though, strictly speaking, they are not, but Hepaticas. They are of the same family, so what does the name matter? They are beautiful, are they not?" He sighed. "They make me sad for their life is so short; by the middle of April all this glowing majesty of greenery and flowers will be naught but parched and barren desolation. These were the lilies of the field, Mr. Harding, to which the Lord referred, and yet, and yet—" he sighed—"how good is God, to give us even this fore-glimpse of His home."

With renewed interest I looked round. A strange feeling trickled down my spine, for here was my first contact with the Personality of the Master. That carpet of wild-flowers, more gorgeous a display, though tended by no human care, than any I have ever seen, and I'm not excepting the tulip meadows of Lincolnshire nor the daffodil-fields of Cornwall, brought Him for the first time close to my shoulder. Certainly, as He Himself said, nothing that Solomon in all his glory ever wore, could compare with that mantle of wood-smoke and flame spread at Carmel's foot, and surging up Carmel's rock-ribbed shoulders.

It was such a natural thing for a wandering Teacher to have pointed out to his hearers. It brought the whole scene so very close; to be perfectly frank, I didn't like the feeling it engendered—and yet I did,

Britain for what she has done to them, but to make some money to feed their families. We're only making worse enemies for ourselves by this sort of thing."

He shrugged his shoulders, and answered coldly:

"We've tried everything to pacify them, but we can't do anything with them now that some European countries have taken a hand in encouraging them. The only thing is to scare them, to frighten the living daylight out of them. Come over here, and look at this."

He led me to a large house in the centre of the village.

"This is what they call the Guest-house," he told me, "what you would call the Parish Hall at home. See this wireless receiver? Have a good look at it. It was given to this village free by the agents of a European country, and they keep up a good supply of free batteries. See anything peculiar about it?"

I did. It was locked so that its tuning-dial could not be altered. It could receive messages only on one wave-length. I looked up.

"That's right," said the officer, "it can only receive one programme. If you spoke Arabic you'd realize what a flood of anti-British propaganda comes over that wave-length every twenty-four hours. Why, these Arabs firmly believe that the Empire is finished, and they are regaled with a hash-up of news that sends them mad. That's the cause of most of our troubles. If only we had a way of smashing up every wireless-receiver in Palestine, we would have some chance of carrying out our job."

There was another set beside the first one, dusty and

neglected looking. I asked what it was. He looked scornful.

"Oh," he said, "that! Why, that is the set provided by the Government, the key is held by the village headman, but the brutes prefer Bari, they simply won't listen in to the stuff our own broadcasting company puts out, if they can help it."

I went back to my quarters in the Stella Maris Hospice on Carmel, very sick at heart. If this is what is meant by British rule in the Holy Land then I am very sorry that I have seen it. Like most ordinary folk at home I believed in the civilizing and benevolent rôle of our Empire as colonizers—fruit, I suppose, of that intensive propaganda to which we are exposed as youngsters at school, and daily, by the newspapers at home.

There was worse the next day. Haifa, native Haifa that is, was in mourning—two more Arabs had been hanged on the great gallows at Acre by order of Courts-martial. Three more had just been sentenced to death. The amazing speed of these cases took your breath away. Arrest, trial, sentence and execution could all happen within a week—not much time for second thoughts or for mercy. Once again my analogy of the Asiatic army-of-occupation, negro settlers and yellow-skinned terror in my own Dorsetshire, came to my mind, and I was glad to hear Edgar tell me that he had arranged with the good Franciscan Friars for my accommodation at some of their Hospices throughout Palestine.

I took a seat in a native-driven taxi and left Haifa to go to Acre across the Bay, where I thought I would

"That was different, they were white men," the Inspector snorted.

"You mean that they are heroes nowadays, noble patriots, held as martyrs by their fellows, because they were white men—and, conversely, that the Arabs, whom you are hanging, are ruffianly murderers because their skins are brown?" I inquired.

"Go to Hell!" he said, and turned upon his heel.

I passed out of Hell, instead, by recrossing the narrow bridge, and, as I emerged on to the rampart walk, felt a dirty, greasy cloud lifting off my spirit.

Acre is a vast dust-heap. It is dying, soon it will be nothing but deserted ruins. Its trade has gone with the growth of the great new port of Haifa across the Bay. Thirty years ago Haifa was an insignificant village, whilst Acre was a city of importance—now all that is changed. The ramparts and curtain-walls are tumbling down, blocks of masonry and collapsed houses are everywhere. The sea-breaches are not repaired, and they grow larger with every storm of winter.

One hallowed sanctuary of utter peace I found; it was beneath that Hell on earth, the prison. The chapel of the Hospitallers lies beneath the prison courtyard, it is approached from a narrow street, close to the memorial erected to the officers of the Royal Marines who died in the operations of 1799 and 1841.

There is not much to see—the ancient House of God has been filled with earth, so that it might take the weight of the new fortifications above. When you enter you stand at the spring of the vaulting of its

ceiling, perhaps thirty feet above the old floor. Dingy stonework, earth-stained and festooned with the most gigantic cobwebs I have ever seen, stretch around you, yet—desecrated, dirty, almost gone, there is an atmosphere about this holy place such as I have felt in few others. I recalled the heroic tale of the nuns of Acre. It is worth the telling:

When the Moslems captured the city from the Crusaders in 1291, some of the nuns, more afraid of the violation of their chastity than of death, mutilated themselves, cutting off noses and ears, gashing their cheeks, in the hope of making themselves so revolting to the conquerors that they would be slain out of hand, and escape the searing horrors of rape. They mustered in this ancient chapel, and here they died beneath sword and axe, wielded by angry foes, madened by being cheated of a soldierly perquisite.

Whilst we are on this period it is just as well to remember that the Crusaders were no better than ourselves. Very few of them were the high-souled idealists we picture—the majority were land-hungry, selfish, proud, superstitious ruffians only too willing to sacrifice their souls for their own advantage. A great many were criminals who had made their own countries too hot to hold them. A few, especially the men of the First Crusade, may have been impelled by the highest motives—most of the members of the later expeditions certainly were not. The descendants of the original army were only too anxious to prevent any fresh arrivals from gaining a stake in the country, so that they were more or less allies of the Saracens when matters came to a head.