

THE HOME OF  
FADELESS SPLENDOUR

OR

THE DIARY OF A PILGRIMAGE  
TO PALESTINE

by

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CHAPTER X

THE EXCELLENCY OF MOUNT CARMEL

(a) *Haïfa*

Shortly after Easter I paid a visit to Haifa. The train from Jerusalem went only three times a week, so needless to say it was crowded. As usual there was a long wait at Ludd, and although we left Jerusalem at 11 a.m., we did not reach Haifa until 6 p.m. At the station there were three carriages for at least sixty people, so most of us walked into the town, employing half-naked little Arab boys to carry our bags. Shortage of accommodation was the rule all over the country in those days, and Haifa was no exception. However, just as it was getting dark, by good luck I managed to secure the last room at the only hotel.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, I was recompensed by a perfectly splendid view of the Bay of Acre when I woke early next morning to brilliant sunshine and sea and sky of azure blue. Haifa could be made into a veritable paradise, and thus vie with many places on the south coasts of France and Italy. At present it is a squalid little town, noisy and dusty, the only attraction being Mount Carmel.

Haifa, Haïffa, or Caïffa, called by Arabs Héfa, or Hepha, for like many other towns in Palestine and Syria it rejoices in many names, is the old Calamon, not mentioned in Holy Scripture, and apart from the Crusades of no special interest in history. Near it stood Sycaminos, or the town of the Sycamores, and these two cities were great rivals in the Middle Ages. St. Jerome, on the other hand, made but one town of Sycaminos and Calamon, and stated that Sycaminos was called Epha (Hepha), because of Mount Carmel, which gave shelter (Hebrew, Khafah) to the town.

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The famous "Pilgrim of Bordeaux," who visited Palestine in the third century, mentions that he came across Sycaminos three Roman miles from Calamon.

During the first Crusade Tancred captured Haïfa after a siege of fifteen days; it was conquered by Saladin in 1187. and later, when the Crusaders took Acre, he ordered it to be laid waste. The Crusaders again rebuilt it, but after their departure from Palestine in 1292 it was left to itself until the eighteenth century, when Sheik Dhaher el Amar, the conqueror of Galilee, rebuilt it towards the east of its former position and surrounded it by a great wall. Napoleon Bonaparte took it in 1799, and here repulsed the attack of the English fleet. Ibrahim Pasha occupied it in 1837, and three years later it was badly damaged by the fleets of England, Austria, and Italy.

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<sup>1</sup> There are now at least two tolerably good hotels (1928).

Haifa is situated at the south of the Gulf of St. John of Acre almost opposite that picturesque city, and is the only port for the whole of Galilee. Fishermen told me that in the bay were found the fine Syrian sponges which are much appreciated in the European market. The town stretches along the bay and is dominated by Mount Carmel; under the north-west slope of the Mount is the so-called German colony. In the centre of the town are to be found the bazaars and somewhat squalid streets, and at the extreme end, facing the harbour and beyond the railway station, the new Jewish colony is situated. There seemed to be very little commerce in this city, and what there was consisted chiefly of the exportation of corn, sesame (sunflower seeds), maize and oil. Quite recently, however, I was told that commerce had been reopened between Haifa and Damascus, and now many steamers ply between it and Bejrout and Jaffa.

Whilst in Haifa I had hoped for the opportunity of meeting His Excellency Sir Abdul Baha Abbas, the present leader of the Bahai movement, but unfortunately the opportunity did not arise. A friend has sent me the following information concerning Abdul Baha, and the remarkable religious cause with which he is associated, which I am glad to be able to share with my readers:

“The Bahai movement arose in Persia in 1844. and now

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numbers many millions of adherents, the bulk of whom live in Persia and the Middle East. Whilst the majority of the Bahais are drawn from the Moslem world, this cause can claim disciples within the ranks of all the world religions.

“Bahatism, working for world-wide spiritual and social reconstruction, irrespective of caste and creed, was an outcome of Babism, which took its name from a Persian youth, Mirza Ali Mohammed, known to his followers as ‘The Bâb’ (‘Gateway’).

“Many European historians, including Professor E. Browne of Cambridge, have described the wonderful charm of this pure-hearted seer and teacher of progressive religion. The ‘Bâb’ was martyred in 1850 after six years of missionary work. Before his death he announced that a great spiritual leader would arise within the lifetime of many of his followers to spread throughout the world tidings of an era of universal peace and brotherhood and this prediction was widely believed to have been fulfilled when Baha’o’llah, a Persian nobleman, came forward and announced himself as ‘He whom God would manifest.’

“Baha’o’llah, after a period of imprisonment in chains, was, with his family and immediate followers, driven into exile by reactionary leaders in Persia, and after great hardship and many wanderings, he and his family were imprisoned in 1868 in the barracks at Acre. From prison Baha’o’llah continued to spread his gospel of universal love throughout Western Asia, and the movement which he led continued to grow by leaps and bounds, despite the martyrdom and persecution of Bahais in Persia and elsewhere.

“Baha’o’llah, having spent forty years in exile and imprisonment, died at Acre in 1892, after appointing his son, Abdul Baha Abbas, as his successor.

“Under Abdul Baha’s leadership the Bahai cause has spread in many lands, especially in the United States, and has brought thousands of Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Parsis Jews, and Hindus into harmonious association.

“The Bahais believe that the period of the ‘Golden Era’ upon earth is approaching, the age when, as Christ foretold, ‘men shall come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.’

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“The following are some of the basic principles on which the Bahai faith is built:

1. The oneness of the world of humanity.
2. Independent investigation of truth.
3. The foundation of all religions is one.
4. Religion to be the cause of unity.
5. Religion to be in accord with science and reason.
6. Equality between men and women.
7. Caste prejudice and class hatreds of all kinds to be replaced by fraternal co-operation.
8. The establishment of universal peace.
9. Universal education, with equal educational facilities for boys and girls.
10. Just solution of economic problems.
11. The adoption of a universal auxiliary language.
12. The establishment of an international tribunal for the prevention of wars and the settlement of international problems by arbitration.

“There is no priesthood in the movement, no religious ceremonial, its only dogma being the belief in God and His Prophets (or ‘Manifestations’). Ritual holds no place among the Bahais, whose faith must express itself through prayer and devotion to God and by all the actions of life accomplished in neighbourly love.

“Abdul Baha Abbas (knighted in 1920 through the influence of General Sir Arthur Money, the Chief Administrator of Palestine, in token of his spiritual and social services to the country) lives on the slopes of Mount Carmel, and is now in his seventy-seventh year. He is held in the highest reverence and respect by the inhabitants of Haifa and Acre, irrespective of their creed, his venerable gracious figure being familiar throughout the district, and in many other parts of the east as well. After the reform of the Turkish Government in 1908 Abdul Baha Abbas was released from imprisonment within Acre, and in 1911 he visited London and Paris, travelling throughout the United States in 1912. At the City Temple in September, 1911, he said: ‘This is a new cycle of human power. This is the hour of the unity of the sons of men and of the drawing together of all races and classes.

“ ‘The Gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind and of the fundamental unity of religion.

“ ‘War shall cease between nations and by the will of God

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the Most Great Peace shall come. The world will be seen as a new world and all men will love as brothers.’

“In bidding his friends in London farewell, Abdul Baha said:

“My hope is that through the zeal and ardour of the pure in heart the darkness of hatred and differences shall be entirely abolished and the light of love and unity shall shine; that this world shall become a new world and things material the mirror of the divine. That the whole world shall become as a man’s native country and the different races be counted as one race ... I pray that blessing may be upon all who work for union and progress.”<sup>2</sup>

Possibly there may be a great future in store for Haifa, for some hope that it will become the Mediterranean port for the new Baghdad railway and the pipe-line from the oilfields of Mesopotamia. In mediaeval times Acre was the port of Galilee, for the

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Abdul Baha Abbas died in 1925, and was succeeded as leader by his grandson, Mr. Sheoghi Rabani. I visited him in his pleasant villa in the Persian colony on the slopes of Mt. Carmel in 1926. Like his grandfather, Sheoghi Rabani is held in great respect by the inhabitants of Haifa and Acre irrespective of creed. Many Bahai pilgrims visit him, and several hostels have been built in the colony to house them.

reason that its site was more readily defensible on the landward side. Haifa, with the glorious background of Mount Carmel, could be turned into a residential town, suitable for those who prefer the cool breezes and shady walks of the Prophet's mountain to the sun-scorched flatness of Acre. Again there is plenty of room for expansion to the north-west and south-east of Haifa, and there are few situations so superbly beautiful and romantic, enjoying such possibilities.

I ascended Mount Carmel on the first morning of my visit, only too glad to get away from the noise and dust of the town, then in military occupation, and consequently full of khaki and motor-lorries. Mount Carmel is not really a "mount," but a chain of hills, chiefly limestone, which stretches from north to south for a distance of some sixteen miles. Its highest point is in the middle of the chain, where it rises to a height of 1,782 feet, facing the Bay of Acre on one side and the plain of Esdraelon on the other. Carmel signifies a *garden*, and the name is altogether appropriate. Would that I understood the names and meaning of flowers, and could in any way describe the wondrous beauty of the spring

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flowers that grow all along the paths to the sacred Mount! Flaming marigolds, red anemones, wild roses, scarlet poppies, marguerites and literally hundreds of other wild flowers whose names were unknown to me. There are hedges also of sweet-smelling herbs from which the monks make their famous liqueur.<sup>3</sup> Carmel is not a geographical name, it is more a type of metaphor of fruitfulness and beauty. When I climbed the Mount its sides were gloriously verdant, for the sun had not yet been sufficiently fierce to scorch them into dull brown. Among other trees were many almonds, evergreen oak, pines, and olives. Lizards were to be seen in great numbers, and some unusually large ones ran across the sunny paths or chased each other up and down the stone walls. The beauty of the Mount is described by Isaiah:

It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon.<sup>4</sup>

The carriage road is a very easy climb, and after about thirty-five minutes' walk I arrived at the summit of the ridge or esplanade. The first building reached is that of the Sisters of Nazareth, and next it are the great Carmelite buildings with the conspicuous dome which surmounts the Church of our Lady of Mount Carmel. Towards the west is a large modern building with a lighthouse, called "The Summer Palace." On this site a church was built in the fifth century in honour of St. Helena, and later a Carmelite monastery, in which St. Simon Stock was a monk, who later became general of that Order. This was destroyed by the Turks, who in 1821 built here a summer palace for Abdallah Pasha of St. John of Acre. In front of the palace is a graceful column of granite, with a statue of the Virgin given by pilgrims from Chile. ]

The church is eighteenth-century Italian style, and in shape like a Greek cross. Opposite the west door, a double staircase of white marble leads to the High Altar. Between the balustrades a flight of stairs leads down to the Grotto of Elijah, the cave in which the prophet dwelt. It is this cave which has made the mountain for ever renowned, this and the wonders that he

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wrought here and elsewhere during his sojourn on Mount Carmel. In the native language the Mount was called "Jebel Mar Eliâs," the Mountain of Elias (Elijah). A

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<sup>3</sup> Eau de Mélisse.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah xxxv. 2.

modern inscription over the cave testifies to the work and merits of the great prophet. The cave is held in great veneration alike by all religions in Palestine, and many come to pray in this grotto.

The view from the roof stretches from the promontory of Tyre, beyond Acre to Tantura, the ancient Dor of Joshua's time. Beyond this I could just distinguish Cesarea of Palestine, once a most important city holding the privileges of a Roman colony, bestowed upon it by Titus. St. Paul was imprisoned in this town. It is said to be the only city that has been besieged for so long a time as seven years, capitulating at the last in 1101, when it was taken by Baldwin. It is related that a very precious glass vase said to have been used at the Last Supper was discovered here at the taking of the town, a vase that played an important part in mediaeval times in connection with the Holy Grail.

In a small garden in front of the church there is a stone pyramid surmounted by an iron cross, placed here in memory of those French soldiers, wounded or ill, who were left by Napoleon in the care of the monks, and massacred by the Turks after his departure (May 20th, 1799). Their bones, found by the monks scattered among the ruins of the convent, are buried beneath the monument. At the annual "pilgrimage of penitence" made by French residents and visitors to this spot a requiem is said for the repose of their souls.

After leaving the convent I visited the grotto known as the *School of the Prophets*, close to a small Moslem cemetery, and now used as a mosque. According to tradition, it was here that Elijah gathered his disciples and started the community known in the Bible as the "Sons of the Prophets." This sanctuary, too, has for many years been an object of veneration. The energetic visitor can, if he wishes, proceed from here to El Mukhraqu, or the Place of Sacrifice, which stands on the highest peak of Mount Carmel, and entails a climb of four to five hours. This is the traditional spot on which Elijah offered the victim that was consumed by fire from heaven and is marked by a chapel built by the Carmelites a few years ago.

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There are few places in Palestine quite so attractive as Mount Carmel for its peace and tranquillity, its manifold legends and traditions, as also for its beauty. The mountain in springtime is green and fresh, and this in spite of the fact that all cultivation has been abandoned for years, yet the sight of the trees, the flowers of spring, and of the verdure, makes one realise what a fertile district this really must be. The sides of the mountain are grooved by many dales, and burrowed by grottoes which afforded safe refuge to those flying from persecution or from justice. This, perhaps, explains the words of the prophet Amos:

And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence.<sup>5</sup>

### **(b) *St. John of Acre***

Acre, or Acca, called by the Arabs Akka, the one-time stronghold of the Crusaders, and always associated with them, has already been mentioned. As the train neared Hafa, Acre was pointed out to me, shining in the sun, and standing out on its small promontory. The very first sight of Acre is most attractive, not merely because of its charming situation, but also because of what it stands for in history and romance. The quaint fact about Acre is that, though almost every stone has witnessed the thrilling scenes of its history, not one building of ancient interest remains, except the gate of the city, and part of the ramparts which date back to the time of the Crusaders. All else,

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<sup>5</sup> Amos ix. 3.

bazaars, mosques, and houses, are built up of the old stones that once formed part of great monasteries and magnificent palaces.

To get to Acre it is best to drive along the sands, crossing the mouth of the river Kishon, with the great plain of Acre on the right. The beach stretching from Haïfa to Acre is most picturesque, and in parts studded with tall palms. All kinds of shells are to be found on the shore, including the spiny shells of the fish from which the Phoenicians in olden times obtained the Tyrian purple. Glass was made from the sand of the Kishon.

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At the mouth of this river, where it joins the Mediterranean, a large monument of Memnon once stood.

I first visited Acre one evening just before dusk and it seemed as though I had suddenly stepped into the Middle Ages as I passed under the magnificent gateway, the only gate of the city. The streets were narrow even for an Eastern town, and every turning brought me upon something fresh and strange. I saw no European, and the illusion would have been perfect in the half-light had I not suddenly come upon some English soldiers belonging to the "Somersets," who were stationed here. In the Square were several Arab cafes, where men sat on low stools smoking their hookahs, and from the Square ran the very narrowest street of bazaars, over which were stretched tarpaulin and sacking to protect the sellers from the heat of the sun. Down the middle of each street ran a tiny rivulet, which left still less space for pedestrians. In many of the shops dinners were already cooked on tin trays, and there was no lack of customers. From one bazaar I passed to others, all equally picturesque; there was nothing for the tourist to purchase beyond the commodities of daily life. Further on I came to the Franciscan Convent in the Khan Frandji, the ancient quarter of the European merchants. Close by the Franciscan convent is the large building of the Khan Frandji itself, which dates from the seventeenth century and would seem to have escaped destruction. It was one of those many fortified caravanserais where traders and others took shelter under the protection of their Consuls and were thus able to carry on their business. I could just distinguish in the fading light the Mosque of Jezzar, built about 1780 in a very picturesque position, surrounded by orange trees, palms and cypresses which shelter the tombs of former pashas of Acre. Close by is a charming and graceful minaret, the gallery of which was brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps, for the muezzin was about to give the call to prayer. The citadel near by marks the spot where once stood the ancient monastery castle of the Knights of St. John.

Few towns of its size have had such a remarkable and romantic history as Acre, and few have taken part in so many wars and sieges. Acre is mentioned in Scripture for the first time in the Book of Judges as a town of the tribe of Aser. In the time of the

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Ptolemies it received the name of Ptolemais. It is mentioned in the days of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Alexander the Great, Ptolemy and Simon Maccabaeus; Cleopatra took it and gave it to the Syrians; later it became a Roman colony. St. Paul landed here, through him Christianity spread, and as early as 198 there was a Christian Bishop. It had resumed its name of Akka when in 638 it fell into the hands of the Moslems. In 1104 it became one of the principal bulwarks of the Christian religion in Palestine, and was called St. John of Acre. Except for a short interval of Moslem rule it remained in Christian hands, and was the last outpost of the Crusaders until 1291, when they were finally driven out of Palestine. Since then it has suffered from many attacks and changes of fortune, but from 1840 until 1918 it remained in the hands of the Moslems. It is interesting to remember that during the Great War Acre was neither attacked by land nor bombarded by sea, an altogether new experience for this bellicose little city. ...