

# Prior to the arrival of the colonists

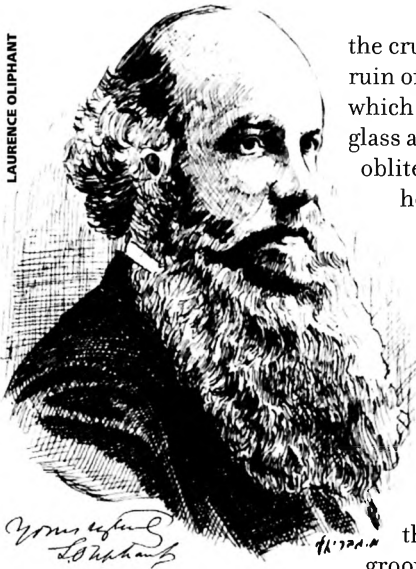
of the Temple Society, Haifa was as dirty as most Arab villages. It is now well paved throughout. The houses, all constructed of white limestone, quarries of which abound in the immediate vicinity, give it a clean and substantial appearance, and contain a bustling and thriving population of about six thousand inhabitants. Under the high cactus hedges at its eastern gateway are usually to be seen, squatting amid sacks of grain, hundreds of camels, which, attended by wild-looking Arabs, have arrived with their loads of cereals from the Hauran, on the other side of the Jordan; for Haifa is gradually becoming one of the great grain-exporting ports of the country, and one or two steamers are generally to be seen loading in the harbour.

Leaving the town by the western gateway, we ride for about a mile parallel to the seashore between high cactus hedges, and suddenly find ourselves apparently transported into the heart of Europe. Running straight back from the beach for about half a mile, and sloping upward for about a hundred feet in that distance, to the base of the rocky sides of Carmel, runs the village street. On each side of it is a pathway, with a double row of shade-trees, and behind them a series of white stone houses, of one and two stories, generally with tiled roofs, each surrounded with its garden, and each with a text in German engraved over the doorway. There is another, smaller, parallel street. The whole settlement contains about 60 houses and 300 inhabitants. The English, American, and German vice-consuls are all colonists. There is a skilled physician, an architect, and engineer in the colony, an excellent hotel, a school, and meeting-house. The German government subscribes two thirds and the colonists one third of the funds required for the school. Some of the colonists are in business, and have stores in Haifa. There is also a good store in the colony, where all the most important trades are represented. There is one wine grist, and one steam mill, the latter

in process of erection. There is a manufactory of olive-oil soap, the export of which to America is yearly increasing, and now amounts to 50,000 pounds, and which may be purchased in New York by such of your readers as have a fancy to wash their hands with soap direct from the Holy Land, made from the oil of the olives of the Carmel, at F.B. Nichols's, 62 William Street. There is also a factory for the manufacture of articles from olive wood.

Where Carmel rises abruptly from the upper end of the street, its rocky sides have been terraced to the summit, and about a hundred acres are devoted to the cultivation of the vine. Unfortunately, the varieties which have been imported from Germany all suffer severely from mildew. I have therefore sent to the United States for Concords and some of the hardier American varieties. Along the lower slopes are thick groves of olives. Scarped along the rugged mountain-side leads the road to the monastery, distant about a mile and a half. Situated about five hundred feet above the sea, it forms a conspicuous object in the landscape as seen from the colony.

The views from the house in which I am living are a never-ending source of delight. To the east I look over the native town and harbour, with the date-groves and the plain of the Kishon beyond, backed by the wooded range which separates it from the plain of Esdraelon. To the northeast the eye rests on the picturesque outline of the mountains of northern Palestine, with the rounded top of Jebel Jernik rising to a height of 4,000 feet in the middle distance, and snow-clad Hermon towering behind to a height of 9,000 feet. Immediately to the north, across the blue waters of the bay, the white walls and minarets of Acre rise from the margin of the sea, and beyond it the coastline, terminating in the white projecting cliff known as "The Ladder of Tyre". To the northwestward we look across a plain about a mile wide, containing the colony lands, and beyond is the sea horizon, till we turn sufficiently to meet Carmel bluff and monastery. Behind us the mountain rises precipitously, throwing us at this time of the year into shade by three in the afternoon. But even on New Year's Day we do not grudge the early absence of the sun, for as I write the thermometer is standing at 66° in the shade. It is not, however, the features of the scenery which constitute its chief beauty, but the wonderful variations of light and shade, and the atmospheric effects peculiar to the climate, which invest it with a special charm. On the plain to the west of the colony, which is bounded on the two sides by the sea, on one by the mountain, and on one by the colony, are the traces of the old town of Haifa, mentioned in the Talmud, but not in the Bible, which was besieged and taken by storm by Tancred,



the crusader, in 1100, with a massive ruin of sea-wall and other remains, from which I have already dug out fragments of glass and pottery. Behind are the almost obliterated remains of an old fort, with here and there a piece of limestone cropping up, bearing the marks of man's handiwork.

Everywhere in Palestine we come upon the evidences of its antiquity. This plain, now made to yield of its abundance under the skilful labour of the German colonists, is no exception, for in the time of the Romans it was the site of the city of Sycaminum, and in the groovings of rocks upon which the sea now breaks we see the traces of what were its baths; in the mounds we find fragments of old masonry and cement; in the depressions we see signs of wells, and in the rock cuttings of tombs. Only the other day I found, while digging in the garden for the prosaic purpose of planting cabbages, a fragment of polished agate which probably formed a part of the tessellated pavement of some Roman villa.

So the process of decay and reconstruction goes on, and man is ever trying to rear something new on the ruins of the old. Let us hope that the 60 or 70 substantial houses of the new colony are but the outward and visible signs of that moral edifice which these good people have come to Palestine to erect, and that from the ruins of a crumbling ecclesiasticism they may build a temple worthy the worship of the future.

#### **Note from the editor**

*Haifa or Life in Modern Palestine* (Wm. Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1886) by Laurence Oliphant, from which the present selection has been excerpted, includes articles (like this one) written between 1882 and 1885 for the *New York Sun* and the *London Jewish Chronicle*. Oliphant loved the town in which he settled and used as a base for his travels throughout the Holy Land, and envisioned it as a symbol of the country's modernisation. Thanks to his writings Haifa, though still a quite small place, became known to the wider world.

Of Scottish descent, born in South Africa in 1829 where his father, Sir Anthony Oliphant, was attorney-general in Cape Colony, Laurence was

educated in Ceylon when his father became chief justice there. A man of empire, he served as a diplomat in the US, Canada, China, and Japan. He lived for a while in the US as a member of a religious-mystical movement, wandering through Russia and Eastern Europe before settling in Haifa and finally returning to the UK and dying there in 1888 at the age of 59. He has enjoyed at least three biographies and a 1976 Hebrew translation of his book prefaced by the assassinated right-wing minister Rahabam Ze'evi.

Oliphant became a kind of hero of Jewish circles in Eastern Europe and even in the Yemen. He may well have been, additionally, a British spy concerned with the 'agony' of the Ottoman Empire, the 'Sick Man of Europe'. His encouragement of Jewish immigration may be considered part of the British quest for a colony in Palestine. Some 17 years before Herzl's mission to Istanbul in the name of Zionism, he had met with the Ottoman Sultan and argued for Jewish settlement in the Holy Land.

In 1882, at the height of pogroms in Russia, Oliphant returned to Haifa with his wife Alice and his secretary Naftali Herz Imber, the composer of what is still Israel's national anthem, "Hatikva" ("The Hope"). A house was rented in the German Colony near that of Gottlieb Schumacher, the head of the German Templar community, and a summer home built in the Druze village of Daliat Hacarmel. His texts fit into the category of classical romanticism with the Christian fundamentalist and colonialist flavours and prejudices of the times.

#### **THE GERMAN COLONY**

