

THROUGH A MONOCLE

THE AMERICAN COLONY IN JERUSALEM.

JUST before the train started from Jaffa to Jerusalem, there came into the already well-filled compartment a young man in European dress, who at once assured us that he would not add to our crowded condition—that he was only one of the guides. This meant that he would ride standing when he did not betake himself to the car platform. Presently his purpose was revealed by his distribution of cards, inviting us to call at the store of "The American Colony." Immediately every man and woman of us fell into a defensive attitude of mind. He would, of course, try to establish a claim to our patronage by giving us gratuitous information; but we could keep out freedom by receiving it only in a grudging spirit. Such are the ethics of the tourist world. He was not very obtrusive, however; and the other dragomans left him little scope. But he shook hands with us in parting, and said that he would next see us at the store. We thought him optimistic, but we did not at that time know that he was not as other men—that he was, in fact, a member of a communistic Christian community whose hospitality we would be accepting before the week was out.

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THE next message we received from the American Colony was, appropriately enough, in the form of an American dough-nut. A young American bridal couple arrived the next night; and the first thing the young husband did—he had been here before—was to go down to the American store and buy a bag of dough-nuts and a box of "fudge." Also, he ordered a pumpkin pie which they shared with us next day. But the next day we found the store for ourselves; and a typical brother of the Sunday School type from Maine told me all about it. Then I recalled that I had been told about these people before, though hardly in the same tone as that taken by this representative. Possibly you have heard of them yourself. They were, I think, once known as the Spaffordites, their original leaders being Mr. and Mrs. Spafford. Mrs. Spafford is still living and as capable an old lady as you ever met; and her daughter is now married to a Mr. Vester, in whose name the store stands. Everything, however, is the common property of the entire community which numbers a little over a hundred and lives in a group of fine stone buildings—rented—on the road to the Mount of Olives which starts from the Jaffa Gate.

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THE following Sunday afternoon we went on a special invitation to a service held in the large drawing-room of their home and tarried to the afternoon tea which they served immediately afterward. There I talked to several of the members with the utmost frankness, and learned a good deal about their views and purposes. They denied the common report that they came here originally expecting the end of the world. Their purpose was rather to escape the "entangling alliances" which hamper people amidst home surroundings, and come to a place where they could live the Christian life as they understand it in the freest manner. They do not insist

that a common purse is necessary, but they find that it helps them to live like brothers and sisters, to rise above envy, to escape pride and to avoid strife. They did not tell me anything about their early struggles, but other people say that at first they had the utmost difficulty in paying their way. However, they finally started their store in the city, and now they look fairly prosperous. They sell more than dough-nuts, of course. They have a fine selection of olive wood things, of mother of pearl, of beads of all sorts, of photographs, of postal cards, of rugs and of all the other things which tourists take home from the Holy Land.

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THE religious service was a simple one, consisting chiefly of singing. They have a nice choir, composed principally of young ladies; and rumor says that these are the very young ladies who make the dough-nuts and the pies. If this should tempt any lone bachelors into thinking of coming to Jerusalem and joining a community which presents so attractive a matrimonial possibility, I had better mention that, as a preliminary to joining the community, they must first put all they possess into the common purse—and even then the community may not decide that it is best for them to marry. Entire surrender seems to be the gate of admission into this paradise. I hesitate, however, to go very deeply into the actual workings of this body; for I cannot always feel sure what has been told me by themselves and what by their—well, their critics. For instance, outside testimony says that the Colony began by refusing to take a price for anything they produced, but the present practice of the community is quite contrary. They may have found that this interpretation of the teachings of Christ would not work out, even in Jerusalem.

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THEY certainly get the patronage of the American—and many of the English—tourist at their store. They offer to us of the western world the sort of shopping to which we are accustomed. That is, when they say that an article is worth four francs, we know that that is the price—and the last price. We do not have to embark on a tournament of bargaining in order to get the lowest figure which the vendor is willing to take. Still I am not sure that the indulgence of this taste for the "fixed price" does not cost us something. The Colony store does not seem to me to be an oasis of cheapness. But you can depend on the honesty of the goods you buy there. The brothers who act as clerks tell the truth. They admit it themselves with fair frequency. A funny thing happened, though, the other day. I have been buying two-cent stamps at my worldly hotel office for two cents, which, after all, seems to be quite the natural price for them. Having bought some cards at the store, however, I asked them for stamps to go with them. The spectacled super-Christian who sold them said, as he gave me less change than I expected, that they were worth nearly two cents and a half each. I pointed out that they were marked ten centimes or two cents. He looked hurt but explained that that did not matter. Then I mentioned that I usually got them for two cents. He said, "Oh, do you?"; but kept the change. Now I am wondering why my worldly hotel man lets me have stamps worth nearly two cents and a half for two cents, and yet says nothing about his superior brand of Christianity. Still it cannot be denied that the Colony dough-nuts are orthodox, nor that the dough-nut-makers can sing "Nearer, My God, to Thee."



At the Toronto Review—Colonel Lessard, General Cotton, Major-General Sir John French, two Aides, and General Lake.