

REV. F. C. STIFLER FINDS HOLY CITY SMALL PLACE

(Continued from page 57)

Dead Sea, but now I must tell you how we entered this compact, wonderful, holy land.

My first view of it was at five o'clock in the morning as I woke in the train coming from Egypt. There was a hazy moisture brooding over the bleak rolling country, such as we had not seen in the Valley of the Nile, but how desert it was. Here and there were sparse little crops and a lone man leading a camel. Now and then our train would stop at a station. What famous names, but what desolate places! They were all that was left of the great Philistine cities of the plain, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod.

By seven we were at Lud. As "Lydda" in the New Testament, this is the place where Peter healed a paralytic. Today it is nothing but the Palestine Railway's big junction where trains meet twice a day from Haifa to the North, Jaffa to the west, Cario to the south, and Jerusalem to the east. But the significant thing is that if Peter had not somewhere received the power to make him, instead of a fisher of fishes, a fisher of men like Aeneas, there would be little use for a railroad system in Palestine at all.

Palestine, Land of the Book

For after all, Palestine is the Land of The Book. It is not a land that could support a railroad system on its natural resources for its resources have not been tapped. It has no precious metals or deposits of jewels to export. Its business is the business of religious sentiment. It is the Land of the Book. Since the war, 14,000 Christian pilgrims from Europe and America alone come there every year. How many Moslem visitors come I do not know, but it is safe to say that many times the number of Christians, and Zionism has in recent years greatly increased the Jewish influx. But this business is all done in the name of Religion. If anyone believes that religion is dead, let him pay Jerusalem a visit.

So Lydda is a very busy little junction. From there the train took us through country that reminded me of

the western slope of the Sierras, to Jerusalem. What rocky country it is. Stones everywhere. The guide told us of a legend about the stones in Palestine. It is that when God made the world, he put all the stones that were to cover it into bags, and gave the bags to an angel, and while the angel was passing over Palestine, one of the bags broke. I was traveling with a Vermont preacher. Vermont also has a reputation for stones. As we watched those Arab farmers picking around on their little patches in the mountains along the way from Lud to Jerusalem, he remarked more than

once that he was going to tell his Vermont friends that their farms were the best on earth.

As our train wound through the gorges of these Judean hills, we saw our first threshing floors. There were the oxen "treading out the grain," walking round and round on the straw. Then next to them were the men with "winnowing fans" blowing away the chaff, all just as it was 2,000 years ago.

But I confess as we neared Jerusalem, I found my heart beating just a little faster, and my interest even in the fascinating scenery outside my

car window, flagging. What is it about Jerusalem that so captured us? Whatever it was, it captures all of us. For as we drew near the station, you could almost feel the tremor of motion passing up and down the corridor of the car. Every one was standing. What was it? Well for me, it was the thought that here was the "city of cities" built by David for purposes of religion. Here King Solomon had lived, here Isaiah had preached. Herod and Pilate had held sway here, making as though they possessed more power than Jesus when they secretly feared his unmatched strength.

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(Continued from page 59)

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