Book review

A DOCTOR IN GALILEE THE LIFE AND STRUGGLE OF A PALESTINIAN IN ISRAEL

HATIM KANAANEH

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'A History of the World in 100 Objects', the series of 15-minute Radio 4 gems produced by Neil MacGregor, the director of the British Museum, has described many beautiful objects from the cradle of civilisation, the countries round the Nile and in the ancient Middle East. The rich, turbulent history of that very special part of the world has been brought expertly to life.

The richness and turbulence continues today. To be in Jerusalem is to experience a cultural melting pot and to realise that responding to the needs and concerns of Palestinians and Israelis is never going to be easy.

Hatim Kanaaneh is a Palestinian doctor who has struggled against a culture of anti-Arab discrimination for over 35 years to bring medical care to Palestinians in Galilee; this book is the story of how he fought for the human rights of his patients. Kanaaneh is a native of Galilee, born before the creation of Israel. He left to study medicine at Harvard, before returning to work as a public health physician and discovering a shocking level of malnutrition and disease in his community. After doing all he could for his patients by working from inside the system, Kanaaneh set up the Galilee

Society, an NGO working for equitable health and socioeconomic conditions for Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is quoted on the cover:

'A moving account of the plight of the Palestinians by one of them — a physician struggling to alleviate his people's lot.'

A personal memoir illustrated with beautiful old photographs, this book gives valuable insight into the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians which must be solved for peace in the Middle East and beyond to be safe and lasting.

The last chapter, 'A little piece of Palestine', is especially moving and tells how the author achieved his dream of transplanting an ancient olive tree into his garden. He refers to how ancient cultures had a mystical fascination with the olive; for Palestinians, the olive tree symbolises their love of their land. As Kanaaneh says:

'I can prove my belonging to this piece of the earth's crust through it; its roots are my surrogate roots.'

Perhaps Neil MacGregor's series will include an object made from the wood of one of these deeply significant trees.

Lesley Morrison

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