

The Oldest City.

The poetic and exalting associations which naturally gather around the places we find mentioned in Holy Writ are too apt to be rudely dispelled on nearer view and close acquaintance; for the ravages of time and the neglect of degenerate governments have left most of them forlorn and repulsive, and inhabited by forlorn and repulsive people—so travelers say: The still surviving beauty and importance of Damascus, however, in spite of all disadvantages, make it, in a measure, an exception in the long roll of decay and departed glory. We may well venerate and admire the spectacle of the first city in history outliving so many younger and greater ones. Its thousands of years are a kind of immortality.

Damascus is the oldest city in the world. Tyre and Sidon have crumbled on the shore; Baalbec is a ruin; Palmyra is buried in a desert; Nineveh and Babylon have disappeared from the Tigris and the Euphrates. Damascus remains what it was before the days of Abraham—a center of trade and travel—an island of verdure in the desert; a presidential capital, with martial and sacred associations extending through thirty centuries.

It was near Damascus that Saul of Tarsus saw the light above the brightness of the sun; the street that is called Straight, in which it was said "he prayed," still runs through the city. The caravan comes and goes as it did a thousand years ago; there is still the sheik, the ass, and the water-wheel; the merchants of the Euphrates and the Mediterranean still "occupy" these "with the multitude of their wares." The city which Mahomet surveyed from a neighboring height, and was afraid to enter, "because it was given to man to have but one paradise, and for his part, he was resolved not to have it in this world," is to-day what Julian called the "eye of the East," as it was in the time of Isaiah, "the head of Syria."

From Damascus came the damson (our blue plum) and the delicious apricot of Portugal, called damasco; damask, our beautiful fabric of cotton and silk, with vines and flowers raised upon a smooth, bright ground; the damask rose, introduced into England in the time of Henry VIII.; the Damascus blade, so famous the world over for its keen edge and wonderful elasticity, the secret of whose manufacture was lost when Tamerlane carried the artist into Persia; and that beautiful art of inlaying wood and steel with gold and silver, a kind of mosaic, engraving and sculpture united—called damaskeening—with which boxes, purses and swords are ornamented. It is still a city of flowers and bright waters; the streams of Lebanon and the "silk of gold" still murmur and sparkle in the wilderness of the Syrian gardens.

A Wonderful Bell.

The temples of Koto, Japan, are mainly of interest on account of their great bell, which swings in a monster wooden belly half way up the hillside, back of the buildings proper. This bell is a huge bronze cup with nearly perpendicular sides and a flat crown, and like all other Japanese bells, is sounded by means of a huge beam kept in place by ropes, but, when occasion requires, damped into England in the time of Henry VIII.; the Damascus blade, so famous the world over for its keen edge and wonderful elasticity, the secret of whose manufacture was lost when Tamerlane carried the artist into Persia; and that beautiful art of inlaying wood and steel with gold and silver, a kind of mosaic, engraving and sculpture united—called damaskeening—with which boxes, purses and swords are ornamented. It is still a city of flowers and bright waters; the streams of Lebanon and the "silk of gold" still murmur and sparkle in the wilderness of the Syrian gardens.

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