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THE OLDEST CITY OF THE WORLD.

Damascus is thought to be the oldest city of the world. The Jewish historian Josephus says it was founded by Uz, the grandson of Noah, and whether it dates so far back or not there is no doubt it was a place of importance in the days of Abraham. Our readers will remember Naaman's boastful answer to the prophet (2 Kings, v. 12), "are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" At this day the Abana, commonly called the Barada, is the life of Damascus. It rises in the centre of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, descends through a "sublime" ravine, enters a plain of great extent at an elevation of 2200 feet above the level of the sea, flows eastward for twenty miles and empties itself into a lake, which in the height of summer becomes a morass. On the banks of this river about a mile from the mouth stands Damascus. The river cuts the city in two, and its deep rapid current averages fifty feet wide. It is the Abana that has given the city its long life and never-dying prosperity. By a system of channels and pipes, many of them of great age, its waters are conveyed into every quarter and into almost every house. In addition canals are led off from it at different elevations above the city, and carried far and wide over the surrounding plain, converting what would otherwise be a parched desert into a para-

dise. The orchards, gardens, vineyards, and fields of Damascus cover a circuit of at least sixty miles, and they owe their almost unrivalled luxuriance to the Abana, which fertilizes a district upwards of three hundred square miles in extent, while Pharpar, which empties into the same morass, fertilizes one hundred more. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* describes the view of Damascus from the crest of Antilibanus as "scarcely surpassed in the world. The elevation is about 500 feet above the city, which is nearly two miles distant. The distance lends enchantment to the view, for while the peculiar forms of Eastern architecture do not bear close inspection they look like an Arabian poet's dream when seen from afar. Tapering minarets and swelling domes, tipped with golden crescents, rise from the white-terraced roofs; while in some places their glittering tops appear among the green foliage of the gardens. In the centre of the city stands the Great Mosque, and near it are the gray battlements of the old castle. Away in the south the eye follows a long suburb, while below the ridge on which we stand is the *Merj*, the *Ager Damascenus* of early travellers—a green meadow extending along the river from the mouth of the ravine to the city. The gardens and orchards which have been so long and so justly celebrated encompass the whole city, sweeping the base of the bleak hills, like a sea of verdure,

and covering an area of more than 30 miles in circuit." The population is estimated at 150,000, of whom about 19,000 are Christians, some 8,000 belonging to the Greek church and an equal number to the Roman Catholic, 6,000 Jews and the rest Mohammedans. The principal street which runs through the city is called the *Via Recta* or "the street called Straight."

THE USELESS CLOCK.

"Big Ben," the great clock at Westminster, leads a busy, useful life. High up he holds his face, and stretches out his beautiful hands to tell the time. Not a moment does he stop to speak or play, as some children do when they should be at work. From morning to night, and when the great city is asleep, he still pursues his useful career. While long before the sun has risen, he still points to and chimes out the quickly passing hours.

There is another clock in the outside of an old country church which leads a very different life. It has no hands and cannot tell the time. But, strange to say, it is wound up once a week, and then does nothing but say, "click, click," while no one is a bit the better of it.

Now, while there are many leading a good, useful life, like "Big Ben," there are also some like that useless clock. Once a week, at church or Sunday-school, they get wound

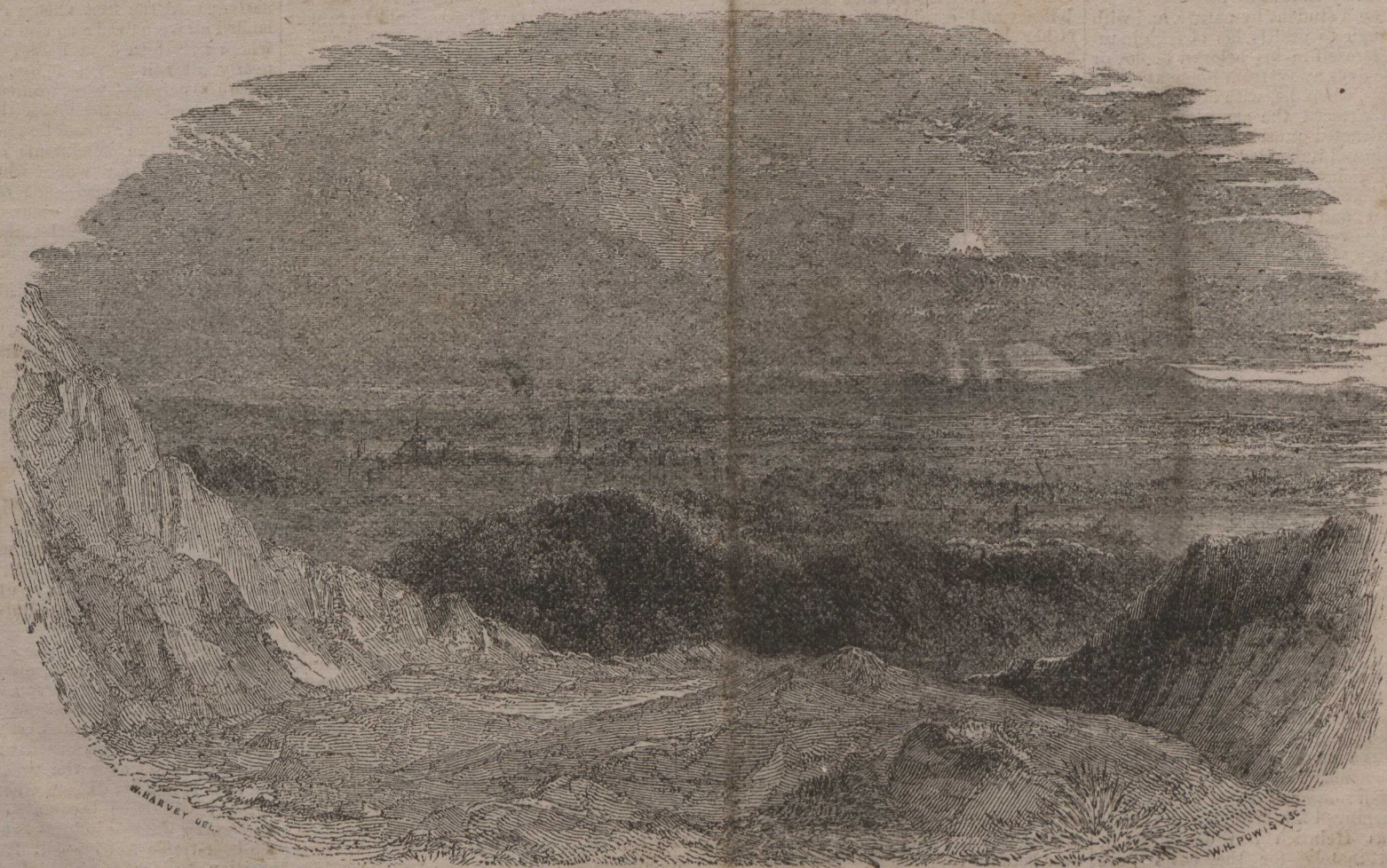
up; but it makes them no better. There life is just a useless "click, click." They never tell the time.

When the clock does not tell the time, there is something wrong with it. And when we do not lead a holy, useful Christian life, there is something wrong with us. That useless clock only needed, perhaps, a nice pair of hands to make it right; but we need a new heart to make us right.

A little boy once listened to an address on the new heart, which deeply impressed and interested him. On coming home, he told what he had heard to his younger sister. "And," he added "do you know, I believe I have got the new heart." "Oh," said the delighted little girl, "I am so glad; do show it to me."

"You may smile at the request of that child, yet she was not far wrong. All who have the new heart can show it by a new life. When we see any one striving to be like Jesus—holy, useful, making all around bright and glad by the sweetness of their life—feel sure that the secret of it is a new heart. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."—*The Christian*.

Excess generally causes reaction, and produces a change in the opposite direction, whether it be in the reasons, or in individuals, or in governments.—*Plato*.



DAMASCUS.