

Damascus.

Two things make Damascus interesting. One is that it is the oldest city in the world. The other, that yonder on the road leading to the city Paul was stricken blind. Here in the city he received the command to go unto the Gentiles. Here then was the starting point of Paul's life of service to God.

But is it not strange that the nations that were then savage heathen are now sending the gospel back to Damascus.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which contributes every year to our own Home Mission fields, has a missionary in Damascus, who writes as follows:

"Let me ask you to accompany me to our little church on a Sabbath morning. The church, a neat stone building, stands a little distance back from the street, and is surrounded by an open space several feet in width, with no high walls near it, so that the air circulates freely through the building, a matter of some importance during the warm season. The service commences at 9.15 a.m.

As you enter you notice that the men are seated on one side of the building, the women on the other. The custom of the country makes this necessary. For a good many years it was even necessary to keep a curtain stretched, during the service, the whole length of the church, separating the men from the women, so that none but the preacher, who stood in the pulpit at the end of the building, could see the faces of all on both sides of the curtain. As shewing the change that has taken place in this respect, the curtain was removed a number of years ago, with little objection on the part of anyone.

The order of the service is that with which you are familiar at home, though (to you) in a strange language. The most of the congregation unite in singing the Arabic version of the Psalms, the preacher usually leading in the singing, in which he is assisted by the teachers and pupils of the girls' school. All seem to join reverently, with the exception, it may be, of a few strangers, who have dropped in out of curiosity, to see what a Protestant service is like. The attention given to the sermon is as close and devout as in most of your churches at home.

You will observe that the congregation is largely made up of

and that among these are a number of persons who from their style of dress and general appearance manifestly do not belong to the city. These last are natives of villages, or other towns in Syria. Some of them are here for a short time on business, and may not be seen in the congregation again. Others have come to the city seeking employment, and have taken up a temporary residence here.

Among them you will notice, first of all, a man considerably advanced in life, with a heavy gray beard and a broad forehead. This man was formerly a priest of the Greek Church, living in a village in the district of Hauran, three days journey to the south of Damascus. A number of years ago, a Bible and some Protestant books came into his hands. In the study of these his eyes were opened to the soul-destroying errors of his own Church, and the way of salvation through faith in a crucified Redeemer. After trying for a time to quiet his conscience while continuing in his office as priest of the village, he felt compelled at last to throw off his priestly robe and make an open confession of his faith in the simple truths of the Gospel. He was obliged to leave his village, even his own family turning against him and disowning him. His life was for a time in danger. Few in these days have suffered more for the truth's sake. He held among his people a position of great influence, and was in comfortable circumstances. From a worldly point of view he had nothing to gain by the course he has pursued. He gave up all for Christ and the Gospel's sake. And he has borne all with great cheerfulness, and does not seem to think he has done anything remarkable. He has been employed a part of the time as a teacher and colporteur among the Belaween—the Arabs of the desert.

Not far from him sits a young man, of dark complexion, a native of one of the northern villages of our field, and, when a boy, a pupil in the mission school in his village. He has come to Damascus, seeking employment as a weaver, and has now for several months been very regular in his attendance upon our Sabbath services. A short time since he expressed a desire to become possessor of a Reference Bible, for the better study of God's Word. Now, a Reference Book in Arabic is a large book, and costs about three times as