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AND ARABIA.

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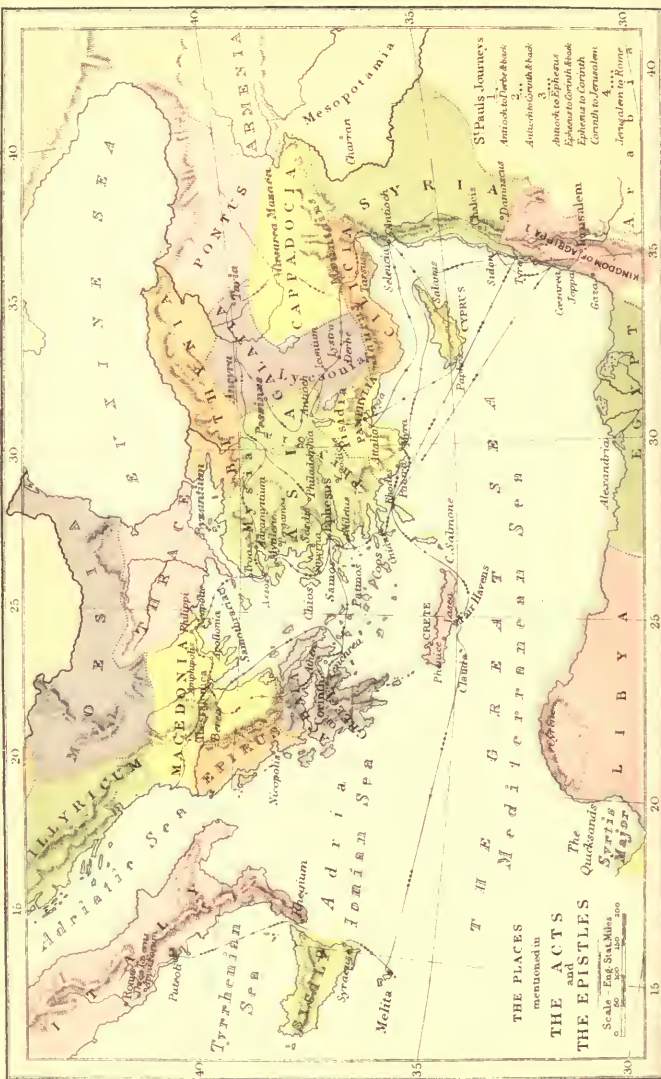


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THE HEATHEN WORLD AND
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ST. PAUL IN DAMASCUS
AND ARABIA.

BY THE

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OXFORD.

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PREFACE.



IN this little Volume an attempt is made to describe and illustrate the external surroundings of the Apostle Paul, from the day when he quitted Jerusalem armed with the High Priest's mandate to the night when he was let down from the wall of Damascus in a basket, and so escaped the assassination with which the Damascene Jews threatened him. The time covered is called by the Apostle himself a space of "three years" (Gal. i. 18); but, according to ordinary Jewish usage, this expression need not mean more than a year and a few months. This period, short as it is, is one of the most important in the world's history, since it embraces the event on which, humanly speaking, the conversion of the whole civilized world to Christianity altogether depended, viz., the conversion of St. Paul himself. It has not been within the scope of the writer to consider that event in any but its purely objective aspect, or to deal, unless incidentally, with the character, the feelings, or the teaching of the great

Apostle. For these he must refer his readers to the excellent work by the Rev. W. J. Conybeare and Dean Howson,¹ and to that of Mr. Thomas Lewin,² with which they may compare the less satisfactory treatise of Schrader.³ The present writer's task has been the humble one of describing, as best he could, the "environment" of the Apostle, or, in other words, the circumstances by which he was surrounded during these two most momentous years, which shaped the world's course for all after-ages. Until recently it would have been impossible to do this at any length without drawing mainly on the imagination; but within the last quarter of a century the scenes of the conversion and the subsequent events have become intimately known to us from the researches and descriptions of intelligent travellers, while inquiries have been pushed with good results into every corner of the large subject known as "archæology" or "antiquities"; and the general condition of the ancient world in almost all respects has come to be tolerably well ascertained. It is impossible to make suitable acknowledgments to all the various writers from whose works the author has derived the materials of this essay; but he feels

¹ "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," 2 vols. 4to. London, 1854.

² "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," 2 vols. 8vo. London, 1851.

³ "Der Apostel Paulus." 1830.

bound to express his great obligations to the Rev. J. L. Porter, to Dr. Robinson, to Dean Stanley, and to Canon Tristram for their excellent accounts of localities, and to the late Professor Ewald, the late Dean Milman, and Professor Plumptre for their judicious observations on points connected with Jewish customs and practices. The great work of Conybeare and Howson, and the learned but unpretending treatise by Mr. Lewin, have been of much service to him, and have often, even where he felt compelled to differ from them, suggested trains of thought which have led him to his conclusions.



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ST. PAUL IN DAMASCUS AND ARABIA.



DAMASCUS.

CHAPTER I. — THE SITE.

General character of Asia west of the Euphrates—Syrian mountain region—Central portion of it, Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon—Courses of the rivers—Chief fertile tracts—Position of the Ghûtah or Damascene plain—Chief natural features of the Ghûtah—Improvements effected by art—Soil and products—Contrast between the Ghûtah and the adjacent regions—Outer range of Antilibanus—Eastern or Syrian Desert—Valley of Awaaj and bleak plains south-east of Hermon—Climate of the Ghûtah—Views of it and from it.

THE broad tract of desert which extends in a north-west direction from the mouth of the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf almost to the shores of the Mediterranean, is skirted along its western verge by a fringe of fertile territory. Between the desert and the sea, and closely abutting upon the latter, lies interposed a mountain barrier of a considerable elevation; and these highlands, catching the vapours which rise constantly from the Eastern Mediterranean, or Levant, condense them into clouds, which, falling in rain or snow upon the mountain-tops, become the source of innumer-

able fountains and rills, and of some fair-sized rivers. In the low latitude of Syria, wherever there is water, there is a rich and luxuriant vegetation; and the ranges which skirt the Syrian coasts from the Gulf of Issus to Carmel, and even in a certain sense to Hebron, are the primary cause of that fertility which characterizes the entire region, which made Canaan "a land of milk and honey,"¹ the district round Damascus a "paradise,"² and the whole of Syria a "garden."³ In explaining the topography of the region, we must thus commence with the mountain-ranges, to which the other features of the locality are mainly due, determining (as they do) the volume and course of the streams, the extent and character of the valleys and plains, the division of the entire tract into districts, and the relations of the several districts one to another.

The Syrian mountain-system is an offshoot from the great range of Taurus, which stretches from Armenia to the Ægean, in a direction nearly from east to west. Midway in the line thus constituted is given off, almost at right angles, a broad spur, or lateral rib, which, beginning about lat. $37^{\circ} 30'$, runs south, or a little west of south, for a distance of six degrees, or above four hundred miles. This is the

¹ Exod. xiii. 5.

² Abulfeda says: "The Ghûtah of Damascus is one of the our paradises, which are the most excellent of the beautiful places of the earth. They are, the Ghûtah of Damascus, the She'ab of Bauwân, the river of Ubulleh, and Soghd of Samarkand. The Ghûtah of Damascus excels the other three" (Tab. Syriæ, ed. Köhler, p. 100).

³ Gen. xiii. 10.

Syrian mountain region. It consists for the most part of two ranges or lines, one closely hugging the coast ; the other, further to the east, less pronounced, and less continuous, but in places even more striking than the coast range, a valley, wider or narrower, lying between them. Both ranges have borne, and still bear, in different parts, different names. In ancient times the more western was known, towards the north, as Amanus, next, as Casius, then as Bargylus, and then as Libanus or Lebanon ("the White Mountain"); the central part of the more eastern bore the names of Antilibanus and Sirion,¹ or Hermon. Where names failed, the ranges still in reality continued, Lebanon being prolonged into the hill country of Galilee, Samaria, and Judæa, while Hermon had a similar extension through Gaulanitis and Bashan to the mountains of Ammon and Moab.

In treating of Damascus, we are especially concerned with the central portion of this mountain region, that which lies between lat. $33^{\circ} 20'$ and $34^{\circ} 30'$. Here the two ranges, properly called Libanus and Antilibanus, which have well-defined terminations, both northwards and southwards, extend parallel one to the other for somewhat more than a hundred miles in a direction which is nearly from north-east to south-west. The deep and fertile valley, called anciently Cœle-Syria,² "the Hollow Syria,"

¹ Deut. iii. 9.

² The term is common to the Greek and Latin geographers. Dionysius thus explains it in his "Periegesis" :

"The 'Hollow Syria' called, because so low
It lies between two lofty mountain-heights."

and now El Buka'a, "the Plain between mountains,"¹ watered by the two large streams of the Litany and the Nahr-el-Asy (Orontes), lies at their base, joining, and at the same time separating them. Libanus is the higher range of the two; it culminates towards the north, where the snowy peak, from which it derives its name, attains an elevation of 10,050 feet.² Antilibanus is tilted the other way; it is highest at its southern end, where Hermon boasts an altitude of 9,400 feet above the Mediterranean.³ The width of Antilibanus is considerable. Hermon itself is from fourteen to sixteen miles across; and, north of Hermon, the range greatly expands; several ridges of a moderate height break away from the main chain, diverging from it chiefly towards the east, and spreading like the rays of a fan. Between these various ridges there is room for broad valleys and extensive plains, many of which are well watered and fertile. The outermost ridge, known in its different parts as Jebel Kasyûn, Jebel Kalamûn, Jebel Tiniyeh, and Jebel-el-Kaus, has a direction only a little north of east from Mezzeh, where it quits the main chain to long. 37° E., where it sinks into the desert.

The mountain tracts thus briefly described furnish the sources of all the great Syrian rivers. These are

¹ See Robinson's "Later Researches," p. 546; Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," Appendix, pp. 478-9.

² So Kiepert, in the map attached to Robinson's "Later Researches." Robinson says 9,310 feet (p. 547). Tristram ("Land of Israel," p. 623) 10,000 feet.

³ Tristram, p. 604. The altitude of Hermon above the Dead Sea is 11,000 feet.

four in number,—the Orontes, or Nahr-el-Asy (“the Rebel Stream”); the Litany, or “River of Tyre”; the Jordan, or Sheriat-el-Kebir; and the Chysorrhoads, or Barada. Of these, the first two, the Orontes and the Litany, rising from the skirts of Libanus and Antilibanus, at a short distance one from the other, in lat. 34° nearly, flow in opposite directions down the Cœlesyrian valley, the Orontes to the north, the Litany to the south, each of them absorbing numerous rills from the mountain-chains on either side, and conveying to the Mediterranean a large body of water through gorges, which cut the coast-chain at right angles, near the famous cities of Seleucia and Tyre. The third river, the Jordan, starting from the south-western base of Hermon, has a course that is almost due south down the valley which separates Palestine proper from Peræa, and which may be considered roughly as a prolongation of the Cœle-Syrian “hollow,” for two degrees southward. It conveys to the Dead Sea the meltings of the snow-clad Hermon, together with the drainage of the hills forming Palestine and Peræa, the two chief tributaries being the Yarmuk, or Hieromax, and the Jabbok, or Zurka. The fourth stream, the Barada, has its origin in the rocky folds of Antilibanus, within which it collects its strength, and then cutting through the outermost ridge by a transverse gorge near Mezzeh, bursts out upon the Great Desert plain, across which it forces its way for a distance of above twenty miles, finally losing itself in two shallow lakes, the Bahretesh-Shurkiyeh and the Bahret el-Kibliyeh, in long. $36^{\circ} 35'$ E. nearly.

As moisture is the one and only condition of fertility in southern lands, so, naturally, the great rivers spread along their courses the richest and most abundant blessings. Thus the general fecundity of Syria culminates in the Buka'a, or Cœle-Syrian hollow, in the Orontes valley, in the Ghor or deep cleft watered by the lower Jordan, and the tract along the lower Barada, the Ghûtah of Damascus. It is with this last-named region that we have here especially to deal ; and after briefly summarizing its position with respect to Syria generally, we shall proceed to give, so far as we can, a minute and exact description of it.

The Ghûtah, or Plain of Damascus, lies then very nearly midway in the length of Syria, being only just included within the more southern moiety. So far, it has a central position ; but in another point of view, it is an outlying region. Syria is bounded on the east by the Great Desert, and the Ghûtah lies upon the desert's very verge, or may perhaps better be described as an oasis running into it. It is well protected on all sides. The two ranges of Libanus and Antilibanus guard it like lofty walls upon the west, while beyond them is the water barrier of the Mediterranean ;¹ the ramifications of Antilibanus are a triple defence to it upon the north ; the sand ocean of the Syrian desert affords it a protection better than that of either seas or mountains towards the east ; while on the south, the barren and rugged region of

¹ Stanley ("Sinai and Palestine," p. 113) observes that in ancient times "the Mediterranean was not the thoroughfare ; it was rather the boundary and the terror of the Eastern nations."

Trachonitis and Gaulanitis (El-Jaulân) is a tract difficult to traverse, and forms no contemptible bulwark against an enemy. Altogether, the Ghûtah of Damascus lies out of the natural route of conquerors and armies, which must go far out of their way, and overcome many and great obstacles in order to approach it. It is a secluded district, which conquerors might easily overlook, and which, if attacked, possesses great facilities for defending itself. At the same time it is placed so near many rich and fertile countries that in peace it readily communicates with them; it lies in the natural pathway of trade between the East and West, and it is even so little removed from the shortest lines of traffic between North and South as to be able to attract to itself, with a little effort, a fair share of the commerce of those regions.

The plain of the Ghûtah has an elevation of 2,200 feet above the sea-level.¹ Its general shape is triangular. Bounded towards the north-west by the outermost ridge of Antilibanus, which rises above it to the height of sixteen hundred feet,² it has on the south a barrier of low hills known as Jebel-el-Aswad, while on the east its limit is the great desert of Syria. The apex of the triangle is at Katana, near the eastern foot of Hermon; the base runs nearly north and south along the Nahr-el-Mukubrit, north of the Bahret-esh-Shurkiyeh, to Hijâneh, near the mouth of the Awaaj. The length of the north-western side is estimated at thirty-three miles; that of the southern

¹ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 26.

² Robinson's "Later Researches," p. 444.

at twenty-eight; the eastern, or base line, measures about seventeen.¹ The entire area is probably not much short of 240 square miles.² Midway in the plain is the great river. Springing from numerous fountains in the central parts of Antilibanus, the Nahr-Barada, already "deep and swift,"³ eats its way through the barrier of the great chain with a course which is nearly south-east, and, continually increased by fresh sources, bursts finally through the outermost ridge near Mezzeh, "a deep, broad, rushing mountain river."⁴ The natural course of the stream from this point seems to be due east; and, if left to itself, it would probably terminate in a single lake, somewhat deeper in the desert than the present Bahrets, but not perhaps at any great distance from them. Along its banks it would spread bright verdure and rich fertility. Where it flows at present, untouched by man, through the gorge of the Antilibanus, its course is marked by uninterrupted vegetation. While on either side rise the limestone or chalky mountains "absolutely bare, as sterile as the peaks of Sinai,"⁵ the river winds among them, "visible everywhere by its deep green zone,"⁶ "willows, poplars, hawthorn, walnut hanging over a rushing volume of crystal water,"⁷ and delighting the eye by a verdure the more charming from its contrast with the surrounding desolation. A similar rich growth must always have

¹ Porter, p. 26.

² Ibid.

³ Robinson, p. 485.

⁴ Ibid. p. 446.

⁵ Stanley "Sinai and Palestine," p. 401.

⁶ Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 616.

⁷ Stanley, *ut supra*.

accompanied the stream from the point where it quits the gorge along its course through the plain; if naturally it divided itself into different channels, then the vegetation would be more widely spread; the "zone" would become a broad oasis, an island of greenery in the midst of a parched region of rock and sand. Even apart from this, the dews and mists from the stream, spreading over the open space, together with the occasional inundations when the river was unusually swollen, would tend to create a broad tract, not a mere line, of verdure; and the Ghûtah would from the first have been a considerable, fertile region, irresistibly attracting settlers, and capable of supporting a numerous population.

In the course of time nature was largely assisted by art. In order to make full use of the natural advantages of the situation, it was seen that the waters must be spread beyond the limits to which they carried themselves. Canals were consequently made on either side of the stream, and the fertilizing fluid was scattered far and wide over the broad, flat, loamy plain. At present there are at least nine or ten main cuttings, three on the north, and the remainder on the south side of the river,¹ from which are derived innumerable smaller channels, and thus a network of canals is formed, covering almost the whole of the Ghûtah. The two largest branches are taken out of the river above the point where it issues from the Antilibanus, and brought along, side by side, on the

¹ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. pp. 27-8; Robinson, pp. 446-7.

left bank of the stream through the narrow chasm, beyond which they turn to the north-east, and carry their treasures to that portion of the oasis. A third quits the Barada a little to the east of Damascus, and supplies a number of villages in that quarter. On the south, three canals are taken out before the gorge is quitted, of which two are carried southward into the plain, while the third flows eastward through the city, which is also supplied by two other main cuttings. Below Damascus several smaller canals are led off towards the south and the south-east, and spread fertility in those directions. The result is the formation of a vast meadow (*Mery*), from five-and-twenty to thirty miles in circumference, the whole of which is richly productive, and may well be termed a "Paradise."

Thus far the fertility and beauty of the Ghûtah is traceable to the Barada ; but this, though the main, is not the sole cause of the extraordinary richness of the tract in question. Besides the Barada, a number of small streams and springs, flowing from Antilibanus, or bursting from its foot, contribute to the water-supply, and give fecundity to portions of the plain, to which the waters of the Barada could only with much difficulty be conveyed. Such are the stream, called in some maps ¹ the Barbar (Pharphar ?), which flows down from Kulat Jendal into the south-western extremity of the plain ; the fountain west of Katana, which "supplies the village, and is exhausted in the

¹ As in Kiepert's map at the close of Robinson's "Later Researches."

fields some distance beyond";¹ the source near Mar'aba in the Wady Helbon, which sends a stream down the gorge that separates Jebel Kasyûn from Jebel Kalamûn, watering the village of Burzeh, north of Damascus, and the tract below it; "the fine fountain" near Haeyir,² further to the eastward; and the considerable stream known as Nahr-el-Mukubrit, "the Sulphur River," though its waters are "sweet and good,"³ which passes through Maksurah, north of the Bahret-esh-Shurkiyeh, and is expended in irrigation soon afterwards. These various springs and sources all aid in fertilizing the Ghûtah along its north-western boundary, where the plain is the highest, and whither, consequently, there would be the greatest difficulty in conducting the waters of the Barada.

It is implied in the observation just made, that the plain of Damascus is not really a flat, but slopes somewhat. The declivity is in fact considerable, and is evidenced by the rapid rush of the water along the course of the river itself and in the main canals, which "babble" as they pursue their several paths,⁴ and seem to be in a hurry to reach their journey's end. The slope is such as to allow of a second and subordinate species of irrigation, whereby the oasis is yet further extended, and lands are brought under cultivation that must otherwise have been wholly barren. Below the soil irrigated from the open canals, subterranean channels are excavated, and the water which filters through is collected and made use of a second

¹ Robinson, p. 449; Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 321.

² Robinson, p. 448.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 459.

time, by conducting the fluid at the least practicable fall along the channels, until the natural slope of the plain allows it to be brought out once more upon the surface. Some of these subterranean aqueducts are more than a mile in length. They occur chiefly in the more southern and the more eastern parts of the plain.

The natural soil of the Ghûtah is a sandy loam,¹ not promising any very great fertility. But the growth and decay of many thousands of years have enriched it with a thick layer of vegetable mould, which has productive qualities that appear to be inexhaustible. With scant labour and with no artificial dressing heavy crops are produced of almost every kind, and the land seems equally fitted for the growth of grain, fruit, and flowers, for corn-fields, orchards, vineyards, olive-grounds, kitchen-gardens, and flower-gardens. In the remoter parts of the plain "all the various species of grain for the use of man or beast are raised in profusion."² Besides these, tobacco, cotton, flax, hemp, madder, ricinus, are successfully cultivated. Vegetables of all kinds are grown, and are "abundant and cheap."³ Of forest trees the principal are the palm, the plane, and the poplar. Planes grow to a great size; there is one within the bounds of the modern city, the stem of which measures forty feet in circumference. But the glory of the Ghûtah consists in its orchards and gardens, which extend for miles, and form a wilderness of scented verdure. Lemons

¹ Robinson's "Later Researches," p. 446.

² Ibid. p. 452.

³ Ibid.

oranges, and citrons, bearing fruit and flowers at once, delight the eye with their bright green foliage and their golden produce, while they fill the air with a delicious perfume that is sometimes almost overpowering.¹ Great apricot-trees are laden and bent down under strings of ripe, luscious fruit.² The blue haze of the olive contrasts well with the livelier verdure of the fig and walnut.³ Mulberries, vines, quinces, peaches, pear-trees, apple-trees, pistachios, almonds, hazels, plums, prunes, flourish on all sides, and for the most part bear abundantly; while beneath their shade the pomegranate and the oleander brighten the scene with their delicate blossoms. Damascus lies embosomed in a sea of varied foliage, "resting, like an island of Paradise, in the green enclosure of its beautiful gardens."⁴

The beauty of the Ghûtah, as has been already observed, is greatly enhanced by its contrast with the surrounding regions. The outer range of Antilibanus, which bounds the Ghûtah to the west and north, is singularly monotonous and uninteresting. Viewed from the plain, it stretches along the north-western horizon in a dull and almost unbroken line, "bare, grey, and flat-topped,"⁵ except for Jebel 'Tiniyeh, which, about midway in the ridge, rears above the crest of the hill a rounded summit. Nor does the

¹ Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 611.

² Ibid.

³ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 29.

⁴ Conybeare and Howson, "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," vol. i. p. 94.

⁵ Porter, "Handbook of Syria," p. 470.

interior of the range present any improvement on its external aspect. The traveller, who, quitting the Ghûtah, enters the nearest gorge of the Antilibanus, steps from an Eden into a desolate wilderness. "Not a tree," says one, "not a blade of grass, not a dwelling, not a sign of life relieved the drear monotony of the glaring chalk hills, as they glittered and fretted in the sunlight."¹ "The peaks of Sinai," remarks another, "are not more sterile than these Syrian ranges."² A large tract at the summit of the range, lying west and north-west of the Ghûtah, bears the ominous appellation of Es-Sahra, and is declared not only to deserve its title, but to be even "more dreary than its namesake."³ Naked and arid limestone hills, chasms deep, precipitous, and jagged, broad chalky plains, barren and uncultivated,⁴ characterize this district, which has no vegetation beyond a few "brown and scrubby plants," and no occupants but gazelles, bustards, and sand-grouse.⁵

The tract on which the Ghûtah abuts towards the east is even more desolate, and offers a more dreary monotony. The great lakes into which the Barada empties itself are wildernesses of tall waving reeds, the haunt of water-fowl and wild swine. But beyond them, all the country is during the greater part of the year utterly and entirely bare.⁶ The Syrian desert, in

¹ Tristram, p. 616.

² Stanley, p. 401.

³ Tristram, p. 611.

⁴ Robinson, pp. 439-441.

⁵ Tristram, pp. 611, 616.

⁶ In spring the plain has for a short time a carpet of flowers, and affords good pasturage.

its extremest sterility, begins where the waters end. A sandy slope, without tree or shrub, stretches for twelve or fifteen miles, unbroken by any elevation, from the eastern shores of the lakes towards the rising sun, terminating in a range of conical hills, also perfectly bare, which is known as El-Tellûl (the Tels), and which, in this quarter alone, interrupts the perfect uniformity of the prospect. Beyond the Tels, north, south, and east, all is absolutely flat and bare, a boundless, treeless, trackless plain of glaring sand, which extends as far as the eye can reach, and blends with the sky upon the horizon. A few ruins diversify the tract between the lakes and the Tels; but the plain beyond is wholly devoid of all sign of fixed habitations.

Towards the south, it must be admitted, the contrast is less sharp and decided. The boundary of the Ghûtah on this side, the Jebel-es-Aswad, is indeed sufficiently sterile, being composed of volcanic rock, hard and black; but this range does not extend to the foot of Hermon, and the south-western corner of the Damascene plain is continuous with a fairly fertile district, the valley of the Awaaj and its tributaries. The Awaaj itself enters the Damascene plain by a canal, and mingles its waters with those of the Barada near the large village of Muaddamiyeh, five miles S.S.E. of the city. Along its upper course and the courses of its tributaries are some tolerably productive districts. But still, on the whole, when the traveller proceeds southwards beyond the circle irrigated by the Barada, he finds himself at once in a very different region. Its general features are "for-

bidding and monotonous.”¹ Plains of volcanic origin, slightly undulating, with conical hills at intervals, and strewn with large boulders and fragments of basalt, meet his gaze on all sides, instead of the variously-coloured foliage, the gardens, orchards, and corn-fields of the Ghûtah. The Awaaj runs in a deep channel, far below the surface of the soil, and does not readily lend itself to the art of the irrigator. Thus, the slopes which extend from the base of Hermon eastward and south-eastward, are not improperly described as “barren uplands, stretching in dreary succession along the base of Antilibanus;”² and the country further to the south, the regions of Ituræa and Gaulanitis, are even bleaker and more sterile—broad wastes of rock and sand, bare, parched, and desolate.

The climate of the Damascene plain, like that of Syria generally, though unhealthy for Europeans, is one in which the natives delight. For the greater part of the year the sky is clear and cloudless, the heat of the sun fierce, and the temperature, even in the shade, high. But the heavy dews, which fall as soon as the sun sets, render the nights comparatively cool; and the fresh breezes which blow often from Antilibanus and from snowy Hermon temper the summer warmth even by day, and prevent it from being oppressive. When the heat is at the greatest, there is occasionally a thunderstorm, which refreshes the thirsty fields and considerably lowers the tempera-

¹ Porter, “Five Years in Damascus,” vol. i. p. 319.

² Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 94.

ture. In winter there is a good deal of "cold wind and drizzly rain";¹ but snow seldom falls, and, if it falls, still more seldom lies long on the ground. The spring comes early, and is simply delicious; all nature seems to rejoice that the cold season is past; the birds sing, the flowers open their delicate petals, the orchards burst into bloom, the hum of the bees fills the air; a uniform deep blue sky, or one dappled with light filmy clouds, promises that continuance of fine weather which is so rarely looked for in more temperate climes; and the promise is almost without fail followed by performance, an interruption of the fine weather during the spring and summer-time being regarded as a strange phenomenon. But these advantages are not without their drawbacks. Fever and ague lurk in the lovely meads and gardens when the dew comes stealing up, and the breeze blows cool through the walnut-trees; Oriental cholera is no unfrequent visitor, and occasionally the hot blast of the simoom sets in from the desert, withering flowers and herbage, smiting beasts with sickness, and causing men to experience a sense of languor and depression which makes life a misery and exertion a thing impossible.

All travellers agree that, from whatever side the Ghûtah is approached, the first view obtained of it strikes the beholder with admiration and astonishment. The ordinary, and perhaps the best, approach is from the gorge of the Barada. Here, as you near the end of the ravine, "a cleft opens in the rocky

¹ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. ii. p. 14.

hills¹ between two precipitous cliffs. Up the side of one of these cliffs the road winds; on the summit of the cliff there stands a ruined chapel. Through the arches of this chapel, from the very verge of the mountain-range, you look down on the plain of Damascus.



DAMASCUS FROM THE ANTILIBANUS.

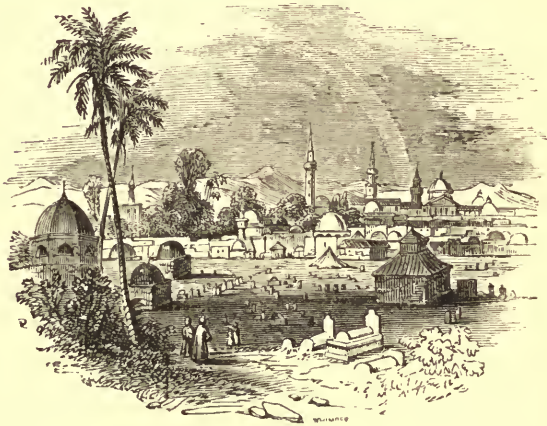
It is here seen in its widest and fullest perfection, with the visible explanation of the whole secret of its great and enduring charm—that which it must have had when it was the solitary seat of civilization in Syria, and which it will have so long as the world lasts. The

¹ This description is taken from Dean Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," where it occupies p. 402 of the first edition.

river is visible at the bottom, with its green banks, rushing through the cleft; it bursts forth, and as if in a moment scatters over the plain, through a circle of thirty miles, the same verdure which had hitherto been confined to its single channel. It is like the bursting of a shell—the eruption of a volcano, but an eruption, not of death, but of life. Far and wide in front extends the wide plain, its horizon bare, its lines of surrounding hills bare, all bare far away on the road to Palmyra and Bagdad. In the midst of this plain lies at your feet the vast lake or island of deep verdure, walnuts and apricots waving above, corn and grass below; and in the midst of this mass of foliage rises, striking out its white arms of streets hither and thither, and its white minarets above the trees which embosom them, the City of Damascus. On the right towers the snowy height of Hermon, overlooking the scene. Close behind are the sterile limestone mountains; so that you stand literally between the living and the dead. And the ruined arches of the ancient chapel, which serve as a centre and framework to the prospect and retrospect, still preserve the magnificent story which, whether truth or fiction, is well worthy of this sublime view. Here, hard by the sacred heights of Salahiyeh, consecrated by the caverns and tombs of a thousand Mussulman saints, the Prophet is said to have stood, whilst yet a camel-driver from Mecca, and, after gazing on the scene below, to have turned away without entering the city. “Man,” he said, “can have but one paradise, and my paradise is fixed above.”

From the plain the prospect is almost equally strik-

ing. With a carpet of the greenest grass and the loveliest flowers at his feet, with the sweet odour of roses, violets, and jasmine floating in the air, the traveller gazes with ever fresh delight on the thick wilderness of trees stretching before him for miles, the rounded tops of the walnuts and other fruit-trees contrasting well with the dark peaks of the cypresses, the silvery



DAMASCUS FROM THE PLAIN.

pinnacles of the poplars, and the feathery tufts of the palms; while here and there amid the foliage tall minarets lift their heads, or glittering roofs shine out from among the leaves like diamonds flashing among emeralds,¹ and ever through the verdant screen is

¹ Porter's "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 29.

seen the gleam of crystal streamlets and the play of fountains, while the air is musical with the hum of insects and the song of birds. Beyond the vast wilderness of trees, towards the west and north, stretches the long level line of the outer Antilibanus range, broken only by the one conical height of Jebel Tiniyeh, and forming a grey mass, against which the vivid green of the orchard forests shows brightly and pleasingly. In the extreme west, overlooking every part of the plain, and attracting the eye of every beholder, towers the huge snow-clad dome of Hermon, a never-failing refreshment, now sparkling in the mid-day heat, anon roseate in the sunset's flush, then pale and ghost-like as the sun sinks down,¹ and the short twilight of a Syrian evening settles upon the scene. The view delights, under whatever aspect of sky and clime it is contemplated; but perhaps the charm is greatest in the summer-time, and under the full bright glow of noon, when foliage and buildings, tall trees and cupolas and minarets, tremble and quiver in the sunbeams,² and the contrast is strongest between the scorched tracts around and the luxuriant leafage, the bubbling gushing waters, the plethora of fruit and flowers, in the oasis which they enclose.

¹ Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 602.

² Porter, vol. i. p. 29; Tristram, p. 616.

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY.

Antiquity of Damascus—Supposed founder and time of foundation—Claim of Damascus to be the “perennial city”—Original appearance and character of the place—The old features, in the main, still preserved—The walls—The citadel—The great temple—More particular description of them—Of the gymnasium and theatre—Of the streets and houses—General appearance of the city at the time of St. Paul’s visit.

A SITUATION like that described in the last chapter was not likely to remain very long unoccupied. In early times, when population was scanty, and primeval tribes or families of men perceived that

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest,¹

scarcely any but the best sites tempted them to exchange their wandering habits for fixed residences. The nomadic spirit had a strong hold on the hearts of our remote progenitors, and the charm of moving freely from place to place, and enjoying a constant succession of “fresh fields and pastures new,” was so sensibly felt, that only when some exceptionally attractive region was reached did the acquisitive instinct

¹ Milton, “Paradise Lost,” xii. 647-8.

show itself, and lead to the formation by a tribe or race of a permanent settlement. The *very* best sites did, however, exercise this influence early ; and Egypt, Susiana, Babylonia, "Syria of Damascus"¹ became at a remote era seats of fixed populations, presenting, as they did, to the wanderers a combination of charms and attractions which, it was felt, could scarcely be surpassed anywhere. Where men settled in any numbers, a town speedily grew up ; and Damascus can dispute the palm of antiquity with the most ancient of known cities,—with "Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar";² with Susa, whence Memnon led his thousands to Troy ;³ with On or Heliopolis, and Mennofer or Memphis, in the "land of Ham" ; or even with Teni, the city of Menes, where, at the very dawn of civilization, the first of the Pharaohs is said to have set up his rule over the Egyptians.⁴ It is sometimes claimed on behalf of Damascus that she is "*the oldest city in the world* ;"⁵ but this claim is exaggerated, or, at any rate, is one which it is impossible to substantiate. Babylon, and Ur, and Eridu, and Susa, and Memphis, and This, or Teni, are probably as old, and, perhaps, older ; so that all which can legitimately be said with respect to

¹ "Syria of Damascus" (*Aram Dammeseck*) is the name applied to the region about Damascus in the Bible. See 2 Sam. viii. 6 ; 1 Chron. xviii. 6.

² Gen. x. 10.

³ Diod. Sic. ii. 22 ; iv. 75 ; Strabo, xv. p. 1031 ; &c.

⁴ Manetho, ap. Euseb. Chron. Can. i.

⁵ Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 94 ; Robinson, p. 468 ; Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 291 ; Lewin, "Life and Writings of St. Paul," vol. i. p. 44.

Damascus is, that it is *among* the most ancient cities, *one* of the earliest places where mankind settled, and a town grew up, in days when the site of Jerusalem was a barren rock, that of Rome a marsh, those of Vienna, Paris, and London gloomy and almost impenetrable forests. What we know of the antiquity of the city is, that when Abraham was wandering with his flocks and herds over the green uplands of Palestine, and Chedor-laomer bore rule in Elam (or Susiana), and invaded Syria with his confederate kings, Damascus was already a city, and a place of some considerable repute, so that Abraham's steward was known to his contemporaries as "Eliezer of Damascus";¹ and another city, or village, Hobah, was considered to be identified by the description, that it was near Damascus, "on the left hand."²

One writer of some weight as an authority ventures to go further than this, and to state positively who was the founder of the city, and what was the time of its foundation. According to Josephus, Uz,³ the son of Aram, and the grandson of Shem, built Damascus in the fourth generation after Noah. But this story can scarcely rest upon any better ground than a vague floating tradition, such as those which ascribed the building of Rome to Romulus, of Athens to Theseus, and of London to Brute, the Trojan. It is, at least, doubtful whether Uz and Aram were intended by the writer of Genesis to represent persons, or were not rather in his mind the names of tribes or races whom he regarded as descendants of

¹ Gen. xv. 2.

² Ib. xiv. 15.

³ Ant. Jud. i. 6, § 4.

Shem. Even if they were persons, it is most improbable that authentic accounts of their actions, or of the actions of either of them, would have descended the stream of time in an unwritten shape for nearly three thousand years, to be first distinctly placed upon record by a Hellenistic Jew living under Domitian. We must, therefore, dismiss this tale as a mere fable, and fall back upon the historic fact, which is sufficiently established, that Damascus was a city of some importance in the days of Abraham, or almost four thousand years from the present date (1877).

With better reason, and a sounder historical criticism, has it been laid down that Damascus may claim, alone among the habitations of the earth, the proud title of "the perennial city."¹ While other towns have risen and fallen, "while Babylon is a heap in the desert, and Tyre a ruin on the shore,"² while Jerusalem has from time to time lain utterly desolate for years, or even centuries, while Nineveh, Memphis, Egyptian Thebes, "Ur, of the Chaldees,"³ are among the "waste places" of the earth,⁴ haunts of the owl and the jackal, Damascus is still what it always was, a great city—"the head of Syria"⁵—splendid, magnificent, a "city of praise,"⁶ and not only so, but scarcely from first to last has there been any interruption of its continuity, or any considerable break in its greatness.

¹ Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 136.

² Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 94.

³ Gen. xi. 28, 31; xv. 7.

⁴ Isaiah v. 17.

⁵ Ib. vii. 8.

⁶ Jer. xlix. 25: "How is the city of praise not left, the city of my joy."

It has, indeed, from time to time been taken, sacked, burnt, ruined—no fewer than twenty-three conquests, mostly following upon sieges, are on record—but it has never continued long unoccupied, or in a state of desolation. “The waves of many wars have rolled over it; the city and the plain have often been deluged with blood: but the traces of war and pillage have never long remained.”¹ The place has always risen quickly, like a Phœnix, from its ashes. Again and again does it re-appear in history after its destructions as powerful and magnificent as before; while Balbec, and Palmyra, and Tyre, and Sidon, and other Syrian towns of greatest note and name, moulder in decay, and even Antioch is a mere village of a few thousand inhabitants, Damascus still flourishes; Turkish misrule does not avail to keep it down: it is still a gem, “the pearl of cities;”² or, as the Emperor Julian termed it,³ “the eye of the whole East.”

It is impossible to describe with accuracy, or with any approach to accuracy, the appearance of the town when it was first built, or for many ages afterwards. The original settlers would construct, probably, huts of wattled reeds or underwood, smeared with mud, along the banks of the stream, and would guard them from attack by a palisade or a low earthen rampart. As time went on, the richer sort would wish for houses of greater convenience, and timber or stone would take the place of the rude materials which contented the

¹ Robinson, “Later Researches,” p. 468.

² Arab poets call Damascus “the Pearl of the East.” See Porter, “Five Years,” vol. ii. p. 342.

³ Ep. xxiv. (*ad Serapion*).

first comers. After a while the community would be sure to "desire a king,"¹ and the king would build himself a palace in the best and most commodious situation. The defences of the place would by degrees be enlarged and improved; a wall of stone would rise, and would be strengthened at intervals by towers; experience would show the advantage of a special stronghold within the circuit of the defences, and a "keep" or "citadel" would be formed as a last refuge in case of extremity.² Further, the need would be felt, sooner or later, of a building for purposes of religion; and at least one temple³ would be erected within the walls for worship, and most probably for sacrifice. Thus a town would have been formed possessing some variety of feature, and more or less of architectural pretension, and Damascus would have begun to wear an aspect not wholly unlike her present one. Tall white buildings⁴ would have shown above an environment of luxuriant foliage; for the abundant waters of the Barada must always have nourished thick groves of forest-trees. The city would have been more circumscribed, and more concentrated than it now is; but the general appearance would, perhaps, not have been very different.

On the whole, it would seem to be most probable

¹ 1 Sam. viii. 5; Acts xiii. 21.

² We see these "citadels" or "keeps" in almost all the representations of fortified towns in the Assyrian bas-reliefs. Jerusalem had one in the "Millo" of Solomon (1 Kings ix. 15).

³ See 2 Kings v. 18.

⁴ The limestone of the nearest range (Antilibanus) is very nearly white. See above, p. 14.

that, when the *enceinte* of the city was once completed in a solid and substantial way, it would retain without much alteration the shape and size given to it. The walls of Servius Tullius sufficed for Rome during a thousand years, from the sixth century B.C. to the reign of Honorius ; and it is far from improbable that the existing wall or rampart, which can be traced without interruption in a continuous line either outside or inside the modern Damascus, follows in the main the course laid down by the old Syrian builders, standing on foundations which are as ancient as the time of Tiglath-pileser, or even of David. It is always more easy to restore a wall by building it up from its old foundations than to begin an entirely new work, and erect fresh defences. Those who from time to time restored the walls of Damascus after it had lain waste for a short interval, would naturally have acted as Nehemiah did when he was allowed to rebuild Jerusalem, and have "repaired" the old wall.¹ Moreover, it is confidently stated that the existing wall shows in various parts the peculiar style of masonry which is characteristic of the era of Solomon, its stones exhibiting the same bevilled form² which is noticeable in those substructions of the Temple at Jerusalem now almost universally regarded as remnants of the original building. There is nothing improbable in the continued preservation of such massive stonework for twenty-nine centuries, since—to say nothing of the Pyramids—the substruc-

¹ Nehem. iii. 4-32.

² Robinson, "Later Researches," p. 461 ; Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 41.

tions of the Temple of Solomon have endured for the same long period, and many even of the brick buildings of Babylonia and Susiana are probably more ancient.

As the lines of the old walls would almost certainly have been preserved through all the various changes of owners and vicissitudes of fortune through which the town might pass, so it would be with the sites of the other main buildings. The place originally selected for the citadel would naturally be the best suited for the purpose ; and the defences erected upon it would add to its strength, and make its abandonment by any new comers less likely. The present "Castle" may, therefore, be regarded as, in all probability, the continuation of the old keep or citadel ; and it is important to note that the simplicity of its plan, the massiveness of its walls, and even the character of some parts of the actual masonry,¹ are in accordance with this view, and strongly support it. Again, the site of the great temple would not be likely to change. In antiquity, there was a general feeling that holiness belonged to particular spots, and that a place once consecrated to the service of the Deity could not again be desecrated, and made "common" ground without manifest impiety. The sanctuaries of religion, as they passed from race to race, were transferred from worship to worship, requiring generally but little alteration in order to accommodate the new cult. Indeed, in most cases the new cult was but a con-

¹ Robinson, p. 461. Porter (vol. i. p. 50) says that the foundations of the Castle are "certainly not later than the Roman age," but leaves it doubtful how much earlier they may be.

tinuance of the old under a fresh name, the conquerors themselves recognising the identity of their own god with the deity whom their coming dispossessed, and regarding Baal, Rimmon, Ra, Moloch, Mithra, Zeus, Jupiter, as local titles used to designate in different places one and the same divinity. Even Christianity, with all its specialism and exclusiveness, did not contravene the general practice, so far as buildings were concerned. As the nations were converted, the heathen temples for the most part became churches; since it was held that however much polluted by the old services, the new rites purified and consecrated them. Thus the great temple of an ancient city passed constantly from religion to religion, the building undergoing alterations from time to time, but the sites remaining always the same.

If the views which have been here maintained are allowed to be correct, it will follow that the existing Damascus may not only give us a fair general idea of the character and appearance of the ancient city, but that on careful examination it may yield to our research something like a distinct conception of the chief features of the place as it existed in St. Paul's day. The line of the old walls, as already observed,¹ may be traced; and we may thus obtain, at any rate, an exact knowledge of the position, size, and shape of the ancient town itself as distinct from its suburbs. It is uncertain whether there were any suburbs in St.

¹ See above, p. 28; and compare Porter, vol. i. pp. 40-55; and Robinson, pp. 461-2.

Paul's time ; if there were, they would assuredly have been detached from the walls, and, considering the troubled character of the times, would, probably, have been in ruins. The city may be considered apart from them.¹ It was an irregular polygon, lying along the river to the south, more than a mile in length from east to west, and in breadth, from north to south, nearly half a mile. The wall had battlemented towers, some of them round, and others square, at intervals along its course, the distance between the towers averaging about forty yards. It was pierced by some seven or eight gateways. From the East Gate, which was one of the principal entrances, the wall ran for a distance of 120 yards due south, after which it turned at an angle, and proceeded almost in a straight line for about 380 yards to a gateway (Bab-kisan), now walled up, near which, according to the modern Damascenes, St. Paul was let down from the wall by a basket. The direction of this portion of the wall was south-west by west. At Bab-kisan there was another, but a very slight change in the direction, which was for 350 yards only a very little to the south of west, and then for 500 yards west, and slightly north of west to the Bab-el-Saghîr, the great southern gateway. Beyond the Bab-el-Saghîr the line of the wall is a little irregular, but its general direction is north-west by west to the Bab-el-Jabyah, or main western entrance. This portion of its course measures about 500 yards. From

¹ The description which follows is taken almost entirely from that in Mr. Porter's "Five Years in Damascus," and from the excellent plan at the end of his first volume.

the Bab-el-Jabyah the wall runs north by west for 400 yards to the "Iron Gate," Bab-el-Hadîd, where it adjoins the south-western angle of the Castle, or citadel, which will be described presently. It starts again, after an interval estimated at 480 yards, from the Castle's north-eastern angle, and runs north-east for 50 yards or so to the Bab-el-Faraj, the most western of the four northern gateways. Hence it proceeds due east along the river course, passing the Bab-el-Faradis, to the Bab-es-Salâm, a distance of 600 yards; after which it trends a little southward, quitting the course of the stream, and running east, and slightly south of east to Bab-Tûma, "the Gate of Thomas." From the Bab-Tûma to the Bab-es-Salâm is, again, about 600 yards. After quitting the Bab-Tûma the wall runs on a very little south of east for 300 yards, when the north-eastern corner of the city is attained, and the line changes to south-east by east, and then to due south, in which direction it continues to the East Gate or Bab-esh-Shurkey. The distance from the north-eastern angle of the city to this gateway is about 320 yards. Thus the entire circumference of the old wall is 4,600 yards, or nearly two miles and three-quarters.¹ The area within the walls is between 300 and 350 acres.

It will have been seen by this description that the Castle or citadel of Damascus stands at the north-western angle of the ancient city. It is a rectangle or oblong square, 280 yards in its greatest length from

¹ Mr. Porter estimates the circumference roughly at three miles ("Five Years," vol. i. p. 137); but his plan and measurements together give the result stated in the text.

west to east, and 200 yards in breadth.¹ At present it consists of nothing but an open space, surrounded by a thick and lofty wall, which is strengthened at short intervals by large massive square towers. The number of the towers is fourteen, the longer sides of the building having each three, and the shorter each two towers, between the corner ones. The principal tower is that at the north-east angle, where the fortress joins on to the northern wall of the town. This tower is built of much larger stones,² and is altogether stronger and more massive, than the others. The enclosure is entered from the west by a gate midway in the western wall, leading into the suburb, and communicates with the city by a larger and finer gateway in the middle of the eastern wall. Until a comparatively recent period, we are told,³ the great quadrangle was occupied by buildings of much beauty, encompassing a spacious court, and including a grand council-chamber. These have now been all destroyed, and the interior "presents nothing to the eye but heaps of rubbish, covering the quadrangle, within ragged-looking walls."⁴ In ancient times, the space would almost certainly have contained buildings of some kind; possibly it was the site of the "palace," or residence of the chief ruler.

At no long distance from the castle, east of it and a little south, is the chief glory of the modern city, the Jamiá-el-Amwy, or Great Mosque of the Omei-

¹ See the description of Mr. Porter ("Five Years," vol. i pp. 50, 51).

² Robinson's "Later Researches," p. 461.

³ Porter, l. s. c.

⁴ Ibid.

yades. Here we are not left to conjecture, but are distinctly informed by writers,¹ and have unmistakable evidence from fact, that the modern building occupies the site of an old heathen temple of great magnificence—"a fabric similar in design to the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra, with spacious court and splendid colonnades"—which was undoubtedly the principal sacred building of Damascus at the time of the conversion of the Roman empire to the Christian faith,² and which had probably succeeded to that "house of Rimmon"³ wherein Benhadad worshipped, leaning on the hand of Naaman, and whereon Elisha's eyes must have rested when he was sent to anoint Hazael.⁴ A modern traveller⁵ has carefully examined the "great mosque," together with the streets and bazaars in its neighbourhood, and has obtained evidence which, if it does not enable us to reconstruct the entire plan and elevations of this great building, at any rate gives us an excellent general idea of its character and dimensions, and even furnishes some particulars of its ornamentation. The space occupied by the Temple and its courts was an area, as near as possible, 500 feet square.⁶ The main entrance lay towards the

¹ Especially Ibn Asâker, whose "History," written about A.D. 1150, is our best authority on the subject of the ancient town.

² Fergusson, "History of Architecture," vol. ii. p. 506.

³ 2 Kings v. 18.

⁴ Ib. viii. 7-15.

⁵ Mr. Porter. See his "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. pp. 68-71.

⁶ Mr. Fergusson says "450 feet square" ("History of Architecture," vol. ii. p. 605); but I gather from Mr. Porter's plan, which Mr. Fergusson does not appear to have seen, that the actual area was, as near as possible, a square of 500 feet.

south. Here, between the Temple and the town, was interposed an oblong court, 170 yards long by 62 wide, skirted on three sides—the east, the west, and the south—by a colonnade or cloister, resting on two rows of Corinthian pillars. Its area was, no doubt, for the most part, paved; but here and there the shade of trees and the play of fountains would, it is probable, have broken its uniformity. On the north side of the court, midway between its eastern and western limits, was the Naos or Temple itself, fronting southward, and entered from the court by an elegant triple gateway. This entrance still exists, and is thus described by Mr. Porter:—In the centre is “a spacious doorway, whose sides and top are richly ornamented with sculptured scrollwork and leaves, somewhat similar in design and execution to those in the great Temple at Baalbek. On either side of this doorway is a smaller one of similar workmanship. The circular top of that on the east can just be seen above the roof of the bazaar; but, by looking down a little opening to a chamber on the west, its fellow may be perceived entire. This magnificent portal is not in the centre of the [present] building.¹” The entire width of the entrance would seem to have been not less than about 70 feet, and the width of the Temple must consequently have been at least 100 feet. Its length may be set down as about double its width;²

¹ “Five Years,” vol. i. p. 70.

² The length of a Greek temple was almost always either a little more or a little less than twice the breadth. See Mr. Fergusson’s list of dimensions in his “History of Architecture,” vol. i. p. 248.

and its size would therefore have approached nearly to that of the Parthenon at Athens. It was, however, not of the Doric, but of the Corinthian order, which was generally preferred by the Seleucidæ, to whom its erection must be attributed. The beautiful form of the acanthus-leaf covered thickly the bell-shaped capitals, and produced that rich effect for which the Corinthian order is celebrated. It is impossible to determine anything with regard to the exact shape or internal arrangement of the temple, since its transformation into a Christian church, and then into a mosque, has entirely obliterated all the ancient features. We may assume, however, that the walls and ceiling were coloured in the agreeable way which was usual among the Greeks, and that a subdued light entered from the roof, either by means of a clerestory or a skylight.

Around the Naos or Temple, to the west, north, and east, was a second or inner court, separated from the outer court by a wall, which may have been screened by a colonnade. The dimensions of this court were 490 feet by 195 feet. It was surrounded by a covered walk or cloister, supported upon a single row of pillars. The approach to it was by two grand entrances opposite each other, and placed exactly midway in the eastern and western walls. These gates, which are now known respectively as the Bab-Jeirun and the Bab-el-Berîd, seem in their present condition to reveal but little of their ancient character.¹ It appears, however, that they were anciently

¹ Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 68.

approached down two long and grand colonnaded avenues, the one towards the west extending a distance of 60 yards, and that towards the east a distance of 120 yards, both avenues terminating towards the town in magnificent arches, which have been called "triumphal,"¹ but which scarcely seem to deserve that epithet. They were porches or entrances, corresponding to the propylæa of an Egyptian temple, which they more than equalled in height,² and greatly exceeded in beauty. The one towards the east was by far the grander of the two. It consisted of twelve noble columns of the Corinthian order, arranged in two rows of six each, and supporting an arched entablature. The diameter of the pillars exceeded five feet, which would imply a height of above 50 feet, and an extreme elevation to the entire structure of not much less than 90 feet. The western arch was of a simpler character: it was single, not double, being supported on a single row of pillars only, like the arch which gives entrance to the court-yard of Diocletian's palace at Spalatro.³ It resembled that archway in many respects, but was richer. The pediment was supported by two pillared piers at the extremities, besides four intermediate columns; and the frieze, cornice, and entablature were of remarkable beauty and delicacy. The entire width of the structure was 80 feet; its greatest elevation about 70 feet.⁴

¹ Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 60.

² Egyptian propylæa did not often much exceed 60 feet in height (Wilkinson, in Rawlinson's "Herodotus," vol. ii. p. 235, 3rd edition).

³ Fergusson, "History of Architecture," vol. i. p. 304.

⁴ Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 60.

Thus it would appear that the Grecian temple, which had succeeded to the old "house of Rimmon" at Damascus before the time of St. Paul, was, taken altogether, a most magnificent and a very peculiar building. Its central edifice was not unlike the ordinary structures which the Greeks erected for the worship of their gods; but its large colonnaded courts were Syrian rather than Grecian, and recall those wherewith Herod the Great, about fifty years before St. Paul's conversion, surrounded the Jewish temple at Jerusalem. Its grand archways and colonnaded avenues were either unique, or, if they had any parallel, reproduced the glories of Antioch, and were otherwise unknown in architecture. Its ornamentation combined richness with delicacy and good taste. Outside the walls of Antioch and Jerusalem, there was probably no grander building to be seen in Asia; certainly there was none grander in Syria, for the remarkable erections at Palmyra and Baalbek belong to a later era.

Besides the public buildings, whereof remains still exist, there were also several whose position cannot be fixed, but which the ancient city is known to have contained, from the notices of authors. Such were the synagogues, or places of worship frequented by the Jews, of which ancient Damascus had certainly more than one,¹ and which we may presume to have been edifices of some pretension.² Such, again, would be the fanes or shrines of the Syrian portion of the

¹ Acts ix. 20.

² A more particular account of the Jewish synagogues will be given in a later chapter.

population, who, though deprived of their old "house of Rimmon" by the Greeks,¹ as the Christians were of their "great Church of St. John" by the Moslems, must still have been allowed some structures in which to conduct the cult peculiar to them. We also know that the Damascus of St. Paul's day contained a gymnasium and a theatre, constructions wherewith Herod the Great, a magnificent beautifier even of foreign towns, had, about half a century before St. Paul's visit, adorned the Syrian capital.² The gymnasia of Herod's time were large enclosures, corresponding in a measure to our "people's parks" or public recreation-grounds, comprising walks, trees, and gardens, together with porticoes and baths, as well as palæstræ, or places for athletic exercise. That presented by Herod to the Damascenes was of such large dimensions that we hear of ten thousand persons being at one time confined in it.³ The natural fertility of the soil at Damascus, and the facilities for the introduction of water to any extent, must have tended to make its gymnasium one of the most charming in the world; fruits and flowers would strew their wealth around in the richest profusion; fountains would rise and fall, filling the air with their light spray and gentle murmur; dense masses of foliage would make an agreeable background, and offer to those heated with exercise the luxury of impenetrable shade. The snows of Hermon would perhaps be seen towering over all, adding depth to every tint of flower and fruit, of sky

¹ See above, p. 34.

² Joseph. "Bell. Jud." i. 21, § 11.

³ Ib. ii. 20, § 2.

and grass and tree, and seeming to diffuse around a grateful and refreshing coolness.

Of Herod's theatre at Damascus nothing is *known* but the fact of its existence. Perhaps we may assume that in the details of its construction it was not unlike those buildings which were erected for theatrical purposes under Roman influence soon afterwards in other cities of Syria. These were in all instances semi-circles, with a rectangular prolongation of greater or less extent below the semicircle. The rectangular projection formed the stage; in front of it, and on the same level, was the arena; skirting the arena in a semicircular sweep were ranges of stone seats, rising up tier over tier to the outer wall, which was either plain or ornamented internally by a colonnade supporting a roof, and forming a convenient passage. The seats were divided by flights of steps into sets, called *cunei*, or "wedges," which were sometimes as few as three, sometimes as many as nine. Where the ground was favourable, the usual practice was to hew the seats out of the solid rock in the side of a cliff, and thus to dispense with an outer wall, excepting towards the stage end of the structure. But in the flat plain of Damascus this would have been impossible, and the construction there employed would probably have more resembled that of the theatre at Bozrah, where the entire edifice is built of hewn stone, like the theatre at Orange,² and the outer wall rises everywhere to a height of fifty feet from the level of

¹ See Porter's "Five Years in Damascus," vol. ii. pp. 73, 97, 148.

² Fergusson, "History of Architecture," vol. i. p. 325.

the soil. Whether the "massive piers and groined arches, resembling those in the crypt of a cathedral,"¹ which form so remarkable a feature of the Bozrah building, were anticipated by Herod, it is impossible to say; but doubtless he took care to raise his theatre to such a height that the spectators might, as at Bozrah, at once enjoy the entertainment upon the stage and the magnificent prospect which even a slight elevation is sufficient to secure at almost any point within the magic circle of the Damascene *enccinte*. Neither the Greek nor the Roman theatres were ever roofed over; and the natural scenery, wherever tolerable, was always called in to compensate and eke out the deficiencies of scenic art upon the stage.

If we pass now from the public buildings to the streets and houses of the town, the first point for remark would seem to be the existence of the great street, called "Straight,"² which runs from east to west through the centre of the city in a direct line for above a mile. The street still exists, and bears among travellers the old name; but it has been miserably contracted by encroachments on the right hand and the left, and is now a narrow thoroughfare enclosed on either side by bare, unsightly walls, and "more resembles the bye-lane of a metropolis than its principal avenue."³ Anciently, however, the case was very different. As at Antioch, so here, this main street of the town was a broad noble highway, colonnaded throughout, and in its entire width ex-

¹ Porter, "Five Years," vol. ii. p. 146.

Acts ix. 11.

Lewin, "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," vol. i. p. 71.

tending above a hundred feet.¹ Four rows of Corinthian pillars, spaced at intervals of probably about seven feet, separated the highway into three grand avenues, the central one for foot passengers, those at either side used respectively for chariots and horsemen proceeding to the west and to the east.² A fine arch spanned it about the centre,³ at which point it was probably crossed by a second grand street⁴ leading northwards and southwards. It is not quite certain whether all the colonnades were roofed, but most probably a covering sheltered, at any rate, the central one ; so that foot passengers were protected from rain and sunshine in their movements through the city. At either end of the "Straight Street" a triple gateway⁵ gave access to the main avenue of the place, and formed an elegant termination to the long vistas of richly ornamented pillars.

The general appearance of the private houses, which, in Damascus, as elsewhere, must have for the most part bordered the streets, was, it is probable, mean and ugly. The historian of architecture notes the fact that even the exquisite taste of the Greeks did not prevent them from making their private dwellings, externally, repulsive and unsightly.⁶ In the East house-architecture has in all ages been con-

¹ Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 48.

² *Ib.* p. 47.

³ *Ib.* p. 57.

⁴ Compare the plan of Antioch (Conybeare and Howson, "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," vol. i. opp. p. 134).

⁵ A more particular description of the Eastern gateway, and a view of its present state, will be given further on.

⁶ Fergusson. "History of Architecture," vol. i. p. 368.

tent to aim at elegance in the interior of the buildings, and to leave their exterior almost wholly without decoration. The flat-topped one-storied houses of the present day, with their "framework of timber filled in with the clayey soil of the plain,"¹ or their "few



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courses of stone at the bottom" surmounted by a clay structure, are, it is probable, mere reproductions of the edifices, which for thousands of years have constituted the ordinary dwellings of the poor in all the towns of Western Asia. Occasionally the flat roof

¹ Robinson, "Later Researches," p. 455.

may have been replaced in Syria, as it was in Assyria,¹ by a small semi-spherical dome, and thus some variety may have been achieved ; but for the most part it would seem that the private houses of the Damascenes, whether of the poorer or the wealthier classes, were low buildings, without architectural adornment on the street side, though internally they sometimes boasted considerable beauty and magnificence. The arrangement of interiors will be considered in a later chapter. For the present it is enough to observe that the court was an essential feature of every dwelling, and that, as courts were sometimes on a large scale, permitting of the cultivation of trees and shrubs, an agreeable intermixture of foliage with buildings was seen throughout the city, the taller trees frequently overtopping the low flat roofs, and becoming conspicuous from a distance.

Can we, after this review of the various constituent elements of the town, obtain any distinct notion of its general appearance in St. Paul's time, and of how far it differed from, or resembled, that wonderful prospect which at the present day calls forth even from the staidest of modern travellers a burst of eloquent admiration? Such a notion may, we think, be formed. The town must have lain, as it does now, embosomed in a wilderness of gardens and orchards—the bright gleam of water must have been seen flashing through the trees²—the buildings must have

¹ See Rawlinson's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. i. p. 322, 2nd edition.

² The wide-spread irrigation was anterior to Pliny's time (A. D. 23-79), who notes that the river was *absorbed* in the tract lying about the city (compare Strabo, xvi. 2, § 16).

shone among them, white and glistening, with some considerable variety of height and character—turrets undoubtedly rose here and there high above the line of the walls,¹ and in places handsome gateways crowned by statues² broke their level uniformity—towards the east the heavy masses of the Castle reared themselves up, and looked down upon the surrounding dwelling-houses—on the site of the mosque of the Omeiyades could be seen the magnificent Corinthian temple, with its lofty pediment, probably painted and gilded; it may be ornamented with sculpture. Through the entire length of the town the colonnaded line of the “street called Straight”³ would have been traceable by means of its superior elevation; while north and south of it the perpetual horizontal lines must have been broken at intervals by the pedimented roofs of the loftier buildings, and the rounded or pointed tops of trees. Domes of a small diameter may also have occurred occasionally, and have afforded some variety of outline: but the chief architectural glories of the modern city were no doubt absent—no slender and lofty minarets threw up into the deep blue of heaven their “tongues of fire”—no majestic dome crowned any main building

¹ The walls of Herod's towers at Masadas rose to the height of 75 feet, when the altitude of the walls was only 18 feet (Joseph. “Bell. Jud.” vii. 8, § 3). The towers of his citadel at the same place attained an elevation of 90 feet.

² Ibn 'Asâker, the Arabian historian of Damascus, tells us that at the time of the Arab conquest a statue of Saturn surmounted the gate known now as Bab Kisan. See Porter's “Five Years,” vol. i. p. 42.

³ Acts ix. 11.

with a vast mass, peaceful and solemn—no gilded cupolas reflected the sun's rays, gleaming from amid the trees "like diamonds among emeralds."¹ The prospect was less dazzling, less astonishing, less like an enchanted or magic scene, than at present; but its general character was similar, and its beauty, perhaps, not much less. "The white buildings of the city gleamed then, as they do now, in the centre of a verdant, inexhaustible paradise. The Syrian gardens were the same then as they are now, with their low walls and water-wheels, and careless mixture of fruit and flowers."² The town itself was more concentrated, more uniform, less brilliant than now; but it may be questioned whether, even in St. Paul's day, there was any place upon the earth's surface, on which the eye of a traveller rested with more delight, when, by whatever road he made his approach, the white buildings in their green setting were first revealed to him.

In conclusion, we may notice the great variety in the architectural features which the town would have possessed at the time whereof we are speaking. Old Syrian buildings, dating from the age of Solomon, or of Ahab, may here and there have presented themselves to the spectator, venerable from their antiquity, though rude and slowly crumbling to decay. At least one Assyrian edifice was to be seen within a moderate distance of the walls, rearing its proud head aloft, as though it sought to emulate the neighbouring range of Antilibanus, and richly adorned with sculp-

¹ Porter, vol. i. p. 29.

² Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 96.

tures.¹ The Seleucid princes had covered the city far and wide with noble examples of what was in their day considered the perfection of Grecian architecture. The synagogues and other public buildings belonging to the Hebrew portion of the population had stamped upon them, it is probable, a special Jewish character. Finally, in the recent gifts of Herod,² and in works executed between B.C. 65 and A.D. 34, by prefects of Syria, there would be structures decidedly Roman, exhibiting, no doubt, the ordinary characteristics of the Roman style,—strength, grandeur, and solidity. Such a structure was, perhaps, the Eastern gate of the town, portions of which still remain, showing Roman mouldings and masonry of a good period. Altogether, the city must have been to students of architecture, had such existed at the period, a rich repertory of varied specimens of their art, while it could not fail to be more pleasing to the ordinary beholder from its picturesque variety.

¹ On the Assyrian mound at Salahiyah and its sculptures, see Porter in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1854, p. 679; and compare "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. pp. 383-4.

² See above, pp. 33-47.

CHAPTER III.

THE INHABITANTS.

Mixed character of the population of Damascus—Four races : Syrians, Jews, Greeks, and Romans—Divergences and approximations of the races, ethnically and socially—Tendency of the Greeks and Syrians to coalesce—Isolation of Jewish colonists generally—Special estrangement of the Damascene Jews from their Syrian fellow-townsmen—Nature of the Syrian religion—Probable Jewish “quarter” in Damascus—Organization of the Jewish community, civil and ecclesiastical—Organization of the Greco-Syrian community—Small size of the Roman element in Damascus—No organization of it—Number of casual visitors, large—Probable amount of the population—Division of employments, and feelings with which the different sections of the population regarded each other.

THE variety in the architecture of Damascus was the reflection and index of the mixed character of its inhabitants. Originally an Aramæan town, it embraced at all times a large Syrian element in its population ; and this element was, it is probable, down to the date of the Mohammedan conquest, in point of numbers the predominant one. An influx of Israelites began at a very early time ; for the “streets” which Benhadad allowed Ahab to build in Damascus,¹ represent most likely the formation of a “Hebrew quarter” in the town for purposes of trade and com-

¹ See I Kings xx. 34.

merce.¹ This colony, no doubt, received a reinforcement in the reign of Jeroboam II., when that monarch "recovered Damascus to Israel," as we read in the Second Book of Kings.² It may have been further augmented by the incoming of fresh immigrants from time to time subsequently, more especially under the Seleucidæ, who certainly settled Jews in many of the Syrian cities. At any rate, it is clear, even from the narrative of the Acts, that at the date of St. Paul's visit the Jewish element in the population was considerable ;³ and, on the whole, there is perhaps no reason to misdoubt the calculation of Josephus, who estimates the adult males soon after this period at ten thousand.⁴ A third class of the original inhabitants, and a very important one, consisted of Greeks, who, having been introduced by the Seleucid princes, and having enjoyed the position of the dominant section from the time of Seleucus Nicator to that of Pompey, must still, even after the Roman conquest, have constituted a large element, and one of great influence. Finally, there would, no doubt, have been after Pompey's Oriental triumphs a gradual infusion of Romans into the community ; governmental duties would have brought some, the delights of the climate and situation would have attracted others, a few may have come with a view to trade ; the number of persons thus brought into the city would probably

¹ So Milman, "History of the Jews," vol. i. p. 349.

² Chap. xiv. 28.

³ They were, at any rate, numerous enough to have several "synagogues" (Acts ix. 2, 20).

⁴ "Bell. Jud." ii. 20, § 2.

have been small, but they would have an importance very much in excess of their numbers ; they would represent "the lords of the earth,"¹ and constitute something like a clique, too proud to have much intercourse with their fellow-townsmen.

The four nations of which the Damascene community was thus, in the main, composed, were not separated each from each, either ethnically or socially, by equally sharp lines of demarcation. Ethnically, two of them were Semitic, two Aryan. In language and physical characteristics the Jews and the Syrians—Semitic races—approached each other ; they spoke either the same tongue or dialects very nearly allied ; they were branches of the same stock, and had, it is probable, a very similar physiognomy. The Greeks and Romans were also allied in race ; differing widely in language and physical type from the Syrians and the Jews, they had with each other many points of resemblance ; but the resemblance was in no respect a very close one. Socially, the approximation was greatest between the Greeks and Syrians. It would seem that the Greek settlers, who, under the auspices of Alexander and his successors, quitted their homes in Europe, and transplanted themselves into Western Asia, were from the first unable to resist the seduction of Oriental manners and ideas. While they succeeded to a great extent in impressing their language on the subject-nations, who became either actually Hellenic in tongue or at any rate bi-lingual, a counter-influence was exercised upon themselves, and they slid very

¹ Virg. *Æn.* i. 282.

generally into Asiatic habits, modes of thought, and even forms of worship. The "Orontes," which Juvenal accuses of polluting the Tiber in his day,¹ pours into the Roman capital, not a Greek, but a Syrian corruption. A secret attraction drew the Greeks and Syrians together; and though the approximation of the two races, one to the other, did not proceed, either at Damascus or elsewhere, to the extent of a fusion, yet it was a real thing, and had important effects. It removed all ill-will, and promoted intercourse between the races; it made them politically at one; it obliterated social distinctions; it reduced, if it did not remove, the elements of discord previously existing in the community; it made the task of government less difficult, and the continued prosperity of the city more likely.

With this kindly attitude of the Greek and Syrian races towards each other, that of the Jews towards both stood in remarkable contrast. Jewish colonists, to whatever country they removed, and however long they continued settled in one place, held themselves aloof from those with whom they came into contact, and formed a community within the community. "The Jew," it has been well said, "neither conquered, nor colonized, nor civilized. He intruded himself silently and pertinaciously into every known quarter of the globe; and no one could say wherefore he came, or what was the object of his sojourn. His presence in foreign lands was marked by no peculiar aim or mission. He cultivated neither literature nor

¹ Juv. Sat. iii. 62.

art, nor even commerce on a great scale, or as a national pursuit. He subsisted for the most part by the exercise of active industry in petty dealings, evaded as much as he could the public burdens of the natives among whom he dwelt, while their privileges he neither sought nor coveted, and distinguished himself alike in every quarter, under every form of government, and in the midst of every social system, by rigid adherence to the forms of an obscure and exclusive creed."¹ The Jew would have no intercourse with his alien neighbours except for trading purposes; he would neither intermarry with them nor take his meals with them, nor attend their places of education, nor join in their amusements, nor take part in their political gatherings, nor buy his meat in their markets, nor exchange a greeting with them except sullenly.² Much less would he consent to any religious communion. Every grove, every temple, every place where worship was offered to a god whom he could not distinctly identify with his own God, was an abomination to him. He viewed the heathen as altogether given up to atheism or idolatry. It was his object to keep himself pure, so far as he possibly could, from all ceremonial, as well as from all moral

¹ Merivale, "Roman Empire," vol. iii. p. 361.

² The well-known words which our great poet puts into the mouth of Shylock ("I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you," and so following; "but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you," *Merchant of Venice*, act i. scene 3), well express the general Jewish practice anciently. In recent times, and in some countries, the exclusiveness has been much modified.

pollution; and for this purpose it was necessary that he should separate himself as completely as he could from those of another religion. Hence the jealous, exclusive, isolation in which the Jewish colonists stood in all the heathen cities where they had formed settlements; and hence the hatred in which they were so generally held, and the persecutions from which they so frequently suffered.

It is certain that the Damascene Jews formed no exception to this general rule. Everywhere, we are told,¹ throughout Syria "hatred" was the feeling which reigned permanently between the two great sections of the city populations—the Jews on the one hand, and the combined Greeks and Syrians on the other. This animosity from time to time broke out into actual conflict; each city was, in turn, divided into two hostile camps—dreadful havoc was committed by either party on the other—"the great object was to anticipate the work of carnage, the days were passed in mutual slaughter, the nights in mutual dread."² At Damascus there had not been as yet any such outbreak—it was reserved for a later date—for the year made memorable for ever by the martyrdom of the great Apostle.³ But the state of feeling out of which actual conflict could arise must have existed for a long time previously, and we can scarcely be wrong in supposing that at Damascus its development was prior to the date of St. Paul's visit—

¹ Josephus, "B. J." ii. 18, § 2.

² Milman, "History of the Jews," vol. ii. p. 197.

³ Ibid., p. 215, note; and compare Josephus, "B. J." ii. 20, § 2.

more especially as the causes had been long at work which would naturally lead to it. We have noted the jealous, exclusive spirit of Hebrew colonisation generally. In Syria, and in Damascus especially, as more a Syrian than a Greek city, this spirit would be intensified by the strong antagonism in which the two races had so long stood to each other, by the memory of past injuries mutually inflicted and suffered,¹ by the existence in the sacred books dear to the Jews of prophetic denunciations of Damascus, as one of their chief enemies,² and above all by the actual character of the Syrian religion, which consisted in rites and practices that a Jew could not but regard with the utmost abhorrence and detestation.

It is difficult to describe these rites and practices in terms which can be written without shame or read without a blush. The Syrians worshipped two deities only, one male and the other female, whom the initiated regarded as personifications of the productive powers of nature. These were Baal, sometimes called Melkarth, or "City-king," the representative of the generative power in nature; and Ashtoreth, or Astarte, the representative of the conceptive power. The worship of these two deities, as practised by the Syrians, involved two things, which the religious Jew could not but loathe and abominate, the offering of human sacrifices, and the duty of unchastity. We have no direct evidence of what was done in the

¹ 2 Sam. viii. 5; 1 Kings xx. 1-34; xxii. 29-35; 2 Kings vi. 8-29; vii. 1-16; viii. 28, 29; x. 32; xiii. 3-7; 22-25; xiv. 28; xvi. 5-9; Isaiah vii. 1-9, &c.

² Isaiah xvii. 1-3; Jer. xlix. 23-27; Amos i. 3-5.

religious gatherings at Damascus; but at Hierapolis, the religious metropolis of Syria, at the spring-festival, called "the feast of torches," children were sacrificed, being "put into a leathern bag and thrown the whole height of the temple to the bottom, with the shocking expression that they were calves, and not children."¹ At Edessa and Harran, the last places where the Syrian worship lingered, "part of the secret rite consisted of the sacrifice of a new-born child, the flesh of which, after it had been put to death, was soft-boiled, and then mixed with meal and different vegetables; in this state it was made into cakes, which served the initiated, the year through, as a kind of infernal communion."² Everywhere, in the cult of Baal, it was usual for parents to offer their own sons to the god as burnt-offerings, a process which was called "passing them through the fire to him."³ Occasionally, the sanguinary rites stopped short of actual immolation, the deity being regarded as sufficiently propitiated by means of wounds and bloodshed. The devotees of the Syrian goddess scourged themselves in her honour, and working themselves up to frenzy by the stimulus of a maddening dance, bit their own arms, and hacked themselves with their swords to obtain her favour.⁴ The priests of Baal, when earnestly desirous of moving him to grant their prayers, "cut themselves with knives

¹ See Döllinger's "Jew and Gentile," vol. i. p. 430 (Darnell's translation).

² Ibid. p. 434.

³ Jer. xxxii. 35, compared with xix. 5. On the identity of Baal with Moloch, see the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 608.

⁴ Döllinger, p. 431.

and lancets.”¹ Self-mutilation was a pious practice ; and the portion of the body cut off was among the most acceptable of all possible offerings.

The duty of unchastity was pertinaciously inculcated. Indecent emblems decorated the courts of temples. In the sacred legends, acts of the most degrading character were ascribed to Astarte herself. The priests allowed and encouraged the pollution of the temples by the foulest sins at the greater festivals, and even on other occasions. Not mere ordinary unchastity, but even unnatural vice was indulged in under the sanction of religion. The temple at Aphaca in Lebanon was, according to Eusebius,² “ a place of evil-doing for such as chose to ruin their bodies in scandalous ways.” Impurity of every kind, shameful and degrading deeds were committed there openly, no law or custom forbidding them, and no honourable or decent person being to be found within the temple enclosure. Even at Antioch, where the Greek element so much preponderated over the Syrian, and the worship was, properly speaking, Greek, modified slightly by contact with native cults, religion was connected with extreme licentiousness, and Daphné (the sacred precinct) was proverbial for lascivious festivals, unbridled debauchery, and unnatural vices, which were all regarded as conducing to the glory of the deities there worshipped.³ If such was the result of Syrian influence being brought to bear on Greek worship, which was (externally at any rate) for

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 28.

² Vit. Constantin. iii. 56.

³ Libanius, xi. 456, 555 ; cxi. 333.

the most part decent and becoming, what must have been the cult itself which thus infected another ?

With a people whose rites were of the character above described, the Jews, if they were bent on continuing Jews, could have no sympathies, and but little intercourse. It is not absolutely certain that in the time of St. Paul they occupied a special "quarter" at Damascus ; but the probabilities lean strongly in that direction. We are expressly told that the Jews inhabited a portion of the city, especially assigned to them—*i.e.* a "quarter"—at Alexandria ;¹ and there is reason to believe that the case was the same at Babylon, Seleucia, and Antioch. In Damascus, where they had probably had a "quarter" in the remote times of the old Syrian kingdom,² they had perhaps never ceased to possess one ; at any rate, the antagonism which existed between them and their fellow-townsmen would lead to their congregating together, as they do even now in many European towns, and so a "quarter" would be created, though there might be no legal assignment.

Whether this were so or no, we may be sure that the Jewish population at Damascus, as elsewhere, formed a distinct and separate community. To attain this position was the earnest endeavour of the Jewish colonists in every city where they settled ; and both the Seleucid princes and the Romans were perfectly willing to concede it to them. "In each town of any size they constituted a *politeuma*, *i.e.*, an organized community with a large body of *gerontes* (senators), a

¹ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xiv. 7, § 2.

² See above, p. 48.

smaller number of *archons* (executive officers), and a chief who, in a country of importance, might even bear the title and dignity of an *ethnarch*, or national prince."¹ We do not know how the senators were appointed; but they constituted a deliberative body, which took into consideration all matters of general interest to the Jewish community of the place, especially such as related to property and taxation, and passed resolutions which had the force of laws so far as members of their own nation were concerned. The archons were magistrates charged with the execution of the decrees passed by the senators, and acting probably as judges in all causes to which Jews only were parties. The ethnarch, genarch, or alabarch,² was the chief of the archons, and the special medium of communication with the chief magistrate, or magistrates, of other sections of the town's population, and with the supreme authority, whatever it might be, which the town acknowledged. Thus the Jews everywhere, and, no doubt, at Damascus, apportioned among themselves the amount of taxation which they had to pay, administered law and justice among themselves, had their own machinery for local government, their own magistrates, tax-collectors, constables, &c., and their own chief ruler and protector, who was responsible only to the governor for the

¹ Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 242 (Carpenter's translation).

² Ethnarch is the usual title. Philo (in "Flaccum") uses the term "genarch." "Alabarch" seems to have been peculiar to Alexandria (Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xviii. 6, § 3; 8, § 1; xix. 5, § 1, &c.).

time being, the person deputed to represent the supreme authority. They must also have possessed public buildings, as a court-house, a senate-house, and, perhaps, a residence for their ethnarch, who would be bound to vie in state and splendour with the other chief authorities of the place.

The organization of the community, thus far, was wholly civil; but there was also an ecclesiastical organization. Ecclesiastically, the foreign Jews, wherever dispersed (unless it were those of Egypt) acknowledged their dependance on the hierarchy which had its seat at Jerusalem. The position of the High-Priest and Sanhedrin in the Jewish system of this period has been likened with reason to that of the Pope and Cardinals in the Roman Catholic communion.¹ The High-Priest and Sanhedrin "kept watch over the remotest Judæans to counteract the dangers to which every Judæan element was exposed, of evaporating when it was so widely dispersed."² All Jewish communities admitted the right of the Jerusalem hierarchy to superintend, to direct, to issue mandates in religious matters. All looked to Jerusalem as their religious centre, and recognised the high-priest as their ecclesiastical head. But this was not the whole. A religious bond connected all Jews with Jerusalem, which is without any parallel in the Roman Catholic system. In the Jewish world there was but one true "House of God"³—one place

¹ Lewin, "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," vol. i. p. 52.

² Ewald, vol. v. p. 243.

³ The synagogues are called "houses of God" in Ps. lxxiv. 8; but it is in a secondary sense.

where sacrifice could be offered, one shrine whereto must be brought the offerings and gifts of all descriptions required by the law. If St. Peter's, at Rome, were the sole Roman Catholic Church in Christendom, and all Roman Catholics must send their offerings thither, and from time to time go there on pilgrimage, the parallel would be pretty nearly complete. As it was, the dependance of the foreign Jews on Jerusalem was far greater than that of the Roman communion on Rome. All Israelites were bound by the law to appear in person at Jerusalem three times in the year;¹ and though natural reason was called in to modify this requirement, when the domicile was remote, yet the obligation of, from time to time, repairing to the sacred capital at the greater festivals was sensibly felt, and few Jews ventured to live and die without at least one pilgrimage to Jerusalem. From places as near the Holy City as Damascus many would go up frequently, and the connection of the Damascene Jews with the hierarchy that ruled at Jerusalem would thus be especially close. Its authority would naturally extend not merely to things but to persons; the conduct of individuals would be observed; and, if need were, they would be arrested, and taken to Jerusalem for trial. Again, in respect of pecuniary matters, the analogy of which we have been speaking holds; but once more the tie is closer, the obligation greater, in the Jewish than in the Roman Catholic system. A sacred treasury exists, and has for ages existed at Rome, and it is continually

¹ Exod. xxiii. 14; xxxiv. 23; Deut. xvi. 16.

replenished by offerings from the faithful throughout the world. But the contribution known as "Peter's pence" has never been universal, nor constant, nor individually obligatory; and the treasury depends almost wholly on free-will gifts, the spontaneous fruit of special zeal and devotion. It was otherwise in the sacred polity of the Jews. There, every adult male was required under pain of excommunication to contribute annually to the support of the sanctuary of Jerusalem the sum of half a shekel¹; equivalent to about two days' wages. He was also expected to make annually a further gift of the nature of a thank-offering, the amount of which was left to his discretion, though he was morally bound to see that it was proportional to his means. The collection of the tax and offerings required special officers; the storing of them required a treasury and a treasurer; for their transmission to Jerusalem other officers² were needed. Further, although the Temple worship was the essence and core of every Jew's religion, each individual feeling that there was no other expiation of his sins but that effected by the sacrifices of the Temple service, yet the religious instinct could not be satisfied without something more; and the Jews of the Dispersion everywhere instituted "prayer-houses"³ or "synagogues,"⁴ where the faithful might

¹ Lewin, vol. i. p. 45.

² Called *Hieropompi* (Ewald, vol. v. p. 244).

³ See Acts xvi. 16; Josephus, "Vit." § 54.

⁴ "Synagogue" was originally the assembly; but it came to be used afterwards of the place of meeting (Ewald, vol. v. p. 243, note).

meet, at least on every Sabbath-day, for prayer, praise, and religious instruction. Here, again, was need for a sacred organization; each synagogue required its "ruler";¹ each ruler needed the support of something like a "council"; and the synagogue service necessitated the appointment of "readers" and "interpreters." Where, as at Damascus, there were many synagogues in a place, we have no evidence of any further organization, of any union of the different "rulers" into a single body, much less of their subordination to a local head. Apparently, the "rulers" were all of equal authority, like the incumbents of separate parishes in an English town; they acted independently of each other, and acknowledged no superior but the high-priest of the entire Jewish nation. The ecclesiastical organization was thus considerably different from the civil; there was no sacred officer who corresponded to the ethnarch; the various rulers of the synagogues did not form an ecclesiastical council; while civilly the Jewish community in such a city as Damascus governed itself, ecclesiastically it was administered and directed from the great national centre, Jerusalem.

The organization of the Greco-Syrian community, which in Damascus stood over against the Jewish, is less well-known to us. It seems, on the whole, probable that its two elements, the Hellenic and the Syrian, were sufficiently united to form a single body for municipal purposes, that they had a single chief magistrate — most likely an ethnarch, a single

¹ Acts xviii. 8, 17, &c.

council, or senate, and a single mixed assembly. Such a state of things prevailed certainly in other Syrian cities; and the absence of any indication to the contrary from the notices which have come down to us respecting Damascus is in favour of the view, that that city did not form an exception to the usual rule. Elsewhere, as at Alexandria,¹ at Seleucia upon the Tigris,² and at Ctesiphon,³ where three distinct organizations existed side by side, a Greek, a Jewish, and a native one, we have sufficient evidence of the triplicity. In default of any such evidence as regards Damascus, it is allowable to assume that there, politically at any rate, the organizations were but two.

In religion, an actual amalgamation is not so probable. While the cults of both nations were, no doubt, to some extent affected by their contact, and the religion of the Greeks especially was modified by Asiatic influences, there are likely to have been Syrians whose attachment to their ancestral rites was sufficiently strong to enable them to resist all foreign influence, and to retain their old cult unaltered. The ancient worship certainly remained in parts of Syria beyond the age of Lucian⁴ (A.D. 150-200); and it would probably continue on at Damascus as late as in most other places. We may therefore assume that in Damascus the Syrians and Greeks, though politically united, had separate religious organizations;

¹ See Josephus, "c. Ap.," ii. 6; Philo, "in Flacc." p. 976; Strabo, xvii. 1, § 6, &c.

² Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xviii. 9, § 9.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Lucian, "De Dea Syra," *passim*.

the exact character of which we are, however, unable to trace. Nothing more seems to be known than this, that the Greeks had certain religious officers, called *Hierotamiæ*, or "Sacred Treasurers," whose position was one of importance, since their names were used in public documents to fix the date of occurrences.¹ Probably they had the custody of the sacred treasury, attached to the Great Temple which has been described in a former chapter.²

The Roman element in Damascus, as already observed, is likely to have been small; but the Roman "resided wherever he conquered";³ and though Antioch was no doubt the Syrian town which had most attractions for him, yet "the pearl of the East" could not but have drawn to itself a share of his regards. The Roman system of government involved the spread over all the provinces of an army of *publicani*, or "tax-gatherers," the subordinate members of which might be natives,⁴ but whose main directors and administrators were always Romans. Romans probably superintended any public works that might be executed, as roads, walls, bridges, and the like, works which were nowhere omitted, and which, alike in Europe, Asia, and Africa, mark the limits of the Roman occupation. It is further quite possible that at the time of St. Paul's coming there was in Damascus a body of Roman soldiers. Strabo, writing not long previously,

¹ Boeckh, "Corp. Inscript." vol. iii. p. 238.

² See above, pp. 33-37.

³ The remark is Seneca's ("Ad Helviam," 6). It has been often quoted. (See Merivale, "Roman Empire," vol. iii. p. 360; De Champagny, "Les Césars," vol. ii. p. 328, &c.)

⁴ As St. Matthew (Matt. ix. 9).

speaks of the Damascenes as protected from the robbers of the neighbourhood by Roman troops ;¹ and though he does not expressly say that these troops were quartered in Damascus, it is reasonable to suppose that they would be stationed in the town which they had to defend. Even apart from this, it would scarcely be likely that a place of such importance as Damascus, and one so peculiarly situated, would be left wholly without a Roman garrison. A small trading element, and a still smaller number of pleasure-seekers, have to be added, in order to complete the tale of Roman inhabitants. It is evident that, taking all these classes into account, the entire number would still not be large. The soldiers might be a few hundreds ; but the officials, the traders, and the men of leisure would, in the aggregate, perhaps scarcely amount to so many.

The nature of the Roman element in Damascus, combined with its small size, prevented there being any need of its having a municipal organization. The soldiers formed, of course, a body apart, living under strict discipline, and being wholly and solely amenable to their commanders. The officials had their respective spheres, and representing in those spheres the supreme authority, would have nothing to fear from Greek, Jew, or Syrian. The trading and pleasure-seeking classes were not numerous enough to constitute bodies ; they had the protection of the Roman name, and, like the Turks in Damascus at the present day, were secure from any ill-treatment

¹ Geograph. xvi. 2, § 20.

themselves, while they could indulge themselves without much risk in the luxury of ill-treating others. Still, of course, they were amenable to the Roman Governor, the Prefect of Syria; and when he held his *conventus*, or assize, at Damascus, they could be summoned before him by any one who had a complaint against them, and would be judged at his tribunal.

In addition to the four main elements in the population of Damascus, which have been hitherto considered, there was also a floating mass, at one time larger, at another smaller, of foreign visitors. Damascus has been at all times a great commercial centre, and caravans of traders from various quarters must in every age have been attracted to it. The same curious medley of costumes and physiognomies which greets the eye of the traveller at the present day as he wanders through the streets and bazaars¹ must have presented itself to notice in St. Paul's time. Bedouins from the Desert, traders from Palmyra and Babylon, thieves from Lebanon, Arab merchants with their precious wares from the spice country, Egyptians, Edomites, Phœnicians, Armenians, perhaps even Indians and Chinese, jostled one another in the squares and streets; camels, asses, mules, horses blocked the way; a Babel of languages was heard; besides the Roman soldiers and officials, the supple Syrians, the courteous Greeks, and the solemn, if not sullen, Hebrews, who formed the main elements in the crowd, some representatives of almost every known country would have been seen in it, conspicuous by complexion

¹ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 30.

or feature, by peculiarities of gait and gesture, or by the strangeness and richness of their attire. What Tyre had been in its palmy days, when Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, the house of Togarmah, the men of Dedan, and Syria, and Israel, the princes of Kedar, the merchants of Sheba and Raamah, of Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, and Asshur, and Chilmad met in its fairs, such Damascus became after Tyre was ruined by Alexander—the mart of Syria, scarcely second in this respect even to Antioch; and, as such, we may apply to it, *mutatis mutandis*, the description given of Tyre in Ezekiel, and regard the number and variety of its foreign visitors as scarcely exceeded by the mixed multitude always to be found in the earlier times within the circuit of the Phœnician city.

It is difficult to estimate with anything like accuracy the amount of the Damascene population. Orientals have in general very vague ideas of number; and though the Romans, when they conquered Damascus, would probably have made an exact census,² unfortunately no Roman statement on the subject has reached our time. Josephus, the Jew, is the only writer who gives us any information from which to form a definite opinion, and his notices are very incomplete, and not only incomplete, but contradictory. He tells us in one place³ that the adult male Jews in Damascus numbered 10,000; in another,⁴ speaking of identically the same time, that they were 18,000. The former estimate would imply a Jewish popula-

¹ Ezek. xxvii. 13-23.

² As they did in Judæa (Luke ii. 1-4).

³ "Bell. Jud." ii. 20, § 2.

⁴ Ibid. vii. 8, § 7.

tion of 40,000; the latter of 72,000. We can scarcely be wrong in preferring the lower figure. It is not unlikely that even this lesser estimate is in excess of the truth, for Josephus is greatly given to exaggeration in respect of number; but as we have no other statement on the subject, and as the estimate is not incredible, it seems best to adopt it. Taking this as a basis, we may form a reasonable conjecture with respect to the Greco-Syrian element, which appears by the narrative of Josephus to have been so largely in excess of the Jewish¹ that, if the Jews were 40,000, we cannot estimate it at less than 80,000. As the Syrians were the old inhabitants, and the Greeks mere immigrants, the former must certainly have preponderated. It may be suspected that they preponderated considerably, perhaps in the proportion of three to one. If we take this view, we may say that the Syrians probably numbered about 60,000, the Jews 40,000, and the Greeks 20,000.² The Romans might perhaps be about 1,000, and the average number of the foreign visitors at any given time from 1,000 to 2,000. This would give a total population of 122,000 or 123,000. The population at the present time is estimated at about 150,000.³

In conclusion, we may consider briefly how these various sections of the population would severally be

¹ The Jews could not have allowed themselves to be, one and all, arrested, and confined in the gymnasium, without offering any resistance, unless they had been very greatly outnumbered.

² These numbers must, of course, be taken as merely approximate.

³ Porter, "Five Years," vol. i. p. 137.

employed, and with what feelings they would regard each other. The Roman officials would watch over the preservation of order, collect the taxes from the Greco-Syrians, and receive them from the Jewish collector, or perhaps from the ethnarch, remit them to the Prefect of Syria at Antioch, and maintain constant communication with him, judge causes between men of their own nation, or between Romans and non-Romans, and otherwise exercise a general supervision over all classes, and a paramount authority. They would be fully convinced of their immense superiority to every other section of the population, and they would not object to showing their conviction upon occasion. But they would be willing, for the most part, to associate with men of all sections; they would invite to their tables the richer members of each; they would accept invitations in return; they would be above favouritism, and from the height of their imagined pre-eminence would condescend to treat all sections with a good-humoured, though somewhat contemptuous, urbanity. The upper classes of the Greeks and Syrians would be engaged chiefly in professional employments, in the higher walks of trade, and in manufactures. They would be advocates, physicians, teachers, artists, contractors, architects, builders, merchants, master-manufacturers, dealers on a large scale. The lower classes would be artisans, retail traders, shopmen, camel-drivers, beggars, fortune-tellers, scavengers. The Greco-Syrian community would not be on ill terms with the Romans; it would dislike them to some extent as coarse and over-straightforward, but would respect them for their

courage, their strength of character, and their general fair dealing. The Jews would be principally dealers on a small scale. Their trade would be carried on chiefly with their own section of the population, but they would not object to commercial intercourse with their neighbours; their shops would be open to all comers, and they would show their proverbial keenness in driving bargains. Perhaps they may already have begun to exercise their favourite occupation of money-lending. A portion of them—the Hellenizers—would be on good terms with the Greeks, and not even very much averse to the Romans; but the bulk of the community would hold sullenly aloof from all classes of the “gentiles” alike, and, except in the way of trade, would have no dealings with them. The Greeks they would despise for their weakness, their plasticity, their willingness to flatter and lie; the Romans they would hate for their unbending sternness and as the oppressors of their nation; the Syrians they would at once hate and despise,—hate as their old enemies and as the votaries of a degraded religion; despise as cringing, effeminate, sensual, debauched, shameless. These feelings would be, to some extent, reciprocated, though on the whole hatred, rather than contempt, would predominate. Greek and Syrian and Roman would unite in regarding the Jews with aversion,¹ on account of their inflexible pride and jealous exclusiveness. The Greeks would look with surprise, the Romans with scorn, on their strange superstition, their tenacious adherence to a

¹ See Ewald, “History of Israel,” vol. v. pp. 458 9

thousand unimportant or ridiculous observances. The Syrians could not despise a race so much stronger than their own, or a religion by the side of which they must have been aware that their own did not show to advantage ; but they would compensate the absence of contempt by an intenser hate, a bitterer and fiercer animosity.

There was one circumstance which was peculiarly galling to the Syrian and Greco-Syrian element in Damascus at this period—the “Damascenes,” as they proudly called themselves—and which tended greatly to embitter the relations between them and their Jewish fellow-townsmen, viz., the fact of a wide-spread tendency on the part of their women to become converts to Judaism,¹ if not to the extent of being actually received as “proselytes” or recognized members of the Jewish body, yet at any rate in their convictions, and we may feel assured in their private talk with each other, and with their husbands at home. Whatever may have been the causes which led to it, there was evidently in the heathen world, about the time of the introduction of Christianity, an inclination on the part of educated females to forsake the religion in which they had been brought up, and to adopt a purer creed.² Probably it was a reaction against the development of the sensualistic element in heathenism, which tended to plunge both sexes more and more into a condition inexpressibly degraded. The instinctive delicacy and refinement of women revolted

¹ Josephus, “Bell. Jud.” ii. 20, § 2.

² See Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 194 ; and compare Acts xiii. 49 ; xvi. 14 ; xvii. 4 and 12.

against the coarse indecency, the unutterable grossness, which they saw prevailing around, and into which they felt that they were being drawn themselves. A yearning arose for something better and purer ; and in the example set by the Jewish matrons and maidens of their own towns the gentile women saw what woman might be, if the proper relations of the sexes were observed, and chastity recognized as a virtue. The first step to such a state of things was the renunciation of a religion which made impurity a duty, and licentiousness the best mode of honouring the gods. Accordingly, in Damascus and in many other places, the better class of women fell away from heathenism, refused to frequent the temples or take part any more in their rites, even perhaps in some cases joined the worship of the synagogue, and became professed converts to the Jewish creed. Such a revolt would necessarily be keenly felt. It was an open condemnation of the men, who adhered to the old religion, as shameless profligates. It was a preference of the creed and society of strangers over those of their own race, of their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons. It was an exaltation of the despised Jews, a proclamation that they were better, purer, more to be respected than the Greco-Syrians. As the devotion of French ladies to their priests embitters and envenoms the hostile feelings of their male relatives against the Roman Catholic hierarchy and faith, so did the inclination of the Damascene women to Judaism intensify the hatred of their husbands and brothers towards the Jews. It led ultimately, not a generation

later, to a terrible catastrophe.¹ But at the time of St. Paul's visit the volcano slept. The general appearance of things was sufficiently smooth upon the surface, and perhaps there were not many who suspected the existence of the slumbering fires below.

¹ Compare Josephus, "Bell. Jud." vii. 8, § 7, with ii. 20, § 2. It appears by the later of the two passages that not only the adult males, but great numbers of the women and children, were massacred.

CHAPTER IV.

THE POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AT THE TIME OF
ST. PAUL'S FIRST VISIT.

Early history of Damascus not within the scope of the work—Existing circumstances arose out of Roman conquest—First effects of the conquest—Damascus a municipium, and the capital of Roman Syria—Privileges granted to the Jews by Julius Cæsar—Invasion of the Parthians—Removal of the seat of government to Antioch—Damascus ceded to Cleopatra by Mark Antony, and pawned by her to Herod—Reverts to Rome, and becomes a prey to robbers—Relieved by Herod, flourishes greatly—Favourable position of a Roman's "municipium"—Troubles break out as Tiberius approaches his end—Seizure of Damascus by Aretas—Uncertainty as to the date of St. Paul's first visit.

It does not fall within the scope of the present work to give any account of the early history of Damascus. Its ancient glories, as the capital of an independent kingdom, which made its power felt from the borders of Egypt to those of Assyria and Babylon, must be left unnoticed ; its position under the Assyrian, the Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian monarchies must be passed by ; we cannot even stop to consider the circumstances of its decline, and then of its later rise, under the Seleucid princes ; our limits require us to confine ourselves strictly to the immediate political antecedents, those which bear

directly on the actual condition of the city at the time when St. Paul approached it, bringing the high-priest's mandates. The actual political situation was the result of that wonderful expedition, in which Pompey carried the victorious arms of Rome over the far regions of the East, and transferred the dominion of Syria, previously for two centuries and a half exercised by the successors of Alexander, the Syro-Macedonian kings, to the great republic which by slow degrees had established her undisputed sway in all the most fertile regions of Europe. Lollius and Metellus, the lieutenants of Pompey, took Damascus¹ in the year B.C. 64. Pompey himself entered the city shortly after, and made it his headquarters for above a year, while he arranged the affairs of the East, dispensing governments and crowns at his pleasure. On his return to Rome in B.C. 62, he left Scaurus to govern his most recent conquests, settling him at Damascus, which from this time till about B.C. 39 was regarded as the Syrian capital.² The Roman system was now for the first time introduced into the place. A governor, with his train or *cohort* of secretaries, notaries, clerks, heralds, lictors, physicians, augurs, and young nobles seeking to prepare themselves for future employment in the public service, took up his abode within the walls; a garrison was introduced; an army of tax-gatherers made their appearance; a census was probably taken, and the town shortly placed on the usual footing of a

¹ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xiv. 2, § 3.

² See Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xiv. 2, § 3; 3, § 2; 9, § 5; 11, § 7; xv. 10, § 3; "Bell. Jud." i. 12, § 1, &c.

“municipium,” or free foreign community. This involved the retention on the part of the inhabitants of the right of meeting in a general assembly, of appointing a council or senate, of electing officers for various purposes, and even of appointing one or more chief officers to direct the local affairs, and be responsible for their fellow-citizens to the Roman government. The exact position of the Jews in Damascus at this time is uncertain; they would, no doubt, have retained the position, whatever it may have been, which they had occupied under the Seleucidæ; but what that position exactly was at Damascus is unknown to us. Most likely they were already municipally separate from the Greco-Syrians; but they had not as yet received from the Romans any of those peculiar privileges which they enjoyed afterwards.

The state of things thus introduced continued without any important change from B.C. 62 to B.C. 47. Seven Roman governors held office during this period, and all apparently continued to make Damascus their capital. One of them, Gabinius, who bore rule from B.C. 57 to 55, is noted as a “restorer of cities,” and may perhaps have been the constructor of some of those Roman works which are still to be seen in Damascus at the present day.¹ When Julius Cæsar, in B.C. 47, three years before his death, was in the East, and settled affairs there, he issued (it would seem) certain decrees in favour of the Jews, which affected them not only in their

¹ Porter, “Five Years,” vol. i. pp. 40, 41, 45, &c.

own country, but also in foreign cities.¹ The Jerusalem high-priest was made the patron of *all* aggrieved Jews, wherever they might be residing. He was empowered to make complaint on behalf of any Jew who had suffered wrong, either to the Emperor or the Proconsul. His messengers were to be protected, and to have free passage everywhere for the purpose of presenting their complaints. Further, the Jews everywhere obtained exemption from tribute in the seventh or Sabbatical year; they were authorised to live everywhere according to their own laws, to hold assemblies as often as they pleased for religious or other purposes, and to collect money, and remit it to Jerusalem for the support of their temple and their feasts. These edicts conceded something more than mere toleration of the Jewish religion; they united the Jews throughout the whole empire into a single body, permitted them to organize themselves, and gave them a recognized head. The change which they effected in the status of the Hebrew communities was, no doubt, felt sensibly in Damascus, as elsewhere. The Jews were emboldened to assert themselves, to take a higher position than they had hitherto claimed, to assume the airs of a privileged class; and the envy and hostility of other portions of the population was consequently provoked, the favour of the supreme rulers towards one section being resented as an injury to the others. Thus the seeds were sown of that animosity, which ultimately, in Damascus as in so many other places, broke out

¹ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xiv. 10, § 2-7.

into open hostility, and ended in violence and massacre.¹

In the year B.C. 41, a great wave of invasion passed over Syria. The barbarous Parthians from the inner parts of Asia swarmed suddenly across the Euphrates, defeated and destroyed a Roman force under the Syrian governor, L. Decidius Saxa, and held the whole country at their mercy. Their plundering bands of horse ravaged the fertile districts far and wide ; Sidon and Ptolemais (Acre) submitted to them without a blow,² while Jerusalem, after a gallant resistance, fell into their hands through treachery.³ It is uncertain whether Damascus escaped capture at this time or no ; perhaps its situation, out of the natural path of war, saved it ; perhaps, like Tyre, it resisted and repulsed the enemy. There is at any rate no record of its capture.

Soon after this a change of some importance occurred in the political position of the city. During his stay in the East, from B.C. 39 to B.C. 34, Mark Antony seems to have come to the conclusion that Antioch was better suited to be the Roman capital of Syria than Damascus, and to have removed the seat of government from the more southern to the more northern site. The luxurious city upon the Orontes, with its grand palace and gay suburbs, its racecourse and its theatres, its light-minded population, and constant round of amusements, had, no doubt, especial charms for him ; but it is not necessary to

¹ See above, p. 73.

² Josephus, "Bell. Jud." i. 13, § 1.

³ *Ib.* p. 13, § 8.

tax him with making the change on mere personal grounds. Geographically speaking, Damascus did not occupy a position that at all pointed it out as the place from which to rule the Roman province; it lay at one extremity of Syria, in an out-of-the-way corner,¹ and in very inconvenient proximity to the robber tribes of the Desert. Antioch was far better situated—in the great valley which has always been the thoroughfare of nations, not far from the sea, in the middle of a settled and peaceful tract, and at a convenient distance from the fortified posts on the Euphrates. Thus, when the change had once been made it was never reversed; Antioch remained from this time the Roman metropolis of Syria till its capture by the Saracens² in the year A.D. 638.

The removal of the seat of government to Antioch from Damascus made the retention of the latter town by Rome of comparative unimportance; and hence Antony, when in the year B.C. 33, Cleopatra was pressing him to add the whole of Syria to her dominions,³ did not scruple to include Damascus in the cession, wherewith he strove to satisfy her ambitious longings. The Egyptian queen, though disappointed and angry with her lover, took what she could get, and Damascus remained under her dominion from B.C. 34 to B.C. 30. She visited her new possession in B.C. 34 on her way from the Euphrates to Alexandria, and shortly afterwards seems to have leased

¹ *Supra*, p. 6.

² Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," vol. vi. p. 323; Ockley, "History of the Saracens," p. 239.

³ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xv. 4, § 1.

out its revenues to Herod the Great, together with those of her other new acquisitions.¹ It was probably at this time that Herod, in the magnificent spirit which characterised him, enriched Damascus with the theatre and the extensive gymnasium described in a former chapter.²

On the death of Antony and Cleopatra (B.C. 30) Damascus naturally reverted to Rome, and was re-attached to the province of Syria. For some years after this the town suffered greatly at the hands of robber-bands, which a certain Zenodorus, whom Augustus had made ruler of the neighbouring Trachonitis, incited to plunder the defenceless citizens.³ This was early in the reign of the first emperor, and was a state of things which of course no Roman ruler could tolerate long. Augustus in B.C. 28 sent orders to the East that Zenodorus should be put down, and his principality added to the dominions of Herod the Great. His orders were carried into effect without much difficulty. The robber-bands, whose retreat was the range of Antilibanus, where they took advantage of the natural fissures in the limestone to construct themselves large caves, artificially supplied with springs of water, and abundantly stored with corn,⁴ were tracked to their lairs and destroyed by Herod, who established order and tranquillity throughout the entire region. Damascus now entered on a period of unclouded prosperity. A Roman garrison

¹ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xiv. 4, § 2.

² *Supra*, pp. 39-41.

³ Josephus, "Bell. Jud." i. 20, § 4; Strabo, xvi. 2, § 20.

⁴ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xv. 10, § 1.

was established in or near the town, which watched over its safety.¹ Neither the freebooters of the highlands, nor the wild tribes of the Desert ventured to trouble it. The universal peace which Augustus signalised by thrice closing the Temple of Janus at Rome, was nowhere more continuous and assured than in the regions of Syria and Palestine, so long disputed between rival claimants, and a prey to conqueror after conqueror. Damascus, no longer brought to the forefront by being the residence of the Syrian prefect, and the centre of the Roman power in the East, drops almost wholly out of sight for the space of more than sixty years.² Under the mild rule of Augustus, and the careful and judicious government of his stepson and successor, Tiberius Cæsar, Western Asia enjoyed an interval of profound repose. Strabo with reason dwells upon the blessings thus conferred upon the Syrians, and especially on the Damascenes, exposed by their situation to so many perils.

We may presume that during this period Damascus increased greatly in population, and in wealth. The condition of the Roman *municipia*, especially in time of peace, was one that even modern cities might envy. A recent French historian³ has said with equal truth and eloquence, "If in all this vast hier-

¹ Strabo, l. s. c.

² Nothing is heard of Damascus during this space, except that she had disputes with Sidon about their boundaries, which were decided by the prefect of Syria, Flaccus. This was probably about A.D. 32 (Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xviii. 6, § 3).

³ M. de Champagny. See his work, "Les Césars," vol. ii. pp. 343-5.

archy" (*i.e.* the Roman governmental system) "there was one condition which deserved to be envied, it was that of the colony, or still more, perhaps, that of the municipium. As free as a foreign town, as highly privileged as Rome herself, the municipium was in truth a distinct and separate republic in the midst of the great Roman republic, living by herself and under her own laws, . . . invested with the right of governing and punishing; worshipping together with the gods of Rome, her own hereditary deities. The municipium repeated, for the most part, the forms of Roman liberty. It had, like Rome, its supreme magistrates, termed sometimes prætors, or dictators, or consuls; its senate of a hundred decurions, whom Cicero did not shrink from calling 'Conscript Fathers, a most noble, sacred, and venerable order;' its censors; at a later time, its tribunes; its knights, whose places we still see marked in the amphitheatres; its people, entitled to make laws and elect magistrates,—factious, turbulent, delighting in assemblies, in games, in riots, and accustomed to be paid for its votes by public shows or spectacles. Cicero tells us of the parliamentary quarrels of Arpinum, where his own ancestor contended with the ancestor of Marius on the question of the ballot. Provided there was no effusion of blood, Rome did not interfere. Thus, the inhabitant of a municipium, that 'Roman citizen living under his own peculiar laws,' belongs at one and the same time to two different countries, to his municipality by birth, to Rome by privilege. In both places equally, the path to honours is open to him; in both equally, he enjoys complete

independence and every civil right. Nay, more ; under the emperors, the freedom of the municipium, since it was less formidable than that of Rome, was more respected. While at Rome law was scarcely anything but the emperor's caprice, the lawyers cited and recognized the law of the municipality. When at Rome election by assemblies was at an end, the excitement still continued at Naples and Puteoli. At Rome, a Lentulus or a Crassus was either too poor or too much under suspicion to venture on building a portico or erecting a theatre ; at Pompeii, the village nobles, the Holconii and Arrii, constructed temples, built circuses, and asked in return no higher recompense than a place among the decurions. At Rome, Cæsar was the only hero, as he was the sole elector ; but at Herculaneum and Pompeii, in the theatre and the Forum were set up the statues of the Nonii and Cerrinii, illustrious citizens, the glories of their province, heroes so obscure that their obscurity saved them from provoking the jealousy of the emperor." Damascus may not perhaps have enjoyed all these advantages, for the Roman municipal system admitted of modifications to suit different localities ; but its general features did not greatly vary, and we may be sure that a degree of local independence was enjoyed, even in the remotest municipium, which greatly conduced to its general prosperity and happiness. Damascus, remaining subject to Rome, and undisturbed by foreign enemies from B.C. 28 to A.D. 36 or 37, would become one of the richest and most flourishing of Eastern cities, and would well deserve to have for her emblem the female figure

holding a cornucopia, which about this time is common upon her coins.¹

But, about the year A.D. 36, the face of affairs changed. The Roman emperor Tiberius, in his foul retreat at Capreæ, was known to be approaching his end. He was already seventy-seven years of age; and though his mind retained its vigour, his bodily strength was rapidly failing him. Agitation had commenced in the provinces some years previously, and a rival had even ventured to come forward and show himself as a candidate for empire.² The attempt had been quickly suppressed; but confidence did not return. There was that oppressiveness in the political atmosphere which is the usual prelude to a storm. Under these circumstances the terror, which in a great measure preserved peace on the Roman borders, lost its ordinary force, and disturbances began to break out. There had for some time been a standing quarrel between Aretas, king of Northern Arabia, who held his court at Petra, and Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who had now for forty years been tetrarch of the fertile region of Galilee. Antipas had married in early life the daughter of the Arabian sheikh; but, becoming enamoured of Herodias, his own niece, and his brother Philip's wife, he entered into a secret agreement with her to divorce his legitimate consort as a first step to the new marriage which they both desired. The Arabian princess discovered the plot, and without

¹ Mionnet, "Médailles," vol. v. pp. 285-6; "Supplément," vol. viii. p. 194.

² Tacit. "Ann.," v. 10.

waiting to be disgraced quitted her husband, returned to her father's court at Petra, and communicated to him the intended wrong, which was at once the cause and the justification of her conduct.¹ Aretas was very naturally enraged, but for some time bore his wrongs without seeking to avenge them. At length, growing bolder as Tiberius appeared to become less formidable, and perhaps exasperated anew by a claim which Antipas set up to land that he regarded as his own, the Arab sheikh declared war upon the Galilæan tetrarch, and sent an army under a general to attack his territory. Antipas, on his side, met force with force. Arming his own subjects, and a body of auxiliaries, who having been exiled from his brother Philip's tetrarchy had been given a refuge in Galilee, he sent a general to meet the general of Aretas, and engage his troops in the open field. A battle speedily took place, in which the Galilæans were completely defeated owing to the misconduct of the exiles, who at a critical moment went over to the enemy. Aretas was triumphant, and appears to have pushed his advantage to great lengths. Not content with defeating the antagonist against whom he had a fair ground of complaint, he resolved to aggrandise himself as far as he possibly could, and accordingly he seems to have seized the outlying town of Damascus, and added it to his dominions. This, at least, appears to be the least unsatisfactory way of accounting for the relation in which Damascus certainly stood to Aretas

¹ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xviii. 5, § 1.

at the time of St. Paul's second visit,¹ a relation which had perhaps commenced some years earlier.

It is much to be regretted, in the interests of history, that we cannot determine chronologically what was the year of St. Paul's first visit.² Aretas, *almost* certainly, became possessed of Damascus in A.D. 36. Had St. Paul's conversion then taken place or no? The best critics are divided on this important question, and, unless (which is scarcely to be expected) some new data should be discovered, the point in dispute can hardly admit of being satisfactorily settled. We must be content to know that either shortly before or shortly after the time of St. Paul's arrival, Damascus passed under Aretas, and was reckoned a portion of his dominions. The difference which this change produced in the general complexion of affairs would not be very great. Aretas was himself a Roman feudatory, and whether in warring with another feudatory, Herod Antipas, or in occupying Damascus, did

¹ See 2 Cor. xi. 32. Some suppose that Damascus continued subject to the kings of Petra from the time of the first Aretas (B.C. 62) until after A.D. 39 ("Dict. of Greek and Roman Geography," vol. ii. p. 1078); but this is contradicted by the whole series of Damascene imperial coins. Others (Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 109) argue that it was assigned to Aretas by Caligula on his accession, without having been previously occupied by him. But the making over by the Romans of an important town which for above 100 years had been Roman, to a foreign tributary king, voluntarily and without pressure, is inconceivable and quite without a parallel.

² Bishop Wordsworth's arguments in favour of the year A.D. 34 ("Greek Testament," vol. i. part ii. pp. 22-3.) seem to me very weighty; but the more ordinary view only brings St. Paul to Damascus in A.D. 37.

not intend, we may be sure, to assert his independence. His hope was, amid the troubles and convulsions incident to the remoter regions of the empire at the demise of one prince and the accession of another, to advance his power; and he probably trusted to obtain by bribes or otherwise from the new emperor, whoever he might be, a condonation of his rebellious acts, and confirmation in his recent acquisitions. It is quite uncertain how long Damascus remained in his power. We only know that by the year A.D. 62 it had passed once more under the direct government of Rome, since coins of that date bear upon them the head of Nero.¹

When Aretas had obtained his great triumph over Herod Antipas, that prince made complaint to the emperor.² Tiberius instantly espoused his quarrel, and sent an order to Vitellius, then prefect of Syria, to put his forces in motion against the Arab sheikh, and send him either alive or dead to Rome. Vitellius felt compelled to obey, but was in no great hurry to commence the war; he collected after a while two legions at Antioch, together with some Asiatic cavalry and light-armed infantry, took them (apparently by sea) to Ptolemais, and proposed to march them through Judæa against Petra. The Jews took alarm at this proposal—protested that they could not allow their sacred territory to be polluted by the presence of idolatrous ensigns—and were so urgent in their representations that Vitellius felt compelled to yield.

¹ Mionnet, "Médailles," vol. v. p. 286.

² Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xviii. 5, § 1.

He sent his troops forward through the plain of Esdraelon, to cross the Jordan near Scythopolis, and so avoid Judæa altogether, while he himself accompanied Antipas to Jerusalem, under the plea that he wished to offer sacrifice to the God of the Jews. It would seem that his journey had a further object; for, while at Jerusalem, he took the opportunity of deposing the High-Priest, Jonathan, from his office, and appointing his brother, Theophilus, in his room.¹ After this he would probably have proceeded at once upon his expedition, but on the fourth day from his arrival in Jerusalem he received despatches informing him of the emperor's death. The news determined him to dismiss his legions to their quarters, and to return without further effort to Antioch.

Thus Aretas was left unpunished, and it would seem that, in the new division which Caligula made of the Roman possessions in the far East, the Arabian prince was, either tacitly or expressly, allowed to retain Damascus. At any rate, we have no further sign of direct Roman dominion over it until the fourteenth year of Nero, A.D. 62.

The doubt as to the year of St. Paul's conversion makes it uncertain whether his first visit to Damascus was before or after its occupation by Aretas. If before, he would have found the city in its normal condition of a free foreign community under the Roman sway—a condition which has been described above²—with a small Roman garrison in it under a

¹ Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xviii. 5, § 3.

² Pp. 81-3.

Roman commander—and engaged simply in its usual business of manufactures, trade, and commerce. If, on the other hand, his arrival fell as late as A.D. 37, or even in the latter part of the preceding year, he would have found Aretas in possession—the Roman garrison probably withdrawn—and the city less quiet and less peaceful than usual. Aretas on assuming possession must almost certainly have sent some soldiers there to look after his interest, and watch the proceedings of his enemies in Trachonitis and the adjacent districts; and these wild troops with their long spears, their white flowing cloaks or robes, and their many-coloured turbans would be conspicuous in the streets, would be guarding the gates and walls, and may have been seen in small parties riding rapidly from place to place, bent on reconnoitering the neighbourhood. Aretas would also, no doubt, either be present or be represented in the city by a governor, who may probably have been the “Ethnarch” of whom we hear later as St. Paul’s enemy.¹ There would be a stir and excitement about the place which was not wont to be seen there, a parade of war, or at least an unusual intrusion of the warlike element into a community noted ordinarily for its commercial habits. But, further than this, there would have been no observable change. The three main sections of the population would remain, and hold their previous relations each to each; the Jews, favoured by the Romans, continued to be in favour with Aretas;² the Greeks and Syrians continued

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 32.

² This appears from Acts ix. 23-5, compared with 2 Cor. i. s. c.

jealous of them ; if there was any notable difference from former times it would be in the Roman element, which would perhaps under the circumstances have abated somewhat of its pride, and have assumed an indifferent and neutral attitude. There is no reason to suppose that they would have disappeared, for we cannot imagine Aretas venturing to expel them ; they would be awaiting quietly the course of events ; if Aretas were allowed to retain Damascus, the governmental element and the pleasure-seekers would probably retire ; the traders might perhaps remain and carry on their business as before. If, on the contrary, as would be the natural expectation, he had to relinquish the city, matters would return to their former state, and all would go on exactly as it had done before. We cannot be sure that he did not have to relinquish Damascus soon. Though the break in the series of the coins exactly at this point raises a suspicion that the place passed for 20 or 25 years under Arab sovereignty, yet it is insufficient to establish that conclusion. Such breaks are of frequent occurrence,¹ and are often accidental. It is not impossible that Aretas having occupied Damascus in A.D. 36 was forced to retire from it in A.D. 37 or 38, having held it no more than one or two years.

¹ There is another in the Damascene series, from the year A.D. 75 to A.D. 127, an interval of 52 years.

CHAPTER V.

APPROACHES TO THE CITY.—SCENE OF THE
CONVERSION.

Three routes between Jerusalem and Damascus at the present day—Description of each—Consideration of the question, which of them St. Paul would have preferred—Possibility of his having selected another—Description of the great Roman road—St. Paul's choice practically confined to one of two—Dreariness of both—Possible mirage—First view of the city on either line nearly the same—Description of it—External circumstances of the conversion.

THE modern traveller, who, after having sufficiently explored Jerusalem, is desirous of paying a visit to the great Syrian city, still the capital of a Pashalik, is now commonly informed that he has the choice of three roads by which to attain his object. He may either proceed almost due north, through the hill country of Samaria and Galilee into the valley of the Litany, and then turning east, cross the range of Antilibanus, and following the course of the Barada down its wild glen obtain his first view of the Damascene plain and city from the Wely Nasr, or ruined chapel above Salahiyah; or he may begin by striking eastward, pass the Jordan near the site of Jericho, and pursuing his way through the sylvan scenes of Gilead and Bashan, visit Bozrah, and proceed thence along the old Roman road through the

Ledjah, so coming first upon the city from the southward; or finally he may take a course intermediate between these two. Travelling due north as far as Nablous, the ancient Neapolis, which may be regarded as representing Samaria, though not exactly on its site, he may then bend gently to the east of north, cross the Jordan by the Jisr-Benat-Yakob a little to the south of Lake Merom, and passing by Nowarān, Kuneitirah, and Sasa, approach Damascus from the south-west, obtaining his first view of the "Queen of Cities" from a low ridge which here separates between the valleys of the Awaaj and the Barada.¹ The first of these routes is that most commonly pursued, since it enables the traveller to visit, without going much out of his way, the magnificent ruins, lovely even in their decay, at Balbek; it is also that recommended by great authorities as bringing him to Damascus on the side "from which alone it should be approached."² But it is, beyond a question, circuitous, taking the traveller some fifty or sixty miles out of his way, and requiring, even if Balbek is not visited, nine or ten days' journeying instead of seven. The route by Bozrah has only recently become known. It was greatly frequented in Roman times, when Bostra and Kenath (Kanatha) were large towns; but the entire region through which the route passes was unexplored by moderns till about twenty years ago, when Mr. Cyril Graham and Mr. Porter re-discovered it.³ The

¹ Porter, "Giant Cities of Bashan," p. 350.

² Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 401.

³ See Mr. Graham's essay in the "Cambridge Essays" for 1858; and Mr. Porter's "Giant Cities of Bashan," published in 1865.

line has attractions in respect of scenery, and of the Roman remains, and "Giant Cities" which lie along it; it is not so long as that by the Cœle-Syrian valley and the Barada; still, however, it is far from being a direct road; and it necessitates a descent and ascent of nearly 800 feet¹ which may be avoided. The route by Nablous, Capernaum, and the Jisr-Benat-Yakob, is by far the shortest of the three. It diverges from the direct line between the two cities no further at the utmost than about twenty miles; the expenditure of time which it requires is no more than seven days; and though after crossing the Jordan it passes for some twenty-five or thirty miles through a dreary and monotonous country, it nowhere presents any difficulties; and in ancient times was certainly often traversed.

If it be asked, which of these three routes did St. Paul select, or is it possible that he chose one distinct from all of them the answer would seem to be as follows:—Of the three routes described he would most certainly have preferred that which we have shown to be the most direct; but it is quite possible, perhaps most probable, that the route which he actually took was different from them all. The character of the man makes it absolutely certain that he would select the shortest route known to him. When he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter,"² he would not allow

¹ This is owing to the depression of the Jordan valley, which is 800 feet lower at its southern extremity than at the Sea of Tiberias.

² Acts ix. 1. Compare xxvi. 11:—"Being *exceedingly mad* against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

considerations of picturesqueness and beauty on the one hand, or of antiquarian interest on the other, to have weight in determining his plans. Indeed, it is curious how little such considerations seem to have influenced the bulk of travellers in ancient times, how seldom they diverged from their direct path to visit sites, or examine ruins, or indulge in the contemplation of natural scenery, however lovely. They appear to have been insensible to such attractions to a degree which we of the present age can scarcely imagine possible, and to have almost never¹ gone a step out of their way for the gratification of what seems to us a natural and almost irresistible instinct. And St. Paul was assuredly no exception to the general rule—it was humanity, living, breathing, actual humanity that interested and occupied him—not the beauties of nature—not the relics of a by-gone age. He may not indeed have been altogether indifferent to the charms of beautiful and impressive scenery²—he may have had a sympathy with nature in her various moods, and have been glad to feel her influence upon his spirit on fit occasions; but he was pre-eminently a man of action, deeply interested in the realities of human life, and the last person to delay any practical business that he had taken in hand for the gratification of a dreamy feeling, or the indulgence of an idle curiosity. Further, as an envoy from the High-Priest, charged with the delivery of a message, he would be bound to make haste, and it would be

¹ Germanicus is an almost solitary exception (“*Tac. Ann.*” ii. 53, 59).

² Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 53.

scarcely more competent for him to choose an interesting route, and loiter by the way, than for a Queen's messenger to do so now when carrying despatches to an ambassador.

What then was in his day the shortest and most practicable route between the two cities? Unfortunately, we have no Roman "road book" of the time of Augustus or Tiberius. The earliest that has come down to us belongs to the age of the Antonines, and interpolated passages in it are even of a later date. But there is, on the whole, good reason to believe, first that the "Itinerary of Antonine" is uninterpolated in the passage bearing on the Damascus route;¹ and secondly, that the line it lays down was identical with that which the Romans had preferred from their original subjugation of the country. It passed through Scythopolis, near which Pompey, evidently, on his first invasion crossed the Jordan.² Again, it is the *only* route given in the Itinerary; which would scarcely have been the case had the Romans previously to its adoption used another. The distance which it traversed was reckoned at 175 Roman, or 160 English miles, and could consequently be travelled in about seven or eight days. It led at first through the hill country of Judæa and Samaria, past Gorphna and Neapolis, to Scythopolis, or Bethshan, a great city in the time of which we are writing. From Scythopolis it proceeded to cross the Jordan not far below its exit from the Sea of Tiberias, whence

¹ "Itin. Antonin." p. 88 (ed. Parthey).

² Josephus, "Ant. Jud." xiv. 3, § 4.

it ascended the agreeable country¹ on the left bank of the Hieromax, or Yarmuk, to Gadara (Umkeis), a place of considerable importance. Here it crossed the Hieromax, and entering Gaulanitis ascended gradually the high table-land which lies east of the Sea of Tiberias, passed Capitolias, an unknown site, and Neve (now Nawa) in latitude 33 degrees nearly, after which it proceeded through Ituræa to Ære, now Sunamein, which has been identified by an inscription. From Sunamein it followed, almost certainly, the modern line of the Haj road, which is nearly straight, and brought the traveller in sight of Damascus where this road crosses the Jebel-el-Aswad, a little to the north of Kesweh. Here from an elevation of 300 feet² the eye ranges far and wide over the vast fertile Damascene plain, stretching out in every direction a distance of fifteen or twenty miles to the far horizon, overlooked by the white dome of Hermon on the west, and the long low line of Antilibanus towards the north—melting eastward into the red-grey haze of the Desert.

If we may suppose that, in the time of St. Paul, travellers might proceed from Jerusalem to Damascus by any one of the routes above described, and so that he had, in a certain sense, to choose among four, still practically it is evident that, proceeding (as he did) in hot haste, he would only enjoy an option of two. The right-hand and left-hand routes, those by Coele-Syria and Bozrah would really be out of the

¹ See the "Quarterly Statement" of the Palestine Exploration Fund for October, 1876, p. 180.

² Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. ii. p. 248.

question—they would not present themselves to his thought—he would quit Jerusalem by “the Damascus Gate,” and make his way to Neapolis, and thence by Samaria to En-gannim without any doubt arising in his mind; at En-gannim he would have to determine where he would cross the Jordan, whether above or below the Sea of Tiberias. In the one case he would have to cross Mount Gilboa to Beth-shan (Scythopolis), and follow the *great* Roman road to Gadara; in the other, he must pursue a more northerly line, passing by Jezreel and Shunem to Tiberias, and thence along the shores of the lake to Magdala, Capernaum, and Chorazin. In either case he would pass the Jordan about the third or fourth day after quitting Jerusalem, and entering the difficult region of Gaulanitis, would work his way up the steep ascents, and across the many watercourses which follow each other in rapid succession¹ to the high bare table-land which lies between the flanks of Hermon and the Ledjah. Here, on the open unsheltered plain the hot sun would beat down upon him day after day as he plodded wearily onward, until he would long for shelter and refreshment in a way scarcely conceivable to those who know only the cool green regions of more northern climes. The monotonous flat, with its slightly undulating lines and masses of black basalt here and there strewn thickly over the surface, would stretch before him on every side; eastward and northward to the very horizon, westward to the foot of Hermon. There only would show in the distance an

¹ Porter, vol. ii. p. 259.

object of beauty, and from that he would be receding—north-east would lie his road or track, a long, straight, endless line, leading seemingly to nothing—all would be dry, naked, forbidding, hopeless, unless, indeed, occasionally his fancy were cheated by the bitter mockery of the mirage. It is of a district neither remote from nor unlike that through which St. Paul was journeying, that a modern traveller, after describing its bleakness, tells us,¹ “The view now became inconceivably lovely. . . . Lakes of great extent, whose shores were fringed with gigantic reeds and graceful poplars, seemed almost to cover the plain. Numerous islands studded their surface, clothed with verdant groves, whose foliage quivered in the gentle breeze that rippled the surface of the water. Villages, too, occupied peninsulas, or were perched upon islands, and were encompassed by their luxuriant gardens and orchards. It was altogether a picture such as I had never before gazed upon; but there was no reality in it—it was the mirage!” In the trembling and rarified air, boulders and blocks of basalt are transformed into trees, houses, villages, castles; their images are seen below them in a reversed position, and have all the appearance of reflections; reflections suggest irresistibly the idea of water; the dance in the air of ripples and a breeze. The inexperienced traveller can at first scarcely be persuaded that what he sees is not a real scene, and that he is not about to exchange the dry plain, and still hot atmosphere in which he is moving, for the

¹ Porter, vol. i. p. 154.

delights of a soft moist breeze upon his cheek, of delicious draughts of water at his will, for the shade of orchards or plane-trees, or the pleasure of a noon-tide rest at a village fountain.

On the sixth or seventh day of his journey the weary traveller—already an apostle,¹ though not in the sense in which he was to become one—would have begun to be sensible of a real change in his surroundings. Hermon would still be visible, if he turned and looked over his left shoulder ; but now a prolongation of the mountain-line towards the north and east would make its appearance in the far distance, while nearer in his front would rise a ridge of hills broken by volcanic peaks, which would be a refreshment after the dreary level whereon he had for so long been moving. Presently he would come upon a stream, a veritable living river, not a mere dry watercourse, like those many *wadys* which he had crossed after quitting the banks of the Yarmuk. Deep below him he would see the Awaaj—perhaps the Pharpar of former days²—flowing eastward down its narrow channel, fringed by trees, and in places by meadows and cornfields, about to fertilize a considerable level tract ere losing itself in a shallow lake on the borders of the Desert. Crossing the Awaaj at Sasa or at Kesweh, he would soon leave it behind him, and begin to mount the southern slope of the volcanic range known to moderns as the Jebel-el-Aswad. If he came from Sasa, he would

¹ The messengers of the high priest bore the title of “apostles” (see Lewin, “Life and Epistles of St. Paul,” vol. i. p. 53 ; Lightfoot, “Comment. on Galatians,” p. 90).

² So Mr. Porter ; but the identity is not established.

ascend gently a comparatively low elevation ;¹ if from Kesweh, he would have to climb to a height of three hundred feet. In either case, on arriving at the summit, the view of the plain and city would burst upon him suddenly, without notice, in all its wonderful beauty. Once more it seems best to adopt the words of one who has been on the spot, at Kaukab,² on the lower elevation of the two, and who, transporting himself in imagination to the time of St. Paul's journey, thus writes :³—"On the left rose Hermon in all its majesty, a spotless pyramid of snow ; the long range of Anti-Lebanon, grey and bleak, stretching eastward to the horizon, the broad plain in front with its many-tinted foliage ; all around little villages embowered in blooming orchards ; and away in the distance the bright buildings of the city. The same figures, too, gave life to the landscape : long strings of camels, bearing the wheat of Bashan ; cavaliers from the Desert, armed with sword and spear ; peasants in the field driving their yokes of oxen with sharp goads . . . the same cloudless sky was there, and the same sun pouring down a flood of light on city, plain, and mountain."

The traveller had arrived in sight of his destination. There, within those walls, that glistened in the sun-

¹ Porter, "Giant Cities of Bashan," p. 350.

² Kaukab is the real traditional scene of the conversion. It was shown as such all through the Middle Ages, and has only been superseded during the last two centuries by the spot in the Christian burial-ground, which is now shown as the scene by the Latin monks. It suits very well the phrase, "as I came nigh unto Damascus" (Acts xxii. 6).

³ Porter, "Giant Cities of Bashan," p. 351.

light, were the victims whom he longed to deliver over, bound, into the hands of the Sanhedrin for imprisonment,—judgment,—death. Did the contrast strike him between these stern, hard thoughts and that beautiful, soft, smiling scene? Was his heart for a moment touched, softened? Who shall say? “Suddenly,” above the brightness of that mid-day sun, which flooded all things with an almost intolerable blaze, “there shined round about him a light from heaven”¹—“a *great* light”²—a light unearthly, strange, dazzling, glorious, like to that which had shone on the Mount of Transfiguration—like to that which the elders of Israel beheld when they “saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness,”³ like to that “glory of Jehovah,” which was “like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel;”⁴ and he, the high priest’s messenger, looked, and then “fell to the earth.”⁵ He looked as St. Stephen looked. He looked and “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”⁶ And then, blinded with “the glory of that light,”⁷ and utterly overwhelmed by that which he had seen, he “fell unto the ground”⁸—fell perhaps from the animal on which he was riding⁹—fell at any rate prostrate upon

¹ Acts ix. 3.

³ Exod. xxiv. 10.

⁵ Acts ix. 4.

⁷ Ib. xxii. 11.

² Ib. xxii. 6.

⁴ Ibid. verse 17.

⁶ Ib. vii. 55.

⁸ Ib. verse 7.

⁹ There is, I think, no evidence to show whether St. Paul performed his journey on foot, or was mounted on an animal.

the soil, and lay there. The companions of his journey "fell also at the first,"¹ but soon rose, and "stood speechless."² Meanwhile Saul, prone upon the ground, heard words which he felt could only come from Him whose power he had just seen—words uttered in the Hebrew tongue, or Aramaic of the time, and which he never afterwards forgot: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."³ Is it fanciful to suppose, with one who has dwelt long in the country,⁴ that the particular form of the expostulation arose from local circumstances, that oxen were ploughing near, and the long goad of the Syrian peasant was in use, and that the futility of contention would thus be made palpably apparent to one who perhaps had just witnessed the vain struggle of a recalcitrant beast against its lord and master? However this may be, the lesson at any rate told. The prostrate Saul was unresisting. "Who art thou, Lord?" he asked; and when he heard the answer, "Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest," then, all "trembling and astonished,"⁵ he put the further humble question, "Lord, what shall I do? what wilt thou have me to do?"⁶ "Arise," was the reply, "and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."⁷ Then

If the latter, the beast that carried him might be a horse, a mule, or a camel.

¹ Acts xxvi. 14.

² Ib. ix. 7.

³ Ib. xxvi. 14.

⁴ Mr. Porter. See his "Giant Cities of Bashan," p. 351.

⁵ Acts ix. 6.

⁶ Ib. Compare ix. 6 with xxii. 10.

⁷ Ib. ix. 6.

Saul "arose from the earth,"¹ and opened his eyes, but found that he could see nothing; and the men that were with him "led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus."²

It is not within the scope of the present work to dwell upon the moral and spiritual bearing of this wonderful event. We are concerned with the external surroundings of the great Apostle, not with his internal feelings, struggles, changes. The preacher and the commentator will ever find in the conversion of St. Paul, and the lines of thought that it opens out, an inexhaustible theme for argument, speculation, inculcation of doctrine, inculcation of duty. The describer of external circumstances has a humbler task. It has been the present writer's aim to depict the event as it occurred. He has endeavoured not to encumber his narrative with speculations that have no basis, or with doubts that cannot be solved. The one point upon which he would insist is, that the dazzling light was an external reality, that St. Paul was actually blinded by it, and that it streamed from the person of Christ, whom St. Paul actually saw,³ and with whom he directly conversed, as above related.

¹ Acts ix. 8.

² *Ib.*

³ See I Cor. ix. 1; xv. 8.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ENTRY INTO DAMASCUS.

Last stage of the journey across the Damascene plain—Its sights and sounds, probable and possible—Gate by which St. Paul entered probably the Eastern one—Description of it—Probable detention of the travellers there—Passage through the town from the eastern gate to the house of Judas—Feelings of St. Paul—His need of rest.

STRICKEN with blindness at the distance, as we have supposed, of about ten miles from the city,¹ and ordered, if he would know “what he must do,” to go forward on his way and enter into Damascus, and there await the further dealings of the Lord with him,² the helpless, hapless traveller arose from the earth, no longer the guide and ruling spirit of the party, but its weakest, feeblest member, dependent wholly on the aid and direction of his companions, who compassionately “led him by the hand.”³ We do not *know* the month, or indeed the exact season, at which the journey was taking place; it is conjectured to have been “late in the year” by one critic;⁴

¹ This is the distance of Kaukab from Damascus (Porter, vol. ii. p. 350). The summit of the ridge on the other road is about half a mile nearer the city.

² Acts ix. 6; xxii. 10.

³ Acts ix. 8.

⁴ Alford, “Greek Testament,” vol. ii., Prolegomena, p. 23.

“in November” by another;¹ at any rate, as the miracle was “about noon,”² there would still remain some five or six hours of daylight, which would make it possible for the city to be reached, and the needed shelter procured before nightfall. The gates of a town are closed at sunset in the East, and there is often difficulty in obtaining entrance after dark, especially in times of trouble and disturbance, such as this would naturally have been at Damascus, if Aretas had lately taken possession. St. Paul’s companions would hasten on their way; but, encumbered by a blind man, they would not be able to make very rapid progress. Roads in the East are not what we understand by roads; they are rather of the nature of routes or tracks, presenting many roughnesses, many inequalities. Here the traveller, if he is not careful, stumbles over blocks of stone; there he steps up to his knees into a hole filled with dust to the level of the rest of the surface. Much caution would have been required in leading along such a route a man who was not only blind, but just struck with blindness, shattered and confused with what had happened, and unaccustomed to entrust himself to the guidance of others, and to move as they directed him. Wearily and slowly, under such difficulties, must the band have pursued its way, provoking comment and perhaps jibe from those who overtook and passed them; surprise and inquiry from such as they met setting forth, as men so often do in the East, towards evening from the city. First they

¹ Lewin, “Life and Epistles of St. Paul,” vol. i. p. 53.

² Acts xxii. 6.

would have to descend the northern slope of the Jebel-el-Aswad, and to reach the level of the Ghutah ; then they would have to proceed across the richly-luxuriant plain. There, at first, their way would lie between fields of corn, or other grounds cultivated in grain and vegetables, on either side. Then they would hear the pleasant sound of water ; canals from the Barada, "fringed with tall reeds and long, sedgy grass,"¹ would have to be crossed, probably "by rustic bridges that rocked and creaked under their feet ;"² gardens, orchards, and vineyards would next come into view ; great planes and walnuts would cast their deep shade across the road ; the air would be heavy with the scent of jasmine and of orange-flowers.³ The way may here and there have been strewn with fallen fruit, left to rot uncared-for ;⁴ now and again, as they advanced through the wilderness of gardens, the melody of singing-birds and the tap of the woodpecker, as he crept along the bark of the tall trees, may have been heard overhead, or squirrels⁵ may have been seen leaping from branch to branch, and from tree to tree, as they chased one another in mere wantonness. Altogether the air would be full of stir, and life, and motion, offering a strong contrast to the motionless stillness and solitude of the almost desert tract through which for days they had been plodding. And the

¹ Porter, vol. ii. p. 340.

² Ibid.

³ Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 611.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 613.

⁵ On the squirrels and woodpeckers of the Damascus gardens, see Tristram, p. 612.

element of human interest would not have been wanting. In the fields on either side there would have been many a Syrian peasant, clothed in tunic and cloak, or in tunic only, with turban or kerchief on his head, and with goad in hand, guiding deftly the rude plough, drawn by two oxen abreast, with which he scratched the surface of the fertile soil. In the gardens would be others, tending their vegetables or gathering in their fruits, attired much as their more rustic brethren, but with hoes or baskets instead of goads. The road itself would be alive with human and animal forms. Here Bedouins from the Desert, perhaps in the service of Aretas, would be seen astride on their small, spirited horses, armed with a scimitar, a dagger, and a long spear, some pricking forward at speed, others leisurely sauntering towards the capital. There strings of camels, asses, and mules, heavily laden, and moving slowly in single file along the route, would be conveying to Jerusalem, or Cæsarea, or Tyre, the precious wine of Helbon,¹ or the valuable produce of the Damascus looms,² or the white wool³ of the neighbouring hills, or raisins and other dried fruits. Caravans, too, may have been pressing towards the town, carrying (as Mr. Porter supposes⁴) "the wheat of Bashan," or laden with the "honey,

¹ Ezek. xxvii. 18. "Damascus was thy merchant . . . in the wine of Helbon." Strabo says that under the Persian monarchy the wine was specially reserved for the table of the Great King (xv. 3, § 22).

² Perhaps referred to by Amos (iii. 12). The celebrity of one fabric gave rise to the term "damask."

³ Ezek., *ut supra*.

⁴ "Five Years," &c., vol. ii. p. 351.

and oil, and balm,"¹ which Judæa in the olden times exported to her neighbours.

Groups of persons may also, not improbably, have been met, engaged in proceedings less legitimate than these. "The initiated of the Syrian goddess, like the priests of Cybele, were wont to pour over the provinces of the Roman empire in companies of strolling beggars. They wandered from place to place, taking with them a veiled image or symbol of their goddess, clad in women's apparel of many colours, and with their faces and eyes painted in female fashion. Armed with swords and scourges, they threw themselves by a wild dance into bacchanalian ecstasy, in which their own long hair was draggled through the mud. They bit their own arms, and then hacked themselves with their swords, or scourged themselves, in penance for some sin supposed to have been committed against the goddess."² The little band of weary Israelites which was pressing towards Damascus, eager to reach the city gates before they were closed, may have encountered more than one such strolling company, as it sallied forth from the great Syrian city, the native capital, at this time, probably, the head-quarters of the Syrian religion.

The two routes, along one or other of which St. Paul must have been proceeding, converge as they approach Damascus, and unite at the distance of about a mile and a half from the present southern gate, the Bab-el-Allah, or "Gate of God." Modern critics, therefore, incline to the belief that St. Paul

¹ Ezek. xxvii. 17.

² Döllinger, "Jew and Gentile," vol. ii. p. 431.

entered the city by a gate on this side of it.¹ Tradition, however, assigns his entrance to the Eastern Gate, near which is the supposed "house of Judas"; and though certainly traditions of the kind that are now met with in the East cannot be regarded as worth very much, yet there is perhaps some reason for not altogether rejecting the one at present in question. If the Jews had a "quarter" in Damascus in the time of St. Paul's visit, or even a portion of the town in which they especially congregated,² that portion is almost certain to have lain towards the east. The west was the grand region of the city; there were the castle, and the great temple with its colonnaded courts, and its avenues approached by arches. The governing class of Greco-Syrians, the Damascenes, as they called themselves, would have been sure to have established themselves in this favoured quarter; and the Jews, like the Christians of the present day, would have been pressed towards the eastern or less favoured region. If this were so, it would be very possible, nay probable, that St. Paul's conductors, on nearing the city, might quit the main line of route, and, diverging towards the right, proceed eastward through bye-lanes outside the walls, so skirting the portion of the city between the Bab-es-Saghir and the Bab-esh-Shurkey, and entering by the latter, the great eastern portal. Travellers, even in modern times, are often conducted round the city instead of through it,³ on

¹ Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 412 (ed. of 1862).

² See above, p. 57.

³ See Maundrell's "Journey from Jerusalem to Aleppo,"

account of the difficulty which would be found in making way through the crowded streets, or for other reasons. Persons who had a blind man to guide would be more than ordinarily desirous of escaping the crush and throng of main thoroughfares, and would be glad to make their way to their destination by less frequented routes. And if the "house of Judas" were situated at all near the site now assigned to it, entrance by the Eastern Gate would have involved no great increase in the distance, and would almost certainly have been a saving of time. We imagine, then, that St. Paul's conductors, on nearing the walls of the city, quitted the great road which led up to the southern gateway, the modern Bab-es-Saghîr, and followed a cross-road through the region south-east of the city, which conducted them to the Bab-esh-Shurkey.

The ancient gateway, which here remains almost entire, though concealed to some extent by more recent buildings, may well have been that through which St. Paul and his conductors passed. It is Roman work of a good period,¹ with nothing about it that is weak or debased, and seems quite as likely to belong to the time of Augustus as to any later era. It consists of a triple archway in the line of the wall, the centre arch being considerably higher than those at either side, and the moulding which surmounts it

p. 124; Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 615. Compare Porter, vol. i. p. 46.

¹ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 40. For a restoration of the gateway to its original condition, see the same work, p. 38.

being richer and more deeply cut. The side arches, which are perfect, do not much exceed the height of a man at the point from which the arch springs; but the spring of the centre arch begins at a height which



EAST GATE OF DAMASCUS.

is at least double this. This arch is at present incomplete, but from the fragment that exists we may gather that the height to the crown of the arch from the ground was as much as twenty-seven or twenty-

eight feet originally. The arches seem to have sprung in every case from pillars, or rather pilasters, which were solid shafts of stone, but projected from the face of the wall only a few inches. Other pilasters separated the three archways from each other; and the whole effect was in this way rendered at once chaste and pleasing.

The arrival of the band of travellers at the city gate would have been followed probably by a short detention for the purpose of making inquiries. In the East gate-dues are often exacted, and travellers must show that they are not bringing into a town anything liable to such an impost. Even apart from this, inquiries were often made, especially at a frontier town like Damascus, as to the rank and condition of new arrivals, their ordinary business in life, and the object with which, on such occasion, they were travelling.¹ These had sometimes to be entered by the keepers of the gates in a register for transmission to the chief authorities of the town, or of the kingdom, whereby the period of detention was prolonged, and sometimes became considerable. We have no distinct evidence of the practice at Damascus; but the probabilities are, on the whole, in favour of its having prevailed there.

At length the ordeal would be over—the travellers would be released—they would be allowed to pass through the gate, and enter the city. St. Paul's companions would see stretched before them the great

¹ See what Philostratus tells us of the arrival of Apollonius of Tyana at Babylon ("Vit. Ap. Tyan." i. 27.)

“street called Straight,”¹ with its four rows of noble Corinthian pillars extending in long vistas as far as their eyes could reach.² Beyond the pillars on either side would be nothing but bare flat walls, broken by an occasional doorway; but the colonnades themselves, in their proportions, in their materials, and in their ornamentation would be so beautiful that the eye would require little else; and the little required would be amply supplied by the deep blue sky above, and the gay throng that would fill the magnificent street. Here a Roman lady in her litter, screened by silken curtains of bright hues, and borne upon the shoulders of slaves was carried through the crowd at a rapid pace, on a visit to a friend or relative; there, perhaps, an “exquisite,” Greek or Syrian, drove his own chariot along the paved way, managing with the utmost skill his two or three prancing steeds, and conspicuous by his own apparel, and by their costly trappings. Groups of Jews here and there discussed matters of business with keen interest, or, if it was a day of prayer,⁴ wended their way towards their synagogue; Arabs from Petra with glittering eyes and loose white robes marched erect through the city which they now regarded as their own;⁵ Bedouins hurried along with a less satisfied look, anxious to exchange the close air and hated confinement of a

¹ Acts ix. 11.

² See above, p. 41.

³ Four horses were scarcely driven except in the games, or when a Roman general triumphed.

⁴ There were three such in the week, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday.

⁵ *I.e.* if Aretas was in possession.

town for the delightful freedom of the open desert. Slaves from Nubia, as black as ebony, Syrian priests with their tall white caps and flowing garments, Parthians in bright vest and trowsers, Phœnician traders, Palmyrene merchants, dark Copts, fair peasants from snowy Lebanon walked side by side, diversifying the scene, and heightening its effect by sharp contrasts. The companions of St. Paul, amid a babel of sound, and the crush and confusion of so many passengers, would with difficulty make their advance ; but at last all obstacles would have been overcome, and they would have stood, with their blind comrade, before the street-door of the house whereof they were in search, "the house of Judas."¹

And he, that comrade, with what feelings would he hear that the day's work was done, the house of Judas reached? Dazed, stupified, overwhelmed by what had happened to him on the way, by the vision that he had seen, the voice that he had heard, the thoughts that had since arisen in his mind as he looked back upon the past, he had suffered himself to be "led by the hand," and had almost mechanically followed his guides from the scene of the vision to the house-door, where they brought him to a stand. As he had been utterly blind to all the sights upon the way, so (we may well suppose) he had been deaf to the sounds. The hum of insects, the songs of birds, the rush and splash of waters, the creaking of bridges, the greetings, the jibes of fellow-travellers, the inquiries of the gate-keepers, the hubbub and bustle of

¹ Acts ix. 11.

the town had fallen (it is probable) on heedless ears, and had been to him as though they were not. In the whirl of emotion and perplexity wherein he was plunged, the inward almost wholly overpowered the outward. If he was sensible of anything beyond his own sad thoughts, it would be of physical fatigue and exhaustion, and of a desire for repose. He had been up, no doubt, at dawn ; he had made his morning's march ; he had then been subjected to the tremendous excitement, the strain on every faculty, of that wonderful appearance ; that sight, those words ; he had been struck down, astonished, dismayed, and since then he had walked with stumbling feet ten weary miles ; he had come through the throng and press of a crowd, and now he had reached his journey's end—he was at the door of Judas's house. What lay before him in the future he knew not ; the mind was, like the body, in darkness ; but it must have been with a sentiment of relief, a feeling of satisfaction, if not of gladness, that he learnt why his guides had stopped ; that Judas's hospitable roof was reached ; that he might enter in, and rest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE OF JUDAS.

The house of Judas probably one of the best Jewish houses in Damascus—The house of a strict Jew—Description of such a house—Its plan—Its ornamentation—Its furniture—Guest-chamber, and proceedings at meals—St. Paul's abstinence—His long fast in his chamber—His prayer and vision—Fulfillment of the vision—St. Paul's baptism—Questions connected with it.

WE have noted in a former chapter¹ the mean appearance of the houses in Oriental towns as they are approached from the street. This appearance is almost universal, and gives no indication at all of what is to be expected within. To obtain a notion of the interior of the mansion into which St. Paul and his companions entered, we must inquire, in the first place, what the rank and position of Judas are likely to have been. Now, considering the unmistakable indications which St. Paul's writings give of his liberal and indeed expensive education,² and again, considering the position which he must have held in order to entitle him to go in person to the high-priest, and ask for an important commission from him,³ it seems reasonable to conclude, that the

¹ Chap. ii. p. 42.

² See on this point Burton, "Ecclesiastical History of the First Three Centuries," vol. i. p. 69.

³ Acts ix. 1, 2.

house where it was arranged that he should reside while executing his commission, was that of a Jew of some distinction. We may, perhaps, without impropriety go further, and say, that it was probably that of one of the leading Jews of the town. St. Paul was not an ordinary high-priest's "messenger"; his commission was one which gave him unusual power and authority; it must have required him to communicate confidentially with the chief authorities belonging to his own communion within the city; and to one of them he would probably be consigned as a guest. We shall assume, then, that the mansion belonged to a Jew of wealth and importance, and possessed all the elegance and commodiousness which characterized the best Jewish houses of the period.

Further, we shall assume that it was the house of a religious Jew, one deeply attached to the faith of his fathers, and unwilling to corrupt it, or fritter it away, by compliance with even the innocent practices and habits of the Greeks. Decorations and ornaments would have been admitted into the residence of many a Hellenizer, which a strict Jew would account as utter abominations; while the house of a strict Jew would retain many peculiar features, which the more cosmopolitan among his brethren had for many years discarded and perhaps forgotten.

Over the street-door—a single door, probably, moving on pivots and not on hinges—was inscribed in the Hebrew character of the time a text from Scripture, according to the well-known injunction in Deuteronomy,¹ which most Jews understood literally.

¹ Deut. vi. 9.

The door was carefully barred within ; and to admit visitors, the porter, whose room was at the side, had to remove the bar, and then draw the door backwards. On admission the guest saw before him a passage, or small hall, lighted by a latticed window above the doorway, and terminating almost immediately in a blank wall, so arranged as to intercept any further view into the interior. Following the passage, he found himself, after a bend or two, in a large court. The centre was occupied by a pond or cistern, with or without a fountain, and was open to the sky. The floor was paved with squares of various marbles, arranged so as to form a tasteful pattern, while around it were deep verandahs, supported on pillars, into which opened numerous apartments of no great size. The largest was a saloon of fair dimensions, the place for receiving ordinary male visitors. This was open to the court on one side ; on the other three it was skirted by a raised platform or divan, well cushioned throughout, on which the guests reclined as they sipped their wine or their sherbet. The other apartments were smaller, and consisted chiefly of rooms for servants. At one or more points in the court were openings, leading further on into the interior of the mansion. These conducted, for the most part, into fresh courts, modelled very much upon the pattern of the first, but each exceeding the other in the richness and beauty of its ornamentation. In all, water was abundant ; fountains threw up freely their delicate spray, and charmed at once the eye and the ear with their rainbow hues, and their gentle plashings. One of the innermost courts was the harem, or quarter of

the women, where the lady of the house, with her children and attendant maidens, pursued her avocations in a privacy that was not often intruded on. Here, in an opulent house, and therefore we may suppose in the house of Judas, was the luxury of a garden; creepers draped the verandahs and hung in festoons from their projecting eaves; the ordinary pavement was replaced by beds of flowers, some dazzling the eye with their brilliant hues, others gratifying or (it might be) overpowering the sense of smell with their delicious odours; shrubs, like the oleander, the pomegranate, and the jasmin, raised themselves in places above the flowers, while here and there a goodly tree shot upwards, towering above the roofs and walls, an ornament, not only to the house but to the city.¹

A lavish decoration of carving and painting pervaded the mansion. Representations of human or animal forms, forbidden by the law, could not indeed be allowed by a religious Jew to decorate his walls or ceilings;² but delicate patternings of a thousand different kinds, guilloches, honeysuckles, lily-work, pomegranates, "knops" or gourds,³ wreaths, palm-trees, and nondescript forms, such as are now generally called "arabesques," in boundless profusion, were to be seen on all sides, painted in gay but harmonious tints, on the doors and walls of apartments. The

¹ See above, p. 44.

² The animal forms admitted in the time of Solomon (1 Kings vii. 25, 29; x. 19, 20) are an indication of the laxity which then prevailed, owing to the influence of foreign ideas.

³ 1 Kings vii. 24.

ceilings of verandahs were richly panelled with carved woodwork, the effect of which was heightened by colour, and perhaps by gilding. Amid the graceful meandering of the patterns appeared frequently short texts of Scripture, the strange shapes of the Hebrew characters harmonising well with the quaint forms by which they were surrounded.

The furniture was, no doubt, costly and elegant. Splendid carpets, fresh from the looms of Persia or Babylon, were spread here and there upon the marble floors, breaking their uniformity, and contrasting strikingly with their more sober hues. Curtains of "white and green and blue,"¹ hung from the pillars; soft cushions of damask² lay along the walls. A modern might have thought the furniture scanty, for the central portion of apartments was commonly bare; but such was the fashion of the time, and to the companions of St. Paul all would seem magnificent and complete in every respect.

The guests would be entertained, either in one of the larger rooms, opening by one entire side into a verandah, or perhaps in the verandah itself. In the soft Syrian clime, the air from the open court was agreeable, and none so much as thought of shutting it out; the scent and sight of the flowers and shrubs lent an additional charm to the social hour; and the plash of the fountains gave a sense of moisture and coolness that must have been delightfully refreshing to those who had been lately toiling over the dry surface of a desert. The master of the house, we

Esther i. 6.

² Amos iii. 12.

may be sure, spread every luxury before his guests—the wine of Helbon, ice perhaps from Mount Hermon,¹ Damascene fruits in endless variety, meat, rice, fresh vegetables. The meal would be taken in a reclining attitude, three persons occupying each couch²; there would be no table, but the attendants would bring the viands to each guest in succession, and they would help themselves by “dipping their hands into the dish.”³ The ladies of the house would hand the wine-jars, and fill the goblets with the rich juice of the grape, or temper them with water from the fountain that splashed hard by. Before and after the meal the attendant would bring each guest a basin, and pouring water from a ewer over his hands, would then wipe them with a clean towel or napkin. After the ablution in each case, grace would be said by the host, who before the meal would ask a blessing on the food,⁴ and after it would return thanks to God for His goodness.⁵

Such, in its main features, was doubtless the mode whereby Judas of Damascus strove to entertain and honour his guests. All responded to his kind and cordial entertainment excepting one. One—the chief guest—lay in the place assigned to him, silent, motionless, and “neither ate nor drank.”⁶ Still, perhaps

¹ Jerome tells us (“Onomast.” ad voc. *Ærmon*) that ice was furnished of old from Hermon to the Sidonians. The modern Syrians obtain it from Jebel Sunnin (Robinson, “Later Researches,” p. 432, note).

² See Dr. Smith’s “Biblical Dictionary,” vol. ii. p. 283.

³ Mark xiv. 20.

⁴ 1 Sam. ix. 13.

⁵ Deut. viii. 10.

⁶ Acts ix. 9.

“trembling and astonished,”¹ or dazed and confused, pondering the past, or striving vainly to penetrate the future, lay the High Priest’s messenger, and ate not, drank not. Vain were the persuasions of the host, vain the exhortations of his friends. No morsel of food, no drop of wine, or even of water, passed his lips. Either he was too much occupied mentally to have thought for the body at such a time, or he was consciously “chastening himself,”² doing a penitential act in the bitterness of his repentance and self-reproach. At any rate he refused all food and refreshment, for it would certainly have been pressed upon him, and could not be induced to break his resolve by any entreaty.

And now the shades of evening must have fallen, and the lamps have been lighted, and the usual hour for retiring to rest in a sober household have approached. The guests would be conducted to their respective apartments, which would be either small dark rooms opening upon the verandah, or possibly upper apartments, reached by a staircase from the court, and looking upon the street through large projecting windows. The poor blind “messenger” must have been carefully guided to his room and to his couch. Here, it must have been some relief to him to lie, to rest, alone with his own heart and with his God, in silence and—so far as man was concerned—in solitude.

A night, a day, a second night passed.³ The

¹ Acts ix. 6.

² Ps. lxix. 10.

The “three days” of St. Luke (Acts ix. 9) are thus best

stricken one was still in darkness, blind, utterly and entirely blind, and consequently utterly helpless. And his strict fast continued—still he “did neither eat nor drink.” Probably he continued to lie on the couch where he had flung himself that first night; perhaps he had “turned his face to the wall,”¹ showing that he could bear no talk of friends, no conventional condolence, nor urgent exhortations to moderate his self-reproach, to quit his bed, to rise and make the best of things, to satisfy the cravings of appetite by taking food. And, as he lay, he “prayed.”² We do not know if he had prayed before; perhaps his thoughts had been too confused, or his heart too depressed, for prayer. It is not every one that can call on God “out of the depths.”³ But whatever may have been the case before, at any rate now he prayed. He prayed, and a vision was granted him. He “saw in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”⁴ Oh, wonder of wonders! was a second miracle to be wrought on behalf of the “persecutor,” a miracle of pure and absolute mercy, recovery from his blindness? Had God punished him enough? Had He forgiven him his past blasphemy, and his persecution, and injury, “because he did it ignorantly in unbelief?”⁵ Was He about to remove the affliction which two days before He had laid upon

reckoned. Compare the “three days” during which our Lord lay in the grave.

¹ 2 Kings xx. 2. Compare 1 Kings xxi. 4.

² Acts ix. 11.

³ Ps. cxxx. 1.

⁴ Acts ix. 12.

⁵ 1 Tim. i. 13.

him? And if so, how soon? When would Ananias come? Who was he? Where was he? Why did he delay? These, and a hundred other such questions, would the aroused sufferer ask himself, now that his time of deep depression was past, and hope had dawned upon his soul.

Nor was it long before the answer came. Ananias indeed was at first reluctant to undertake the task imposed upon him. He had heard of the man to whom he was to go, "how much evil he had done to the saints at Jerusalem,"¹ and knew, moreover, the purpose with which he had come to Damascus, that he had brought with him "authority from the chief priests to bind all that called on Christ's name";² but he yielded as soon as his expostulation received the reply—"Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me."³ Ananias "went his way," and found out the house of Judas, and entered into it; and being brought to the blind man, "put his hand on him and said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales; and he received sight forthwith,"⁴ and "looked up upon Ananias."⁵ Real scales seem to be meant;⁶ a thin whitish substance,

¹ Acts ix. 13.

² Ib. verse 14.

³ Ib. verse 15.

⁴ Acts ix. 17.

⁵ Ib. xxii. 13.

⁶ St. Luke, who records the fact, was "a physician" (Col. iv. 14), and is very particular and exact in his notices of medical phenomena.

like the scales of a fish, was detached from his eyes at the moment of their healing, and fell from them on the couch or to the ground—evidence at once of the reality of the blindness, and of the miracle by which it was removed. Then followed, at the suggestion of Ananias, the baptism of the Apostle. Paul arose and was baptized, and washed away his sins, “calling on the name of the Lord.”¹

Many questions here arise, which it is impossible to answer—How did Paul’s companions regard this sudden conversion? What did Judas think of it? Did he make no effort to prevent it? Did he voluntarily allow it to take place in his house? Or was Paul baptized against his wish or without his knowledge? Was Ananias, when he inquired for “Saul of Tarsus,”² admitted to the blind man’s room, as an acquaintance or friend, and did the rest follow, with no one present but the two principals? And, then, did the fact become known at once, or not till later? The brevity of the narrative is such that we can give no answer to these inquiries. We read, that when Paul “had received meat, he was strengthened”;³ and that “then was he certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.”⁴ From these brief notices the most that can be gathered is, that, immediately after his baptism, he consented to take food, and having taken it found himself refreshed thereby; and that soon afterwards he quitted the mansion of Judas, which was no fitting residence for a Christian, and

¹ Acts xvii. 16.

³ Ib. ix. 19.

² Ib. ix. 11.

⁴ Ib. ix. 19.

found an abode with some of those "brethren," whom, when he set forth on his journey, he had intended to "bring bound to Jerusalem."¹ Christianity (we see) at once showed itself a power of attraction as well as one of repulsion. It separated between Paul and the strict Jew who had received and honoured him. It drew him by cords of love to the despised members of that struggling community, which was known as yet only as "the way," or perhaps as "the sect of the Nazarenes."²

¹ Acts ix. 2.

² Ib. xxiv. 5.

ARABIA.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOJOURN IN ARABIA.

Obscurity of the subject—Supposed motive of the sojourn—
 Supposed motive disproved—Another motive suggested—
 Vagueness of the term Arabia—Portion which St. Paul vi-
 sited—Argument from Galatians—Argument from analogy—
 General features of the Desert—Description of St. Paul's
 route—Features of the Sinaitic region—Revelations made to
 St. Paul during the sojourn—Probable duration of the sojourn.

“A VEIL of thick darkness,” it has been said,
 “hangs over St. Paul's visit to Arabia.”¹ Neither the
 motive of the visit, nor its duration, nor the portion
 of Arabia visited are laid down in the sacred writings ;
 and the opinions held on all these three points are
 conflicting. The earliest commentators,² and some
 among the latest,³ regard it as almost certain that the
 object of the Apostle was to preach the gospel in a

¹ Canon Lightfoot, “Comment on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians,” p. 87.

² See the Fathers generally, particularly those mentioned in the text.

³ As especially Mr. Porter (“Five Years in Damascus,” vol. i. p. 103). Dean Howson regards the matter as uncertain (“Life and Epistles,” vol. i. pp. 105, 106).

region to which it had not as yet penetrated ; that he “hurried forth into the wilds of Arabia, burning to impart to others the glad tidings which had so suddenly burst upon himself.”¹ “See how fervent was his soul,” says St. Chrysostom, in his comment on the passage of Galatians,² “he was eager to occupy lands yet untilled ; he forthwith attacked a barbarous and savage people, choosing a life of conflict and much toil.” Victorinus, Hilary, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, Primasius, and the Œcumenian commentator suppose the same. Jerome,³ too, considers that he preached in Arabia, but that his preaching was unsuccessful. A modern writer, who agrees with these authorities that his object must have been to preach, concludes that his success was great—so great that it provoked the hostility of Aretas, and led him to join in the persecution, which had nearly cost St. Paul his life.⁴

A little word dropped by the Apostle in one of the addresses which St. Luke records, seems to dispose altogether of what may be called “the preaching theory.” “I showed *first* unto them of Damascus,” he says, “that they should repent and turn to God.”⁵ Damascus was therefore the first place where St. Paul preached. And this preaching was not before he went into Arabia, for he went there “immediately” after his conversion.⁶ Moreover, had he preached

¹ Lightfoot, *ut supra*.

² Opera, vol. x. p. 676.

³ Hieronym. “Comment. in Ep. ad Gal.” (Op. vol. iv. p. 235).

⁴ Porter, *ut supra*.

⁵ Acts xxvi. 20.

⁶ Gal. i. 16.

the gospel in Arabia, as supposed, "to a barbarous and savage people," he would have anticipated the revelation made to St. Peter, by offering the gospel to Gentiles, when the admissibility of Gentiles to the church was a thing as yet unsuspected. His own words tell us that he did not offer the gospel to Gentiles till much later. "I showed," he says, "*first* unto them of Damascus and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and [then] to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God."¹ It was not till after the preaching at Jerusalem and in Judæa, three years subsequent to the conversion,² that St. Paul addressed himself to the conversion of the Gentiles.

But if the love of souls, the earnest longing to bring others to a saving "knowledge of the truth," which so especially characterised St. Paul, was not the motive that sent him forth at this time into the wilds of Arabia, what motive can be supposed to have actuated him? It was certainly not an idle curiosity; it was not a mere blind impulse. Some definite desire, some distinct need must have caused the movement. He must have felt some call, have seen some advantage to be derived from a temporary withdrawal into seclusion, a retirement from the busy haunts of men into a region of solitude and silence. What may we suppose that the call was? Surely there can be but one answer. A soul shaken to its

¹ Acts xxvi. 20. The word "then," which is supplied in the authorized version, is clearly implied, though not expressed, in the Greek.

² Gal. i. 18: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem."

deepest depths by so tremendous a revelation as that of which St. Paul had been the recipient, a soul loosed from all its former anchors, conscious that its whole past had been one huge mistake, not knowing whither its new convictions might lead it, aroused, troubled, confused, perplexed, would need, would crave a time for self-introspection, for reconsideration of all the problems of existence, for quiet and uninterrupted meditation on what had recently occurred, for earnest prayer and close communion with God, and solitude would thus become an imperative necessity, and the desire for it a passion of overpowering force. Solitude is obtainable in various ways, and admits of various degrees. To one dwelling at Damascus, with the Desert within sight, but one mode of realising it was likely to suggest itself. There, to the East, within twenty miles of the city, was the bare, treeless, houseless, trackless waste of sand, still, silent, without settled inhabitants, truly and indeed "a wilderness and a solitary place."¹ "Immediately, I conferred not with flesh and blood, but I went off into Arabia."² Do we not see here the dislike of human companionship, amounting almost to aversion and abhorrence, the longing to be rid of discussion, observation, questioning, which moved the Apostle to a sudden flight, a disappearance from the haunts of men, a plunge into the absolute vacancy of the great sandy tract, the "wilderness of Damascus"?³ He needed

¹ Isaiah xxxv. 1.

² Gal. i. 17. The "went into Arabia" of the authorized version is a weak rendering of the Greek verb.

³ 1 Kings xix. 15.

seclusion from the outer world ; he needed not relative, but absolute solitude ; he needed to commune for days, for weeks, perhaps for months with God and with his own soul—to think out the various problems that presented themselves to his teeming, active brain, and large, many-sided, sympathetic mind ; to reconcile the new with the old ; to understand the purposes and ways of God from the beginning ; to obtain that intellectual grasp of the truth which would enable him to be a powerful preacher of it, and “ mightily to convince the Jews, proving that Jesus was Christ.”¹ Perhaps he also needed, as much, the bracing effect of solitude on the moral nature, the power that it gives to do and dare, to make light of the opinions of men, of reputation, fortune, prospects, by showing their absolute nothingness when placed in the scale against that one thing of worth that man can have of his own—“ the answer of a good conscience towards God,”² the knowledge that at the turning-points of life he has not allowed self-interest to sway him, but has gone the way that conscience pointed, and followed where duty led.

St. Paul, then, we may be tolerably sure, plunged into Arabia to find solitude. But whither did he betake himself? Arabia is a vague term, a word of large and uncertain import. The great peninsula which lies below the 30th parallel between the two Gulfs known as the Arabian and the Persian is most properly speaking Arabia, and there are writers who

¹ Acts xviii. 28.

² 1 Pet. iii. 21.

confine the application of the name within these (comparatively speaking) narrow limits.¹ Others, however, extend it northwards six degrees to the neighbourhood of Aleppo ; westward to the Mediterranean below Gaza,² and across the Arabian Gulf, or Red Sea, into Africa ;³ and eastward, beyond the Euphrates,⁴ as far as the Khabour, if not the Tigris. Must we be content to say, that *somewhere* within this vast area of above a million of square miles, the new convert found a refuge for a while, and braced his spirits, and thought out anew the problems of existence ; or can we go further than this, and point out any special portion of the region to which he, either certainly or probably, betook himself? Certainty, let it be at once confessed, is unattainable. Tradition may be said to be wholly silent, for the Fathers tell us nothing on the subject, and the Arabic translator who has been thought to have embodied a tradition in his rendering of "Arabia" by "El-Belka," seems to use that term, in the vaguest way, as equivalent to Arabia in a very wide sense.⁵ And Scripture is silent also, so far at least as any direct notice is concerned. But it has been suggested that,⁶ as the word "Arabia" occurs twice only in St. Paul's writings, and both times in the same Epistle, the sense in the

¹ As Carsten Niebuhr ("Description de l'Arabie," p. 1) and Mr. Philip Smith ("Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography," vol. i. p. 175).

² Herod. iii. 5-9.

³ Ib. ii. 8.

⁴ Xen. Anab., i. 5, § 1.

⁵ He uses the same term to translate "Arabia" in Gal. iv. 25, where Sinai is mentioned.

⁶ See Canon Lightfoot's "Galatians," p. 88.

one passage, where it is definite, should determine the sense in the other, where it is indefinite; more especially as this interpretation lends force and significance to both passages, and throws a vivid light on what is otherwise so dark and mysterious a portion of the Apostle's history. The two passages are as follows:—

“When it pleased God (who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace) to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again into Damascus.” (Gal. i. 15—17.) And

“Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants, the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar; for this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.” (Gal. iv. 24, 25.)

If we may connect these two passages, if we may suppose that the Apostle connected them in his own thought, and was led on to speak of Mount Sinai by the previous mention of his Arabian sojourn, or mentioned his Arabian sojourn to prepare the way for and lend force to what he was about to say of Sinai, then we may perhaps conclude (with one of the most judicious of modern commentators) that the Apostle at this critical period of his life “betook himself to the Sinaitic peninsula, the scene of the giving of the Law, attracted thither by a spirit akin to that which

had formerly driven Elijah to the same region.”¹ He may not have gone there immediately; the first urgent need of solitude may have been satisfied by a plunge into the desert tract that lay so near, east and south-east of Damascus; but, as time went on, and his intellectual difficulties did not wholly clear away he may have been drawn on through the Desert further and further southward towards the “mount of God,”² until he too stood where Moses and Elijah had stood before him, where,

“Separate from the world, his heart
Might duly take and strongly keep
The print of heaven.”³

There are analogies in God’s dealings with His saints, when the position that they occupy is similar, on which it is perhaps safer to rely than on more direct arguments. Beyond a question, there is a peculiar fitness in the sojourn of St. Paul at Sinai before he broke his silence and came forth as a teacher under the new dispensation, when we consider that both Moses and Elijah had been prepared on Sinai for their missions. It satisfies our belief in “the eternal harmonies” to conceive that “in the wilderness of Sinai, as on the mount of the transfiguration, the three dispensations met in one;” that as “Moses had here received the tables of the law amid fire, and tempest, and thick darkness,” while “Elijah, the typical prophet, had here also listened to the voice of

¹ See Canon Lightfoot’s “Galatians,” p. 88.

² Exod. xviii. 5.

³ “Christian Year,” Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

God, and sped forth refreshed on his mission of righteousness," so now "here, lastly, in the fulness of time, St. Paul, the greatest preacher of Him of whom both the law and the prophets spoke, was strengthened and sanctified for his great work, was taught the breadth as well as the depth of the riches of God's wisdom, and transformed from the champion of a bigoted and narrow tradition into the large-hearted apostle of the Gentiles."¹

If, then, St. Paul pursued his way through "the wilderness of Damascus" by the Hauran and the country east and south of the Dead Sea to Sinai, through what outward surroundings would he move? The character of the true Desert is eternally the same. From the dawn of history the same races have lived in it. Even its customs are unchanging, and the traveller of the present day, who crosses it, sees represented before his own eyes the life of the patriarchs, the manners and habits of four thousand years ago. For the most part, the western Arabian desert is a bare region of dry, trackless sand, diversified here and there by rocky ridges.² Its broad reaches are, in general, absolute solitudes. Occasionally, but very rarely, the traveller will come upon the tents and cattle of an Arab tribe in some spot where there is a little grass or a more than usually abundant supply of camel's thorn; now and then he will find the rocks perforated by caves, and the caves tenanted by a low class of ruffians, whom the better sort of Arabs regard as "thieves"; but, with these rare exceptions,

¹ Lightfoot, p. 89.

² Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. pp. 163 201.

he will see nothing from morn to night, from day to day, but a continuation of bare rock and sand, unless it be the carcase of a camel, or the whitening bones of a human skeleton. His food he must carry with him on his own back, or on the back of his beast ; and of this he is liable to be robbed by the "thieves" mentioned above. For drink, he must depend on his knowledge of the positions of the wells, or on his power to read the signs which indicate to the initiated that water may be found by digging to no great depth beneath the surface. He would be a bold man who would at the present day ride forth from Damascus alone into the Syrian desert, and essay to make his way across it to Mount Sinai ; and it is most probable that St. Paul did not attempt any such feat. Most likely he was content to skirt the inhabited regions of the Ledjah, Hauran, and Gilead, not wholly avoiding the abodes of civilized men, though still passing through "Arabia." He would thus reach the countries of Ammon and Moab without incurring much privation or danger, and would pass from them into Idumæa, and so enter the Sinaitic peninsula.

This line of route would be at first to the south-east, and would lead him by the Bahret-el-Hijaneh, and the Matkh-Burâk, another lake or marsh a little further south,¹ to the eastern side of Trachonitis, or the Ledjah, where he would find a Roman road,² with stations at intervals, leading towards the south. This road he would naturally avoid, but it would serve

¹ This lake receives the waters which drain off from the Ledjah and from the northern flank of Jebel-Hauran.

² See Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. ii. p. 33.

him for a guide, and, continuing his journey in a course parallel to it, he would reach about the third day the hilly region now called *Jebel-Hauran*, which some regard as the Scriptural "Hill of Bashan."¹ As this was a fertile and inhabited district, we may suppose that he skirted it along its eastern or western flank—most probably the former. Here alone would he find the solitude which he desired ; for the highland stretching westward from the foot of the *Jebel-Hauran*, known to the Romans as *Auranitis*, though now a desert, was anciently a fertile district, thickly dotted with towns and villages, of which the ruins still exist at the present day.² East of the *Jebel-Hauran* was first a fairly well-watered tract, with many villages scattered over its surface, and then, at no great distance, the Desert. Passing through this region, and crossing the Roman road from *Bostra* (*Bozrah*) to *Bussorah*, or *Busra*, at the mouth of the *Euphrates*, he would come upon a desolate tract, broken by wadys leading towards the *Jabbok*, and so directing him on his way towards the lands of *Ammon* and *Moab*. Skirting these tracts, as he had before skirted *Trachonitis* and *Bashan*, he would enter *Idumæa*, near the south-eastern corner of the *Dead Sea*. Here, if his object still was, as we may well suppose it was, to avoid the haunts of men, he would descend from the highlands, over which his course

¹ Ps. lxxviii. 15 : "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan : an high hill, as the hill of Bashan." For the identification of the hill of Bashan with *Jebel Hauran*, see Mr. Murray's *Atlas, Holy Land, Northern Division*.

² Porter, vol. ii. pp. 263, 264.

had hitherto lain, and entering the deep valley of the Arabah, would proceed south and a little west of south along its entire length, so leaving Petra among the high rocks on his left hand, and reaching the shores of the Red Sea at Akaba. The journey down this curious vale, a continuation of the Jordan Ghor, would be chiefly over a hard sand ; but in places it would lie through a tangled mass of shrubs, giving it almost the appearance of a jungle.¹ As Akaba (Elath) was approached, the scenery would rise in interest. The feathery tufts of the grove of palms, which perhaps gave Elath its name,² would appear in sight, breaking the line of the plain to the south-east. Presently the sea would show itself, its blue waters bounded on either side by jagged ranges ; in the distance, the silvery mountains on the further Arabian coast ; nearer, granite cliffs eastward and westward, sometimes deep red, sometimes yellow and purple ;³ at their base a shelly beach, red with the red sand, or red granite gravel that pours down from the cliffs above, and broken upon by waves of perfect transparency, which churn the shells and gravel into a compressed mass that is mixed but never forced into one. The edge of the Sinaitic region would now be reached ; and a few more days of travel, first along the western shore of the Gulf, and then among the dry wadys of the Tur, would bring the wanderer to his journey's end, placing him in the heart of the mountain cluster whereto the name of Sinai is

¹ Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 85.

² *Ib.* p. 519.

³ *Ib.* p. 83.

attached, by a tradition that has sometimes been vigorously attacked, but never seriously shaken.¹

The leading features of the Sinaitic region have been of late made familiar to us by representations of great artistic excellence, and by descriptions which leave nothing to be desired. The confusion of form, the brilliancy of colour, the extreme desolation, the intense silence are placed before us, with a vividness almost unrivalled in descriptive geography, by Dean Stanley in his "Sinai and Palestine."² The region is manifestly one that has scarcely a parallel anywhere, and that would be absolutely new and strange to a visitor whose mountain experience had been gained in Cilicia and Syria, amid snowclad summits, and rushing streams, and mountain-sides, more or less clothed with forest, and having broad, green, fertile plains at their base. Rising to the height of above 9,000 feet, yet unclad by snow, bare rock from top to bottom, devoid of all that goes to make up our ordinary idea of mountain scenery, devoid of glaciers, devoid of streams and waterfalls, devoid of verdure, wholly without that "variegated drapery of oak and birch, and pine, and fir, of moss, and grass, and fern," which in Europe is almost as essential to mountain scenery as the rocks and peaks themselves,³ the Sinaitic mountain region impresses the beholder, not

¹ On the accordance of the tradition with the Scriptural narrative and the local features, see the volume published by the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1873, and entitled "Our Work in Palestine," pp. 265-272.

² See especially pp. 12 and 13.

³ Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 13.

so much with any sense of its beauty, as with a feeling of astonishment and awe. The vast, almost precipitous heights, their jagged outline, their blood-red colour, their nakedness, their "union of grandeur with desolation"¹ strike the mind most forcibly, but touch no tender or gentle chord. Gazing on them, the Apostle might come to understand the nature of the dispensation that went forth from thence, might perceive that it was a "ministration of death"²—a stern "pedagogue to bring us to Christ,"³ and so might have his soul "attuned to harmony with his divine mission, and fitted to receive fresh 'visions and revelations of the Lord.'"⁴

It is probable that many such were vouchsafed to the new convert during his Arabian sojourn. The analogy of God's dealings with His saints would seem to require at this time some such exertion of the divine power. The great legislator of the Old Covenant, when brought at the commencement of his work into this grand and awful region, conversed with God face to face for forty days and forty nights,⁵ before formulating his enactments. Elijah, the representative Prophet, when standing on Horeb, the Mount of God, heard Jehovah speaking to him in the "still small voice,"⁶ and received directions as to the future.⁷ It would be in accordance with these sacred precedents, that the great Apostle of the New

¹ Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 12.

² 2 Cor. iii. 7.

³ Gal. iii. 24.

⁴ Lightfoot, "Galatians," p. 89.

⁵ Exod. xxiv. 18; xxxiv. 28; Deut. ix. 9.

⁶ 1 Kings xix. 12.

⁷ Ib. verses 15-17.

Covenant, on visiting (as we have concluded that he did), the scene of these marvellous events before commencing his ministry, should, like his predecessors, have not only been strengthened by the divine grace, but also have received special illumination during his stay from the God who on this very spot had twice before revealed Himself. And the teaching of the New Testament, though not explicit, is completely in harmony with this supposition. St. Paul everywhere speaks of himself as "taught of God,"¹ having received the Gospel, "not of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."² "Immediately," after his conversion, he tells us, *without "conferring with flesh and blood,"* he "went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus."³ He expressly avoided seeing the apostles, who were at Jerusalem.⁴ Yet he went forth weak and ignorant, "so far from being fit for the office of an apostle, that the humblest disciple in Damascus was his superior in knowledge:"⁵ he returned thoroughly equipped for his apostleship, complete master of the "mystery of Christ,"⁶ able to "confound" the most learned of "the Jews which dwelt at Damascus,"⁷ and to "preach the faith,"⁸ in all its breadth and depth and fulness. At no subse-

¹ See Acts xxvi. 16-18; Rom. i. 1, 5; 1 Cor. i. 1; 2 Cor. i. 1; Gal. i. 1, 11; Eph. iii. 3, &c.

² Gal. i. 12.

³ Gal. i. 16, 17.

⁴ "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me" (ib. verse 17).

⁵ Burton, "Eccles. History of the First Three Centuries," vol. i. p. 89.

⁶ Eph. iii. 3. Compare i. 9-12.

⁷ Acts ix. 22.

⁸ Gal. i. 23.

quent time did he ever require instruction from man. No one could ever boast himself St. Paul's teacher in Christianity. When, after a while, he went up to Jerusalem, and conferred with those who "seemed to be pillars"¹—James, Cephas, and John—they in the conference "added nothing to him;"² could "impart to him no fresh knowledge, saw nothing defective or incorrect in his teaching,"³ but, on the contrary, heartily recognised it as "the Gospel."⁴ It must therefore have been by revelation that he obtained his knowledge, and this revelation must have occurred wholly, or at any rate mainly, in the interval between his quitting Damascus and his return thither. When made fit by the scenes and associations amid which he lived and moved to receive and embrace the entire range of Gospel doctrine, it was communicated to him "by revelation,"⁵ *i.e.* in a supernatural, ineffable way. The divinity of Christ, His sinlessness, the atoning power of His death upon the Cross, the facts of the resurrection and ascension,⁶ the details of the institution of the Lord's Supper,⁷ the call of the Gentiles,⁸ the sanctifying office of the Holy Spirit,⁹ justification by faith,¹⁰ the necessary union of faith and love:¹¹ these

Gal. ii. 9.

² Ib. verse 6.³ See Canon Lightfoot's "Comment on Galatians," p. 108, note.⁴ Gal. ii. 7.⁵ Ib. i. 12; Eph. iii. 3.⁶ See I Cor. xv. 3, 4; I Tim. ii. 16.⁷ I Cor. xi. 23-26. Note particularly the expression, "I have *received of the Lord* that which I also delivered unto you."⁸ Eph. iii. 3.⁹ I Cor. xii. 7-13.¹⁰ Acts xiii. 39.¹¹ Gal. v. 6.

and all other essential doctrines of Christianity were imparted to him (may we not say by Christ Himself?) during the course of that wintry sojourn in the bare, bleak Sinaitic region, where for more than forty days he was face to face with God.

The duration of the sojourn in Arabia remains to be considered. St. Paul tells us that three years elapsed between his conversion and his first visit to the apostles at Jerusalem,¹ which visit followed immediately on his escape from Damascus "in a basket."² These "three years" are probably to be understood (like the "three days" of his fast)³ as one entire year, and parts of two others, perhaps as altogether not more than a year and a half. Of this space we should be inclined to allow, for the sojourn in Arabia, six months; for the preaching in Damascus, which aroused the fury of the Jews, and caused the plot against his life, a year. There are, however, no data for accurately determining this point; and we must be content to leave it in obscurity, merely expressing our general agreement with the writer who says:⁴ "The sojourn in Arabia was probably brief—brief enough not to occupy any considerable space in the Apostle's history, and yet not too brief to serve the purpose it was intended to serve."⁴

¹ Gal. i. 18.

² Acts ix. 25.

³ Ib. ix. 9.

⁴ Lightfoot, "Galatians," p. 90.

DAMASCUS.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN TO DAMASCUS.—PAUL IN THE SYNAGOGUES.

Route followed by St. Paul on his return from Arabia—Sights and sounds as he neared Damascus—He lodges with the disciples—His resolve to “preach Christ in the synagogues”—Origin and spread of synagogues—Their organization as meetings—Arrangement of the places of meeting—Their architectural embellishments—Character of the synagogues at Damascus—Service of the synagogue—Practice of inviting strangers to make addresses in the course of the service—Probability that St. Paul was among the persons so invited—Small success of his early preaching—Transfer of his activity from the synagogues to the “schools”—Opposition raised to him—Defeat of his antagonists—Their resolve to assassinate him.

FROM the one brief sentence, in which alone the return of St. Paul from Arabia to Damascus is noticed,¹ we can gather nothing, unless it be that the resolution wherewith he set out, “not to confer with flesh and blood,” continued in force, and

¹ Gal. i. 16, 17: “I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.”

that he came back to the city of his baptism still untaught by man, acquainted with the Gospel in all its fulness, in all its depth, in all its mystery, but solely "by the revelation of Jesus Christ."¹ We may presume, therefore, that on his return he still avoided Jerusalem, perhaps avoided Judæa altogether, either going back as he had come, along the outer verge of the Desert, or, at any rate, making his journey by way of Moab, Ammon, and Peræa—*i.e.* by the tract of country east of the Jordan. If he took this line, he may have passed once more over the scene of the conversion, and have traversed, in full possession of all his senses, the road along which he had been led, in darkness, weakness, and amazement, six months before by his companions. Now his ears would be open to the sounds, and his eyes to the sights, of the marvellous Damascene region. It was, perhaps, the full gush of spring.² Overhead was the cloudless blue sky; around an air laden with delicious odours, warm, but not yet oppressive; on either side of the long straight road leading to the city a wilderness of gardens and orchards. Here roses and violets covered the ground,³ and spread around their peculiar fragrance; there the luxuriant vine and purple-tinted pomegranate grew together, and made a thick underwood;⁴ olives formed a grey

¹ Gal. i. 12. Compare Eph. iii. 3.

² That is, if the conversion was about November (*supra*, p. 105), and the stay in Arabia lasted, as above supposed, about six months.

³ Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. ii. p. 343.

⁴ *Ib.* vol. i. p. 153.

mass in places ; elsewhere oranges, citrons, and lemons, bearing fruit and flowers at once, showed brightly against the dark foliage of walnuts and cypresses ; water, clear, sparkling, abundant, was seen on all sides, in streams, in fountains, in jets, in babbling rills, in rushing rivers : all was life, beauty, luxuriance. St. Paul must have been more or less than man if he did not note these things, and allow them to sink into his soul, and deepen his sense of the goodness and tender love of that Almighty Father who, from the beginning, has "given man all things richly to enjoy,"¹ never "leaving Himself without witness," but "giving us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."²

On entering Damascus for the second time St. Paul did not again, we may be sure, seek the house of Judas. Perhaps he went first to the house of Ananias, whom he seems to have greatly respected, not only as the instrument employed by God to complete his own conversion, but as "a devout man," and one that "had a good report," even among the Jews themselves ;³ perhaps he lodged with some other disciple. All of which we can feel assured is, that he "was certain days *with the disciples*" that were in the city.⁴ He did not, as at Rome, "dwell in his own hired house,"⁵ but accepted the hospitality of the faithful during his prolonged stay in the Syrian capital.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

⁵ Acts xxii. 12.

³ Ib. xxviii. 30.

² Acts xiv. 17.

⁴ Ib. ix. 19.

And now the great decision of his life had to be taken. He had been told by Ananias that he was to be "a witness unto all men of what he had seen and heard."¹ The "heavenly vision" itself had declared to him that the very purpose of its appearance was to make him both "a minister and a witness."² He was "a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name before both Jews and Gentiles,"³ commissioned to "open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."⁴ Would he be obedient to the heavenly vision or "disobedient"?⁵ Hitherto he had taken no irrecoverable step; he had not broken with his nation; he had done nothing which the Sanhedrin and High Priest might not pardon; he had, indeed, not executed the commission which he had received at his own request; he had allowed the orders of the High Priest for the arrest of the Christians at Damascus to remain a dead letter; he had himself consorted with the sectaries, and shown a leaning towards them; but he had done no more; he had held his tongue; he had withdrawn into solitude; he had "kept silence, yea, even from good words," though it might be "pain and grief to him."⁶ Was this reticence to continue, or was it to be laid aside? We have the answer to this question in the memorable words, which will form the main subject of this

¹ Acts xxii. 15.² Ib. xxvi. 16.³ Ib. ix. 15.⁴ Ib. xxvi. 18.⁵ Ib. xxvi. 19.⁶ Ps. xxxix. 2, Prayer-book version.

chapter, "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues."¹

To understand this we must know—1. What were these synagogues? 2. In what manner were they organised? 3. How could St. Paul, if now an advocate of a religion which was antagonistic to Judaism, either claim the right or obtain permission to preach in them? The advocates of a new creed are not ordinarily allowed to disseminate their doctrines from the pulpits of their adversaries; how was it that St. Paul enjoyed this advantage?

Synagogues, according to the strict original meaning of the word,² were congregations of Jews, voluntary associations of persons who agreed to meet together at stated times for the purposes of prayer, praise, and religious instruction. Such meetings of religious Jews elsewhere than in the Temple are nowhere commanded in the Law, but still appear to have come into use at a very early period. There is some indication of their existence in the time of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah.³ A fresh impulse towards their formation was given by the Captivity, when the exiles, torn from their own country and detained at a distance from it in compulsory servitude, must either have gone without any religious service at all or have organised some kind of meetings.⁴ On the return from the Capti-

¹ Acts ix. 20.

² See Boeckh, "Corp. Ins. Gr.," vol. ii. p. 1005; and compare Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 243, note.

³ See 2 Kings iv. 23.

⁴ Ezek. xi. 15, 16, is thought to imply the existence of a synagogue among the exiles at Babylon.

vity, the institution, according to Jewish tradition, acquired a large and rapid development. What has been called "the *parochial* synagogue system" was formed; that is to say, the entire country population of Judæa was organized into bodies, with recognized officers and heads, who met at an appointed place on fixed days, and engaged in united prayer, sang hymns together, and gave or received religious instruction by the reading and exposition of Scripture. According to Jewish tradition, the general introduction of this system, and the formulating of the laws and rules by which it was administered, were the work of Ezra,¹ and thus dated from the fifth century before Christ. Between that time and our Lord's coming, the extension of the system kept pace with the ever-increasing dispersion of the Jewish nation. Wherever a Jewish community was to be found, there was at least one synagogue; in the larger communities there were several; Jerusalem itself had some hundreds;² in Damascus, with its population of 40,000 Jews,³ there were no doubt a large number—perhaps thirty or forty.

The organization of a synagogue was as follows: ⁴ At its head stood the "Ruler," or "Archisynagogus,"

¹ See Vitringa, "De Synagogis," pp. 413-16.

² Four hundred and eighty, according to the Jerusalem Talmud. *Ib.* p. 28.

³ *Supra*, p. 68.

⁴ I have followed Vitringa chiefly in this account, but have preferred on a few points the conclusions of Professor Plumptre, as expressed in his valuable article on "Synagogues," contributed to Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. pp. 1396-1402.

who had the general direction of its affairs, temporal and spiritual, who presided in the meetings, and expounded the Scriptures according to the sense fixed by tradition. Under him was a "Council," or "Senate," consisting of a larger or smaller number of persons, venerable for their age and character, who aided the Archisynagogus with their advice, and were entitled to the "chief seats" in the assembly.¹ In a wide sense of the term these persons were sometimes called, like the real head of the synagogue, "Archisynagogi."² Next in importance to them was the "Sheliach," or officiating minister, who recited the prayers and praises in the name of the congregation, as their representative and delegate. Below the Sheliach was the "Chazzan," a sort of deacon, or sub-minister, whose business it was to open the doors, to prepare the books, and to wait on the minister during the service. All these persons were ordained to their office by imposition of hands. There was also in each synagogue a body of ten men, known as the "Batlanim," or "men of leisure," whose business it was to be present at all services, so as to secure there being a congregation. These persons may occasionally have discharged, in addition, some of the previously mentioned offices; but such accumulation of duties was probably accidental, and was far from obtaining generally. Last among the permanent officials of the synagogue must be mentioned the "Interpreter" or "Targumist," who gave the sense of each Hebrew passage, read from the Law or the

¹ Matt. xxiii. 6.² Mark v. 22; Acts xv. 15.

Prophets, in the tongue understood by the people of the locality. "Readers" were not a distinct or permanent class; but on each several occasion the acting Archisynagogus summoned persons from the congregation at his discretion to discharge the readers' office.¹

The institution of the meetings whereof we have been speaking, naturally involved the construction of meeting-houses; and it was not long before the practice arose of designating the meeting-houses by the same name as the meetings or assemblies themselves. Thus "synagogues" came to mean in popular parlance "houses of prayer."² After the Captivity such houses were soon built wherever the Jewish name was known, and became to the Jews nearly what their temples were to the heathen, and what their churches are to Christians. They seem to have been built, almost universally, on one model. Each synagogue was an oblong square, the proportion of length to breadth varying considerably; the entrance or entrances being ordinarily at one end. Towards the opposite end, but at some distance from the wall, stood the most precious treasure of the synagogue, the ark, containing a copy of the Law, before which a rich veil was hung to screen it from the gaze of the congregation.³ Behind the ark were seats for the "rulers" or "elders," facing towards it; while in front of it were the seats for the ordinary worshippers.

¹ See Luke iv. 16, 17.

² This is the ordinary meaning of the word in the New Testament.

³ Vitringa, p. 211.

facing likewise towards the ark, and thus opposite to the seats of the elders. Down the middle of the floor, which was paved commonly either with marble or with stone, ran a wall of partition, five or six feet high, which separated the seats of the men from those of the women.¹ Between the ark and the entrance-door, towards the middle of the building, was a raised stage with a desk or pulpit, from which the Law and the Prophets were read and expounded. Over the entrance was commonly inscribed a text of Scripture.²

The architectural construction, and the external ornamentation of synagogues varied no doubt with the fashion of building in the country or city where they were situated. In Damascus it is probable that the architectural style employed did not differ greatly from that which was in vogue in the neighbouring district of Galilee, though from the greater wealth of the Syrian city we may reasonably conclude that the style adopted would be grander, and richer in its ornamentations. Recent investigations of Galilean sites have shown³ that synagogues in that region, which cannot be ascribed to a later date than A.D. 70, were without any exception pillared buildings, divided into aisles by rows of columns, which were never fewer than two nor more than four. The

¹ Vitrina, p. 194.

² This would naturally follow from the command given in Deuteronomy (vi. 9; xi. 20). Traces of texts have been found over the doorways of some ruined synagogues ("Journal of the Palestine Exploration Fund," No. II. p. 38).

³ See the entire account given by Captain Wilson in the paper above mentioned.

distance between the pillars was small, varying from six to ten feet; the capitals were in most instances either Corinthian or Ionic; the height of the pillars was not more in any case than about seventeen feet. It is supposed that the pillars supported stone imposts, the spaces between which were covered in by rafters, and that then above the whole was placed a flat solid earthen roof. Light appears to have been admitted into the buildings by windows in the front, and perhaps by others at the sides, though this is uncertain. The external ornamentation was by means of pilasters, of decorated doorways, of mouldings, friezes, and cornices, and sometimes (though rarely) of relieving arches over the lintels of doors.¹ Representations of flowers, wreaths hanging in festoons, scrolls of vine-leaves with bunches of grapes among them, vases, seven-branched candlesticks, and a few mutilated animal forms, telling of "Galilee of the Gentiles,"² have been found; and it may be added that the masonry generally, where otherwise unornamented, is "chiselled in" or bevilled to the depth of from two to five inches. Internally, the walls appear to have been plastered, but whether they were further adorned with painting, patterning, or inscriptions is uncertain.

The grander of the Galilæan synagogues³ were entered from a porch. The floor of this was sunk below the level of the synagogue, and was reached by

¹ As at Kefr Birim. No other example has been found.

² Isaiah ix. 1; Matt. iv. 15.

³ As at Meiron, and the larger synagogue at Kefr Birim. Vittinga notes that synagogues have sometimes porches (p. 465).

steps. The porch was supported by pillars, but of their exact arrangement there is at present no evidence.

We may assume that in Damascus there were many synagogues on the scale of those whose ruins have been discovered in Galilee, and not very dissimilar in their arrangements—pillared buildings from fifty to ninety feet long, and from thirty-five to sixty feet wide, with an internal height of seventeen or eighteen feet, and perhaps an external one of twenty-one feet or twenty-two. But it is probable that there were others, or at least one other, of greater pretensions. At Alexandria, and again at Antioch, one synagogue far surpassed all the rest. That at Alexandria is called “the glory of Israel.”¹ It was a basilica of large size, and contained at its upper extremity seventy seats for the seventy elders of the church, all made of solid gold, embossed with precious stones and pearls, and valued severally at above a quarter of a million pounds sterling.² The external beauty of the edifice was no doubt correspondent to the internal. The Jews, who were at Alexandria equally citizens with the Greeks³ and had their own quarter of the city,⁴ would naturally have vied with the Greeks in the magnificence of their public buildings, and have taken care that their chief place of worship should not fall short of the finest Grecian temples,

¹ Vitringa, p. 256.

² See the description in the Jerusalem Talmud, Gemara, *cap. ult.*

³ Josephus, “Ant. Jud.” xix. 5, § 2.

⁴ *Ib.* xiv. 7, § 2.

either in size or beauty. And something of the same rivalry is likely to have existed at Damascus. According to Jewish ideas, synagogues were to be the loftiest buildings within the circuit of any city,¹ or at any rate were to overtop all private dwelling-houses. We may presume that there were some in Damascus, conspicuous by their height and architectural adornment, which might perhaps even compare with the grand temple described in a former chapter.²

The services of the synagogue were held on three days in the week—the second, the fifth, and the seventh,³ corresponding to our Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. They consisted principally, as already observed, of prayers, praises, and the reading and exposition of Scripture. The service commenced with prayer. The *sheliach*, or officiating minister, came forward before the ark, and recited in monotone the customary prayers and praises, including the famous *Shemon-Esra*, or formulary of the eighteen benedictions (or at any rate a portion of it), and some of the Davidical psalms. After this the assistant-minister, or *chazzân*, took from the ark a volume of the Law and handed it to a member of the congregation designated by the Archisynagogus, who went up into the pulpit and read a portion appointed for the day, verse by verse, the *sheliach* standing by the while to see that the reading was in all respects correct. At the close of each verse, the interpreter

¹ Vitringa, "De Synagogis," i. 11; pp. 213-15.

² See above, pp. 35, 36. ³ Vitringa, pp. 263-5

or targumist, gave a translation of it in the language of the place, and, like the reader, was liable to correction from the sheliach. The first reader was succeeded by a second, and the second by a third, and so on until seven portions of the Law had been read. The book was then returned to its place; and, if the day was the Sabbath, a volume of the Prophetical writings was brought in its stead, and an eighth reader came forward and read a portion, the interpreter, as before, giving the sense. The Archisynagogus then called upon this reader, or (if he preferred) upon some other member of the congregation to give an exposition of what he had read, or a more general "word of exhortation to the people."¹ The exhortation ended, some more prayers followed; and then service terminated with the kaddish, or ancient form of mingled prayer and praise—"Hallowed and magnified be His glorious name in all the world, which He has made according to His good pleasure; and may He make His kingdom to rule over men; may His redemption flourish; and His Messiah hasten and save His people, in the days of your life, and in all the days of the house of Israel, and that quickly."²

Such, in outline, was the ordinary service of the synagogue, which was repeated, with slight variations, thrice upon the Sabbath-day, and twice upon each Monday and Thursday. It will be observed that one of its chief peculiarities was the wide "liberty of prophesying" which it gave to Israelites of all ranks and

¹ Acts xiii. 15.

² Vitranga, p. 962.

classes, provided that they could obtain the sanction of the Archisynagogus to their addressing the congregation. This sanction was, it would seem, very readily given to any respectable Israelite who asked for it, and was even offered to strangers¹ of note and name, who were thought more likely than others to be able to instruct and move the audience by the very fact of their being strangers. When St. Paul made up his mind to be "obedient to the heavenly vision,"² and to "bear Christ's name before the Jews,"³ the readiest method of giving his testimony was to take his seat in one of the synagogues and see if the Archisynagogus would not call upon him to address the people. He was still a Jew; he had lost as yet none of his rights; he had not been excommunicated: consequently, all the synagogues of Damascus were open to him, and he was at liberty to enter in and sit down in any seat on the men's side, except only the seats of the elders. The entrance of a stranger would be noticed; inquiries would be made; and, if not on the first occasion, at any rate on the second or third, such a stranger as Saul of Tarsus, the pupil of Gamaliel,⁴ the "apostle" of the High Priest, about whose sudden blindness and recovery, and baptism by Ananias, and almost immediate withdrawal into the wilderness there would be so many rumours, would almost certainly be called upon to deliver a "word of exhortation to the people." Then would come his opportunity. As at Antioch in Pisidia,⁵ he would at

¹ See the narrative in Acts xiii. 14-16.

² Ib. xxvi. 19.

³ Ib. ix. 15.

⁴ Ib. xxii. 3.

⁵ Acts xiii. 16.

once have "stood up," and either taking the word from the passage of Scripture first read,¹ or perhaps commencing with an exordium carefully framed with the view of conciliating Jewish prejudices,² he would have "preached Jesus,"³ have shown his audience the fulfilment of all the promises, of all the prophecies, in the crucified Nazarene; have insisted on the fact of the Resurrection, and on the evidence which it furnished of the true Divinity of Jesus; have exhorted them to look to Him, and to Him only, for the forgiveness of their sins; and warned them against the danger of rejecting the "good tidings" which it was his mission to declare to them.⁴ Having so spoken, he would have sat down, the concluding prayers and kaddish would have been said, and so the service would have ended.

It was probably by a repetition of such appearances in the various places of worship possessed by the Jews in Damascus, and by repeated calls from the Archi-synagogi, who would be curious about the new doctrine and sect, that St. Paul now "preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."⁵ The first effect produced by his preaching was simple astonishment—"All that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed those which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto

As our Lord did, when asked to read (Luke iv. 21).

² As he did subsequently at the Pisidian Antioch (Acts xiii. 16-37).

³ Ib. xvii. 18.

⁴ See the address to the Antiochenes in Acts xiii. 23-41.

⁵ Ib. ix. 20.

the chief priests?"¹ Instead, that is, of asking, "Is this doctrine true? Was Jesus of Nazareth really the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God?" they allowed their minds to be occupied with the comparatively unimportant matter of the consistency or inconsistency of the preacher, and with the strangeness of the fact that one, so lately the very foremost among the persecutors of the new sect, had suddenly become its warmest and most energetic advocate. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the preaching had little success. We do not hear of any converts having been made. Scripture contains no mention of a "church" at Damascus; no personal friend of St. Paul's is known as a Damascene; no "epistle" is addressed to the Christians of the great Syrian city; the preaching of the Apostle seems to have been as "the seed which fell by the way-side";² it took no root at all, but was wasted on unimpressible hearts.

The Apostle, however, was not daunted. He continued to "show unto them of Damascus that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."³ He remained in the city probably a full year.⁴ He "preached boldly in the name of Jesus."⁵ Nay more, instead of despairing and relaxing in his efforts because he made little way, he increased in zeal and strength.⁶ The extreme brevity of St. Luke's narrative makes it difficult to determine

¹ Acts ix. 21.

² Matt. xiii. 4.

⁴ See above, page 143.

⁶ Ib. ix. 22; "Saul increased the more in strength."

³ Acts xxvi. 20.

⁵ Acts ix. 27.

the exact mode in which he continued to address himself to the Jews of the place ; but it may be suspected that after a while the rulers of the synagogues ceased to allow of his addressing the congregations in the public service, and that he was forced to have recourse to another way of making himself heard. Synagogues in many places "consisted of two apartments, one for prayer, preaching, and the offices of public worship ; the other for the meetings of learned men, for discussions concerning questions of religion or discipline, and for purposes of education."¹ The former apartment, the synagogue proper, was called by the Jews *beth-ha-Cenneseth*, "the house of gathering" ; the latter *beth-ham-Midrath*, "the house of study." When the Apostle could no longer lift up his voice in the synagogues proper, he would naturally betake himself to the "Schools" or "houses of study." It was in such "schools" doubtless that Stephen had *disputed* with the Jews of the Alexandrian, Cilician, and Grecian synagogues at Jerusalem,² when St. Paul was probably among his opponents. It was in such a "school" almost certainly that St. Paul afterwards "disputed" at Ephesus.³ Now he would take advantage of some building of the kind at Damascus to "preach the faith which he had once destroyed." From such buildings he could not be excluded ; in them he could not be silenced ; the disciple of so famous a rabbi as Gamaliel might claim to be heard

¹ Conybeare and Howson, "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," vol. i. p. 65. Compare Vitringa, "De Synagogis," pp. 157-174.

² Acts vi. 9.

³ Ib. xix. 9. Compare Vitringa, p. 137.

with deference ; once heard, the fire, the fervour, the augmentative force with which he spoke, would rivet the attention of his auditors, and cause the fame of his preaching to spread through the town.

Naturally, opposition was aroused. The doctrine of a suffering Messiah would not be much more palatable to the Jews of Damascus than it had been to those of Jerusalem. No doubt the Archisynagogi took counsel together, and gave instructions to the most learned rabbis in the city to oppose with all their might the expositions of the new preacher. The school, or schools, wherein he taught, became the scenes of animated discussions, in which he exerted all his intellectual powers to establish, and his adversaries all theirs to refute, the position that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. The circumstances were repeated which had led, at Jerusalem, to the martyrdom of Stephen. Rabbi after rabbi was defeated in argument, "confounded,"¹ silenced. None could "resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."² Profound in his knowledge of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, St. Paul proved his point by a collation and comparison of passages,³ the true intent of which he plainly showed, while his adversaries urged, but urged in vain, the mystical and far-fetched interpretations of the traditionists, which had hitherto met with general acceptance. The victory was beyond

¹ Acts ix. 22 ; "Saul . . . confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus."

² Said of Stephen (Acts vi. 10) ; but probably equally true of St. Paul.

³ See Wordsworth's comment on Acts ix. 22.

all dispute with the Tarsean. Then, once more, in the rage and sense of humiliation that follows on defeat in argument, the party worsted in the contest "resorted to that which is the last argument of a desperate cause;"¹ they determined to silence their antagonist by violence; and, as the surest method of compassing their end, devised a plan of assassination. No details have reached us, but we know that a plot² was laid—a plot which came to the knowledge of the Apostle, and which made him anxious to quit the city. The words of Christ were probably known to him—"When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another."³ He knew also that he had not as yet accomplished the task set him; he had not hitherto "borne the name of Christ before the Gentiles," nor before "kings";⁴ he was, therefore, far from having "finished his course,"⁵ and it was his duty, if he could, to avoid martyrdom. Under these circumstances his preaching and disputing ceased, he went into hiding for a time, so at once baffling his enemies, and hindering them from committing the terrible crime on which they had resolved in their fury.

¹ Conybeare and Howson (p. 109), following St. Chrysostom, Hom. xx.

² The word translated "laying await" (Acts ix. 24), means simply "a plot" in ordinary Greek, and probably has the same sense in the Acts, wherever it is used.

³ Matt. x. 23.

⁴ Acts ix. 15.

⁵ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS

Ordinary modes of proceeding when assassination is threatened—Two authorities to which St. Paul might have appealed—Uselessness of appealing to the Jewish ethnarch—Appeal to the chief civil authority equally useless under the circumstances of the time—Necessity of temporary concealment—Resolve on flight—Difficulties in the way—Plan of escape formed by the disciples and successfully carried out.

It is not often that one whose life is threatened by assassins, if he has timely warning of his danger, finds much difficulty in escaping it. Ordinarily he appeals to the protection of the law, and, invoking its aid against his enemies, obtains their arrest if he can point them out, or otherwise has his personal safety guarded and watched over. If circumstances make the appeal to law unavailing, he has it commonly in his power to evade the danger by flying from it. Sometimes, however, in comparatively rare instances, it happens that neither of these two courses is readily open to him. Difficulties, either physical or moral, may stand in the way of his flight; and the legal authority whereto he has to make appeal may be either weak and unable to cope with those who defy it, or it may be secretly, or even openly, on the side of those by whom his life is threatened. In such

a condition of things the peril becomes exceedingly serious ; escape from it is difficult in the extreme ; and to surmount the difficulty requires much forethought, much ingenuity of plan, and much promptitude in execution.

We may assume that St. Paul's first impulse, when he became aware of the plot against his life, was to invoke the protection of authority. It was his practice generally to insist upon his civil rights, and to require of the governmental powers the strict performance of the duties incumbent on them.¹ He united in his own person rights and privileges not often joined together, and so was entitled to more protection than most others who might have been in his situation. As a Jew, sojourning in a town where there was an organized Jewish community, he could claim the interposition of the Jewish ethnarch, who was bound to defend from lawless violence all Israelites within his jurisdiction. As a Roman citizen,² resident within the limits of the Roman power, he was entitled to special protection from the authority, whatever it was, which in Damascus represented the majesty of Rome. At the first blush it might have seemed almost certain that either one or the other of these authorities, if not both of them, would have been anxious to throw the ægis of their protection over an unfortunate man, whom, merely on account of the doctrine which he preached, certain persons had resolved to murder.

¹ See Acts xvi. 37 ; xxii. 25 ; xxiii. 3 ; xxv. 10 ; xxviii. 19.

² Acts xvi. 37 ; xxii. 25, 28.

But the circumstances of the time and place were such as wholly to deprive the Apostle of the vantage-ground on which he seemed to stand, and to give his enemies the most excellent opportunity of carrying out their nefarious projects. Appeal to the Jewish ethnarch was, of course, in St. Paul's case, not to be thought of; for, sharing the prejudices of his countrymen, he would naturally desire the death of the "heretic,"¹ who had dared to beard the first rabbis of Damascus in their "houses of study," and had had the courage to oppose, and the intellectual ability to confute, their views. "Away with such a fellow from the earth"² was a phrase expressing the ordinary feeling of a Jew on such an occasion—a feeling not wholly Jewish, perhaps, but which had something closely correspondent to it among the Gentiles.³ St. Paul would feel and know that he had nothing to hope for from the Jewish ethnarch, and would perhaps scarcely trouble himself to go through the form of an appeal which was certain to be rejected. But in his Roman citizenship he possessed, apparently, a tower of strength, whereon (one would have thought) he might well have relied; and it becomes an interesting question to consider whether he did or did not take advantage of it to invoke the interference of the civil power, and, if he did not, what combination of circumstances prevented him.

¹ Acts xxiv. 14.

² *Ib.* xxii. 22.

³ See a remark of Mr. Grote's ("History of Greece," vol. vi. p. 159, ed. of 1862), on the feelings which led to the death of Socrates.

Under ordinary circumstances, had Damascus been, as it once was, the residence of the Prefect of Syria,¹ or had it even been presided over by a Roman governor of inferior rank, supported (as he would no doubt have been) by a Roman garrison, we may feel sure, judging by his conduct in other places, that St. Paul would have called in his aid; he would have proclaimed his danger and his privilege of citizenship, and would have demanded the protection which a Roman citizen was entitled to claim at the hands of every official throughout the empire. But the condition in which Damascus now stood was peculiar. Whatever the exact date at which the change in its political status had occurred, at any rate it is certain² that, by the time when St. Paul's life was threatened, the great Syrian city had passed from the direct government of Rome into dependence on the Arab sheikh who ordinarily held his Court at Petra.³ Aretas was recognised as supreme ruler by the Damascenes at this period; and though his own power was derived from Rome, and he acknowledged himself a Roman feudatory,⁴ yet within his dominions he was absolute, and there was no appeal from him to the emperor. St. Paul

¹ See above, p. 76.

² The certainty is derived from St. Paul's own statement in 2 Cor. xi. 32-3: "In Damascus the governor under Aretas" (literally, "the ethnarch of Aretas"), "the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me; and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands."

³ See Joseph. "Ant. Jud." xvii. 12, § 9; xviii. 6, § 3, &c.

⁴ Ib. xiv. 6, § 4; xvi. 9, §§ 4 and 10, § 9; Strab. xvi. 4, &c.

would have to consider whether he should make application to the officer representing Aretas at Damascus, and publicly demand his protection, or whether, neglecting this resource, he should set himself to baffle his enemies by the mere private efforts of himself and his friends. We cannot say with certainty what was his decision; but on the whole it would appear, from the general tenor of the Scriptural notices, that he determined to forego his legal claim, and to seek safety in a less pretentious but more promising way.

There was good reason for such a decision. The officer representing Aretas at Damascus had been gained over by the Jewish authorities of the place, and was leagued with them against the apostle.¹ The "Ethnarch of Aretas" actually backed up the heads of the Jewish community in the plot which they had formed, and so became accessory before the fact to an intended assassination. No Roman would have acted in such a way; and it is unlikely that even an Arab would have done so, except at a peculiar conjuncture. The pretensions of Aretas to make war upon a brother feudatory, and to occupy a city hitherto under the direct government of Rome, had displeased Tiberius. Vitellius, the governor of Syria, had received orders to march against him;² it was consequently of the utmost importance to the Arab sheikh that he should obtain the goodwill of the Jewish element in the population of Damascus,

¹ This appears from combining 2 Cor. xi. 32 with Acts ix. 23-4.

² Joseph. "Ant. Jud." xviii. 6, §1.

in prospect of the fight which he was determined to make, rather than relinquish his recent acquisitions. Should Damascus be attacked by the Vitellian legions, such an accession to the strength of his garrison would be invaluable : even should the entire quarrel be arranged by negotiation, it would be important to be able to argue that Damascus preferred to form a portion of his dominions.

Thus an escape from the designs of his enemies against his life by means of an appeal to authority was impossible for St. Paul under the circumstances. The heads of his own community were, if not the very persons who had formed the plot against him, at any rate among those who gave it their most entire approval. The civil governor of Damascus, who might have been expected to have been unprejudiced and fair, was in league with them from a political motive, and was ready to lend them his help to accomplish their purpose. Nothing remained for the threatened apostle but the two alternatives of concealment or flight—concealment till the hostility which he had provoked should subside, or till the political circumstances of the time should change, or else a sudden and secret flight, which should place him at a distance from those by whom his life was sought, and in a country whereto they were not likely to follow him.

Concealment was easy for a time. The Christian disciples within the city, of whom we know that there had been many even before St. Paul entered the place,¹ would probably one and all have been glad

¹ Acts ix. 2, 19 ; xxii. 5.

to receive him, to harbour him, to keep him hid within their houses as long as he was willing to stay. He was not a criminal; there was no charge against him; and they were liable to no punishment for giving him a refuge. But after a while the Apostle would grow weary of confinement and inactivity, would chafe at his compelled idleness, and pine for liberty to go where he pleased, and "preach the Gospel to every creature."¹ The conviction that he had a mission, and that he was neglecting it, would ere long have become intolerable, and the Apostle would have felt that he must either find a new field for his labours or recommence them in Damascus at whatever risk.

As the latter of these two courses would but have resulted in his almost immediate destruction, every effort would be used to deter him from it, and the thoughts of all would be turned towards devising a means by which he might quit the town in safety, and take up his abode elsewhere. The difficulty of escape depended, in the first place, on the fact that Damascus was a walled town, possessing only seven or eight gates.² It was consequently easy for St. Paul's adversaries to "watch day and night"³ without overtaxing their energies. A further and greater difficulty arose from the fact that the Arabian governor had joined the league against him, since the

¹ Mark xvi. 15. Compare Col. i. 23.

² See above, pp. 31-2. It is said to have had only seven gates at the time of the Arab conquest. (See Ockley's "History of the Saracens," pp. 128-9, and compare Ibn-Kathir, as quoted by Mr. Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," vol. i. p. 69.)

³ Acts ix. 24.

gates were, as a matter of course, guarded by his troops, whose duty it was to examine all who came in or went out, and who, we may be sure, had orders, if St. Paul presented himself, immediately to inform the Jewish authorities of the circumstance. Unless he could contrive some very perfect disguise, St. Paul was certain, on attempting to quit Damascus by one of its gates, to be noticed ; and he would then have been followed by those who sought his life, until they found a convenient opportunity of despatching him.

It occurred to the disciples, when they considered these probabilities, that it was possible for a man to quit the town without passing through any of the gates. Rahab had in remote times let down the Israelite spies by a cord through the window of her house, which abutted on the town wall of Jericho ; and they had thus escaped destruction.¹ The same plan might be adopted at Damascus. There were probably then, as there are now,² many private houses adjoining and even overhanging the walls, with windows overlooking the open country, through which a man might be "let down" without danger. It was determined to make use of one of these. In the dead of night, while the soldiers of Aretas and the exasperated Jews watched the gates of the town,

¹ Joshua ii. 15-22. A more exact parallel is that of the man "let down on the outside of the wall of Damascus in the night," during the siege by Kaled and Abu Obeidah, mentioned in Ockley's "History of the Saracens," p. 109.

² See the accompanying woodcut, which is taken from a photograph, and compare the illustration given by Conybeare and Howson, vol. i. p. 110.

St. Paul was conveyed to a house abutting upon the wall. A large basket, probably formed of a network of rope,¹ and a strong cord had been provided. The Apostle, after bidding his friends and fellow-Christians farewell, stepped into the basket, and, grasping



HOUSES ON THE OLD WALL, DAMASCUS.

the cord, was lowered slowly and steadily from the overhanging window. It has been said that "there was something of humiliation in this mode of escape,"² and, humanly speaking, the statement is certainly true; but St. Paul doubtless felt that the

¹ See the comment of Dean Stanley on 2 Cor. xi. 33.

² Conybeare and Howson. vol. i. p. 109.

disciple of a crucified Redeemer must be prepared to encounter shame and reproach, and like the other apostles, when "beaten" by the authorities at Jerusalem, "rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ."¹

¹ Acts v. 41.

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