

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

VOL. 24.—No. 280.

WELLINGTON, N.Z., OCTOBER 18, 1918.

2s 6d Per Annum, Post Free.
Single Copy, 3d.

DAMASCUS.

FROM CRESCENT TO CROSS.

How we have been thrilled by the cable news of the last week or two! With what breathless interest have we watched the progress of General Allenby and his victorious army! How we have waited with bated breath for news of the great conflict now proceeding 'twixt Cross and Crescent; news of the rolling back of the tide of Moslem invasion which swept across our Holy Places over 12 centuries ago. And, as we watch the progress of the flag, we pray that the light which shines from the Cross may lighten the dark and rayless night which followed in the wake of the Crescent, and settled like a pall over all the lands beneath its sway.

Jerusalem, so beautiful for situation, is once more beneath the rule of a Christian Power, and northward from it moved our army, with Constantinople as a possible objective. Just now we love to picture the boys from these far-off isles of the sea, from this newest of lands, encamped around Damascus, the most ancient city on record, enjoying the beauty of that Pearl of the Orient, that Eye of the East, which tradition asserts Mahomet refused to enter because "There is only one Paradise allotted to man, and I prefer to reserve mine for the future."

Perchance they bathe their wearied limbs in the clear, crystal waters of those streams which flow from snow-crowned Lebanon, and about which Naaman asked, "Are not Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?" and of which a devotee sang:

"Abana, the light of Damascus!

Thy flowing is music to me,
My offering of bright, golden roses,
Ere morning its beauty discloses,
I bring, O fair river, to thee."

Truly, with its clear, blue, smokeless skies, its bright sunshine, its purling streams, and its verdure-clad plain, a paradise in which to rest and recreate for the further struggle which lies ahead.

How varied the history of this old city! Its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity. Josephus tells us it was founded by Uz, the grandson of Shem, in the glimmering dawn of history. How its fortunes were interwoven with those of God's Chosen People! It is first mentioned in connection with Abraham's struggle with the kings for the release of Lot. Captured by David, it was then afterwards the capital of the kingdom of Benadad, the determined enemy of Israel. It passed successively into the hands of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Conquered by Pompey, B.C. 64, it became part of the great Roman Empire.

The wheel of fortune turns up many strange changes. This city, which was old

"When the British warrior queen,
Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought with an indignant mien,
Counsel of her country's gods."

which indeed had passed its first youth ere "Romulus and Remus had had suck," fell under the sway of Rome. But the prophetic eye of the old Druid saw the downfall of that mighty Power, and assured Queen Boadicea that

"Regions Caesar never knew
Thy posterity shall sway,
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they."

Now that prophecy is fulfilled, and the "progeny that sprang from the forest of her land" has come from the sunny islands of the Southern Seas, and, fighting as allies of the descendants of those ancient Romans, has halted around Damascus, that most Oriental of cities, on whose battlements the Cross has replaced the Crescent.

To this city was led Saul of Tarsus, smitten with blindness on "the road to Damascus," and deprived of his power to injure, was taken to a street called Straight, and there visited by Ananias. From its walls, let down in a basket, escaped Paul, the mighty apostle of the Gentiles.

In the 7th century the Saracens captured Damascus after a siege of 66 days, and for seven centuries it was ruled by them. Then Tamerlane swept like a devouring flame across Asia. He captured Damascus, and reduced it to ashes. He took away as prisoners the artisans, who made the far-famed Damascene blades, and with them the secret of their manufacture was lost to Damascus.

Again the city was retaken by the Turks, and ruled by them until in this year of our Lord, 1918, the city, which was the metropolis of the Mahomedan world, through whose gates annually passed 50,000 pilgrims on their way to Mecca, once more displays from its walls the flag of the Cross.

The Cross! Still like Constantine of old we see it flaming in the sky, still we hear the voice saying, "By