

great house of worship, and requesting the aid of artizans, (his own people being chiefly agriculturists), skilled hewers of wood, to assist in procuring timber in the mountains of Lebanon adjacent to Tyre. King Hiram entered warmly into the project, and thus commenced a friendship and a lasting alliance between the two kings, the aged Phœnician and the young Israelite, which, besides affording Solomon immense assistance in procuring material for the temple, enabled him to extend his commerce over the Mediterranean and Indian seas. For the fleets of Solomon, manned by Tyrian mariners, went forth on their mysterious voyages—to Ophir in the East on the shores of Arabia or India, and to Tarshish in the far West, circumnavigating Africa it is believed by voyages of three years duration, during which, in order to replenish their stores of provisions, they stopped by the way, planted corn, waited for it to ripen, then resumed their voyage.

The workmen of Tyre assisted those of Solomon in procuring timber and stone, and floating them down the sea coast to Joppa, one of the ports nearest to Jerusalem, and some 25 to 40 miles distant. Thus were employed 30,000 laborers in cutting timber, 70,000 in transporting the material, and 80,000 in cutting stone and dressing them in the quarries, making a total of 180,000 men. These worked under the direction of him whom we know as Hiram Abiff, who was a son of a widow of the tribe of Naphthali, but a Tyrian by birth. His abilities were so great, and his attainments so extensive and various, that he was skilled not only in the working of metals but in all kinds of works in wood and stone, and even in embroidery, in tapestry, in dyes, and in the manufacture of all sorts of fine cloth. This man was a treasure to Solomon, and was so much respected by him and by the King of Tyre that he was denominated the father of both.

The stone was brought partly from Lebanon, partly from the neighborhood of Bethlehem and partly from the quarries which have been recently re-discovered underneath the temple rock. The stones were dressed in the quarries and when brought to the site were placed with reverend silence one upon another without sound of axe or hammer. Three years were spent in preparation, but at last all was ready, and the foundation of this famous temple was laid in the year B. C. 1012, and occupied seven years and six months in building. The uneven rock of Moriah had to be levelled and terraced, and the irregularities filled up with immense substructions of great stones forming vaulted chambers and huge buttresses, and it is of these if of any part of the temple that the remains are still to be seen. As the area was not wide enough to contain the temple proper and its courts, which together covered thirty-three acres of ground, a wall was built up from the valley beneath constructed of immense white stones firmly united together and reaching to the stupendous height, on the side next the Mount of Olives, of seven hundred feet in its highest and five hundred and forty feet in its lowest places. Some of the stones in this wall were eighty feet long, nine high and eleven wide.

On the centre of the grand terrace thus obtained, and elevated above the outer portion of the great quadrangle, stood the inner temple or temple proper, a building of stone faced with cedar, and covered completely with plates of gold. During seven years and a half this splendid fabric silently but rapidly proceeded towards completion. Every part and material of the building, even the largest beams and most ponderous stones were fitted before they were brought to the site—

“No workman’s steel nor ponderous axes rung,
Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung.”

“Its appearance,” in the words of Josephus, “had everything that could strike the mind or astonish the sight, for it was covered on every side with plates of gold, so that when the sun rose upon it it reflected so strong and dazzling an influence that the eye of the spectator was obliged to turn away, being no more able to sustain its radiance than the splendour of the sun.”

It was about 107½ feet long, 35 broad and 53 high. In front of it stood a towering porch of the same width as the building but of the great altitude of 215 feet. The temple courts were entered by nine magnificent gates, the principal one being on the east side and opposite the porch. Beneath the porch was the great gate of the inner temple, which was of Corinthian brass, the most precious metal of ancient times. This gate was so enormous and so heavy that it required the united strength of twenty men to open or close it. In approaching it from the outside you first passed through the court of the Gentiles above which were three storeys of apartments supported on magnificent columns of white marble, thus forming a grand colonade.

From this by ascending fifteen steps you would reach the women’s court, passing thence through a low wall of elegant construction on which stood pillars at equal distances, bearing inscriptions imparting that none but a Jew who could trace his un-