

A recent traveller has described the feeling which steals upon the Nile voyager, when he turns an angle of the river and sees before him the plain of ancient Thebes—Thebes the magnificent—the “populous No” of the prophet Nahum—the great city of which Homer wrote as

“Royal Thebes,
Egyptian treasure-house of countless wealth,
Who boasts her hundred gates through each of which,
With horse and car, two hundred warriors march.”

All that is left of her lies here, here on the wreck-strewn plain.

“The palmy days of Thebes were over before the first stone of Rome was laid, before Athens was a town, or Carthage rose to eminence. Nahum thus refers to it: ‘Art thou better than populous No, that was situated on the rivers, that had the waters round about her?’ Three thousand five hundred years have elapsed since Thebes became the capital of Egypt. Carthage, Athens, Rome are modern beside it, yet their ruins are insignificant in extent. Those of Thebes are vast in number and stupendous in size.”

The picture on page 214 gives an imperfect impression of the tremendous columns of the great hall at Karnak, thirty-four feet in circumference and sixty-two feet high, covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions and incised figure-pieces. At the end of the vista is shown one of those cliff-like columns which was shattered by an earthquake B.C. 27, and which still leans like a fallen colossus against the adjoining wall. At the upper part of the picture is shown the remains of the clere-story which admitted light to the great hall. I clambered to the top of these columns, and wandered over the tremendous lintels, wondering by what strange power these masses of stone, forty feet in length, had been raised so high in air.

One is perpetually filled with amazement as to how these gigantic masses of stone were brought from the distant quarries of Nubia. The great statue of Rameses II., for instance, must have weighed over 1,000 tons—1,200, it is alleged—but it was brought over one hundred miles from the quarry of Assouan.

It is very remarkable that in the museum of Munich in Bavaria, is a statue of the architect of the great temple of Karnak, Bekenkhonsoo by name, who is described as skilled in art, and the first prophet of Amen. The inscription continues:

“I performed the best I could for the people of Amen, as architect of my lord. I executed the pylon of Rameses II., the friend of Amen, who