

the outset numbered 16 adult persons, I Nephi 16: 7. Lehi had two sons, Jacob and Joseph, born to him in the desert; and it is very likely that the company was considerably augmented by the natural law of increase before they reached the shore of America.

The care of conducting this mixed and inexperienced company through the adventures and hardships of an eastern desert devolved almost solely upon the heroic Nephi. This journey from the capital of Palestine to the Chilian shore of the New World, considered in all its unique and romantic aspects, has few if any parallels in history. And the successful and clever leadership of the youthful Prophet has seldom been rivaled in the campaigns or adventurous exploits of recorded heroism. Like Abraham he started out in search of an unknown country, having faith alone as a guiding star. He had to do with a rebellious and wayward band of men, irritable women, and fretful children; he had to lead them through trackless and savage wastes with no warrant of control save the force and majesty of superior intelligence to command their obedience. He had to meet unreasoning petulance and murmurs, born of fatigues and the wearing frictions of a new nomadic life. He was guard, hunter and general provider for the sustenance of the camp. He must create resources and invent expedients from the elements, and draw supplies, suited to stalwart men, delicate women and nursing babes from the precarious fruits of the sandy plains, and the chances of the chase. He was not furnished with a "base of supplies." No interested government opened its treasury; no company, ambitious for fame and reward, offered him a princely outfit. If he needs a ship, he must build it. If he needs stores for the voyage he must collect them. If he needs apparatus and instruments, he must invent and manufacture them, or get them by faith from the Lord. It should be remembered too that in all his labors and struggles many of the company opposed him bitterly, so that he had to induce them to labor against this inclination; they did the work too without pay, believing it to be worse than useless.

The Israelites were led through the wilderness by a shining cloud and a fiery pillar, but the Lord provided other means for the guidance of the Lehiite pilgrims.

After tarrying for a time a few

days' journey from Jerusalem, Lehi received, during the stillness of night, a command from the Lord that he should lead the company upon their journey toward the promised land. But how was he to know in what direction to travel?

"And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness. And we did follow the direction of the ball, which led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness." I Nephi xvi:10, 16.

It was by the aid of this instrument, which is called "the compass," I Nephi xviii:12, that the company was led through the wilds of the desert, and across the trackless expanse of the Pacific ocean. It was a wonderful and most precious gift. It was an agent of strange and remarkable power and properties. Although described as a ball of brass, this metallic mystery manifested an intelligent acumen; and emitted flashes of intelligence, as though the brazen sphere contained a human brain, and its rational scintillations were from organic faculties.

This interesting object belonged to the same class of physical instruments as the Urim and Thummim; the breast-plate worn by the Jewish high priests; the Ark of the Covenant and its sacred contents; the wonder-working rod of Moses, and other agents of supernatural power, belonging to the science of celestial theology, and used only by the holy Priesthood. All these divinely inspired agents were utterly inert and useless, as the engine without steam, unless operated by the subtle force of faith in God. It was the handiwork of an ancient order of craftsmen, who wrought by Divine authority, and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Those illustrious colleges have disappeared in the remote past; and their occult and grand contrivances have perished with the priestly authority to which they appertained. Sages, whose natures had put on immortality, trod their high courts and halls of science. In their schools, terrestrial science harmonized with celestial laws, and earthly things were formed after heavenly models. Hence their instruments of art were filled with wondrous power and intelligence. They seemed to be creatures of life.

Ezekiel seems to be describing

some of these sentient works of art:

"When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." 1: 21.

We learn further from I Nep., xvi: 28-30:

"And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence, and heed which we did give unto them. And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord, and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. * * * And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball."

Not only did the responsibility of procuring food for the company devolve largely upon the indefatigable Nephi, but he had also to supply spiritual sustenance—courage, hope and patience to every soul; for even the patience of the stout patriarch Lehi, was tried to its utmost tension. Nephi thus briefly, but with touching pathos, speaks of his experience:

"And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness. And our women did bear children in the wilderness. And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, like unto men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings." I Nep., xvii: 1, 2.

From the start, Nephi was the practical leader of the pilgrims. He was the target at which were aimed the arrows of their spiteful ire, from disappointment, vexation and hardship. To his charge was laid the responsibility of every accident or calamity. He had to bear the brunt of every peevish murmur, petty quarrel and fierce opposition and rebellion. Nephi's faith and wonderful fortitude were the only bulwarks that did not yield to the raging tempests of physical and spiritual troubles; but his faith never wavered; and his indomitable courage gave him the victory over every malignant foe.

In writing afterwards of the cruel treatment he received at the hands of his band, he remarks:

"Nevertheless, I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord, because of mine afflictions." I Nep., xviii: 16.