

If this principle applies anywhere, it applies to the case of the Atonement ; for, as we have seen, if there be such a thing at all, it is concerned with the most inscrutable of all mysteries.

To sum up, then, the Atonement must be a fact belonging to the very highest realm of truth. It must be transcendent. It can, therefore, be conveyed to our minds only by means of symbols, which are inevitably inadequate. To construct a consistent and perfectly rationalized theory of it is impossible. But to say this is not to condemn the efforts of the theologian, for the Atonement is known as a fact in the living experience of the Christian faith, and the mind must ever do its best to keep pace with the soul's experience. Every true effort of the Christian thinker is, to some degree, an approach to a mystery of Divine love, which can manifest itself under an infinite variety of forms to the human intelligence ; and the fact that all such modes of representation reach out towards a truth too great for our comprehension corresponds exactly with the teaching of our human experience concerning the problem of evil.



The Red Sea Passage of the Exodus.—II.

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WE have now some idea of the feelings which animated the Israelites on leaving Egypt. They "went out with an high hand," which may be paraphrased as under strong Divine guidance. There was a spirit of elation in having escaped the bondage of their oppressors, and a confidence at first that the journey to Canaan would be of short duration—not longer in performance than it was for their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There was some apprehension of war upon the way, as they could hardly have hoped to reach the promised land without some hindrance from their hereditary

foes, the Philistines, who, they had good reason to know, would become aware of their march, and oppose it with all their strength. They had cause, as we have shown, indeed to expect hard fighting with these Philistines, whose last recorded exploit against them had been so humiliating in its results, and a source of great mourning to the Israelites. The command, therefore, given them at Etham to turn and encamp by the Red Sea, which they had never thought of encountering as an obstacle to their march, though surprising, must have come with a sense of relief, especially as it was now accompanied by a guiding pillar of cloud to lead them beyond the bounds of their adopted country Goshen, on the edge of the wilderness. This, too, presupposes that up to the present they were in a pastoral country, which could have been no other than the extreme limit of the land they had occupied for the four hundred and thirty years of their sojourn in Egypt; and they accepted the command without any recorded dissatisfaction, though there seems to be no doubt that they would have gone on by the shortest route, thinking no other possible. That they were an enormous host is hardly realized by the mention of the number given us in the narrative, which is clearly told us as representing only the able-bodied men, if we consider the supplementary evidence given us in Num. i. 45—an army equalling in itself the combined armies of Russia and Japan at the present time in the Far East. But a very moderate estimate of the number of women and children, and the “mixed multitude that went up with them,” would bring the total up to at least two millions! This should be borne in mind when we are discussing the actual crossing of the sea and its results. We have accompanied them so far to Etham, and must now try to ascertain whereabouts their next destination was—“before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon.” We have before us a complete plan in miniature of the Suez Canal levels, showing the depths of excavation required to bring the bed down to a uniform and almost imperceptible gradient. The highest ground shown is that immediately north of Lake Timsah, where the

deepest cutting had to be made ; and this was probably the original isthmus connecting the two continents, the total breadth of which could not have been more than four or five miles. All the rest of the Suez Canal consists, more or less, of embankments thrown up from the bed, appearing at first sight as if designed to prevent inundation from without, though upon explanation we learn that this can never be the case, either from marine tidal causes from either end or from excessive rainfall, as neither of these contingencies has ever arisen, and is practically out of the question. But further north of this original isthmus, just where the canal enters the southern border of the shallow Lake Menzaleh, is Kantára, which for many centuries has been known as a station on the Syrian route from Egypt, and by way of which the Israelites are said by tradition to have first come from Canaan. We are inclined, however, to the belief that this route could not have been thus early traversable, but was afterwards, on account of easier water-supply and less shifting sand, the one generally used by travellers, and notably by the Persian and Egyptian armies. For instance, Hume tells us that the Persian monarch, Darius Ochus, led his army by this route, and that it was engulfed by the settling of the sand under the unsuspecting camp during the space of one single night. This is, indeed, the historical event alluded to by Milton in the second book of "Paradise Lost," where he compares a certain bottomless waste, traversed by Satan in his journey from hell, to

". . . that Serbonian bog,
'Twixt Damiata and M^t Casius old,
Where armies whole have sunk, . . ."

We know where Damiatta is, and we have very fairly identified Mount Casius with the remains of a high mound on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, while the Serbonian Bog was well known in the time of the Romans as lying between the two places. It is now apparently safe for caravans to travel over and encamp upon. We shall again allude to this event farther on.

The Scripture narrative of the Exodus as far as Etham

points to the probability that it was over this narrow isthmus that the Israelites' journey from Egypt was directed, with the treacherous shallows of the Mediterranean lakes and residue of Nile water on the north, and the deeper water of the ancient head of the Red Sea, now Lake Timsah, to the south. But as between Lake Timsah and Suez the land on either side of the canal again presents an appearance generally about the level of the water of the canal itself, the natural inference is that this tract must have been submerged; and it is still known by the name of the Bitter Lakes almost down to Suez, at the head of the present Red Sea. The site of Pithom, in the land of Goshen, seems to have been unquestionably discovered, and because of this some explorers have come to the conclusion that Etham and Pithom were identical. In any case, one must have been close to the other; and when at Etham the Israelites were commanded to turn from their course towards the Red Sea, it is plain that they were meant to round the extreme limit of that sea where the water was deep—and Lake Timsah is still deep—so as to arrive at a spot which was shallower to the south of the situation of that lake. For, if they had gone on their way without turning, they would still have skirted the head of the then Red Sea, whereas a turning movement southward would have brought them a few miles below that head to opposite the shallower channel. That spot was described as being before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon. The identification of these places is difficult of proof, but that suggested for Baalzephon—Serapeum—contains no element of argument to the contrary, whereas, if accepted with every reservation, would make it thoroughly to agree with the Scripture record. We have seen that no passage of the present Red Sea, *according to the express testimony of Scripture itself*, could have taken place, and we have shown that that testimony is proved by local impossibilities. We have also shown that the usual short route to Canaan must have been taken in the first instance in order to get to the desert of Shur. Modern discovery has in no particular shown this route to be incompatible

with that described of the exodus, and there is no reason why we should put aside what circumstantially establishes the truth without fear of contradiction. Let us, therefore, accept the alignment suggested by Scripture to be that which not only modern discovery has shown to be probably correct, but to which there has not been discovered an alternative route that does not lay itself open to instant objection by Scripture.

After the command to diverge from the direct route had been given, the reason of the command was made clear, which was that Pharaoh and his people would regard the divergence in a favourable light to themselves, no doubt ascribing it to inability to proceed from ignorance of route, or want of supplies, or fear of enemies. To Pharaoh it certainly would appear as if the Israelites had been overtaken by some sudden panic; and that now this enslaved race, who had just escaped his tyranny through a succession of unprecedented misfortunes to himself, were at last in his power for total destruction, being caught in a veritable trap—"they are entangled in the land; the wilderness hath shut them in." Now, if Baalzephon were Serapeum on the Suez Canal, or anywhere near it, on the opposite side of the sea to which they were encamped, truly the Israelites' position was a hopeless one. With no prospect of crossing the treacherous waters of the shallow sea before them, with mountains on the Egyptian side of them, and with no outlet to the south, they had got themselves into a *cul de sac*, from which, humanly speaking, they could never emerge without going back; and this Pharaoh and his host determined not to allow them to do. The pursuit must have been rapid up to the point where they overtook their victims, but the attack was delayed deliberately, seeing it was unnecessary, as retreat was now cut off. The Egyptian host, therefore, encamped in their sight, intending, no doubt, after well-earned rest, to begin the slaughter the next day of the disorganized and spiritless rabble, who seemed not to know what they were doing or where they were going. But the pillar of cloud was now removed from before the Israelites and placed behind them, so as to mask their movements from their

enemy during the night; and then followed the marvellous incident, the phenomenal aspect of which in its physical bearings we are now to consider.

But before doing so, we wish our readers distinctly to understand that the suggestions we adduce as to the physical and natural effects of the means employed are based upon the very words of the narrative, and it is not our object to wrest or distort them to suit our argument. Our aim is rather to invite earnest attention to what is clearly told us as having occurred, so that if our inferences are unsound they may be met in a spirit of unprejudiced correction. There is no desire whatever to minimize the extent of the miracle, as its performance through the means does not appear to us to be incompatible with the wisdom that designed it. It was a stupendous miracle in every detail, but in the same manner as the locality of the passage has been misconceived against the express testimony of Scripture, we submit that it is quite possible to misconceive what is told us in a marvellous record of cause and effect.

There seems to be an indelible idea in the minds of most people as to the means used to bring about the phenomenon. Personally, we frankly admit the first impressions made upon ourselves, impressions which once formed are not easily got rid of—that the division of the waters to enable a passage to be made between them on dry land, was the immediate result of Moses stretching out his hand over the sea, just as happened in the account of most of the plagues in Egypt. The phenomenon was regarded as due, not so much, if at all, to any natural and physical means, as to the investiture of Moses by the Almighty with a certain supernatural power. And, doubtless, this is so far true, inasmuch as the event recorded was consequent to the act of Moses, but Scripture does not mean us to accept it as the whole truth. In most of the miracles wrought by Moses, the means by which they were brought about are not told, and if none were mentioned with reference to that under consideration, we should still accept the performance as a fact. But, fortunately, we have here a distinct record of the means employed, apart

from the act of Moses ; and it is surely our business, in all humility, to endeavour to understand the application of those means. "The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and the waters were divided." This was the means employed, and the act of Moses was the signal for the inception of its work. Now, if we remember rightly, it was either M. Naville, the French explorer, or Dr. Petrie, who asserted that he had actually observed the extraordinary action of the wind upon the shallow waters of the L. Menzaleh, in forcing them back so that they appeared to be restrained from spreading over the usual ground they occupied. That does not present itself as altogether unintelligible when the nature of the country is taken into consideration, but the special mention of the *east* wind in the record is very significant. It happened once in a passage up the Suez Canal that the writer experienced considerable annoyance from the sand which was blown on and over the ship from the eastern side, and an officer assured him that what he felt was nothing to what sometimes was the case, when the ship would be obliged to lie up by the bank, as the pilot could not guide her course till the storm had abated. It more often happened also that in spite of serious inconvenience, the vessel's course was not stopped, but that she went on, and shortly emerged from the area of the storm. Inquiry showed that the north wind was never responsible for this inconvenience, as it came from the Mediterranean, nor the south wind, as it came up from the Red Sea ; nor the west wind, as it came from the direction of the Nile and the region it watered ; but that it was invariably caused by the east wind, which drove the sand from over a desert abounding in that material. And, as for the area affected, the dredgers could abundantly testify, as after a severe storm their energies were exercised between certain limits, fairly defined by observation, so as to clear a channel which in an incredibly short space of time had been impeded with sand from a storm. Now, this east wind sent by the Almighty was a strong one, and though we might assent readily to the testimony of those who have seen the action of a strong

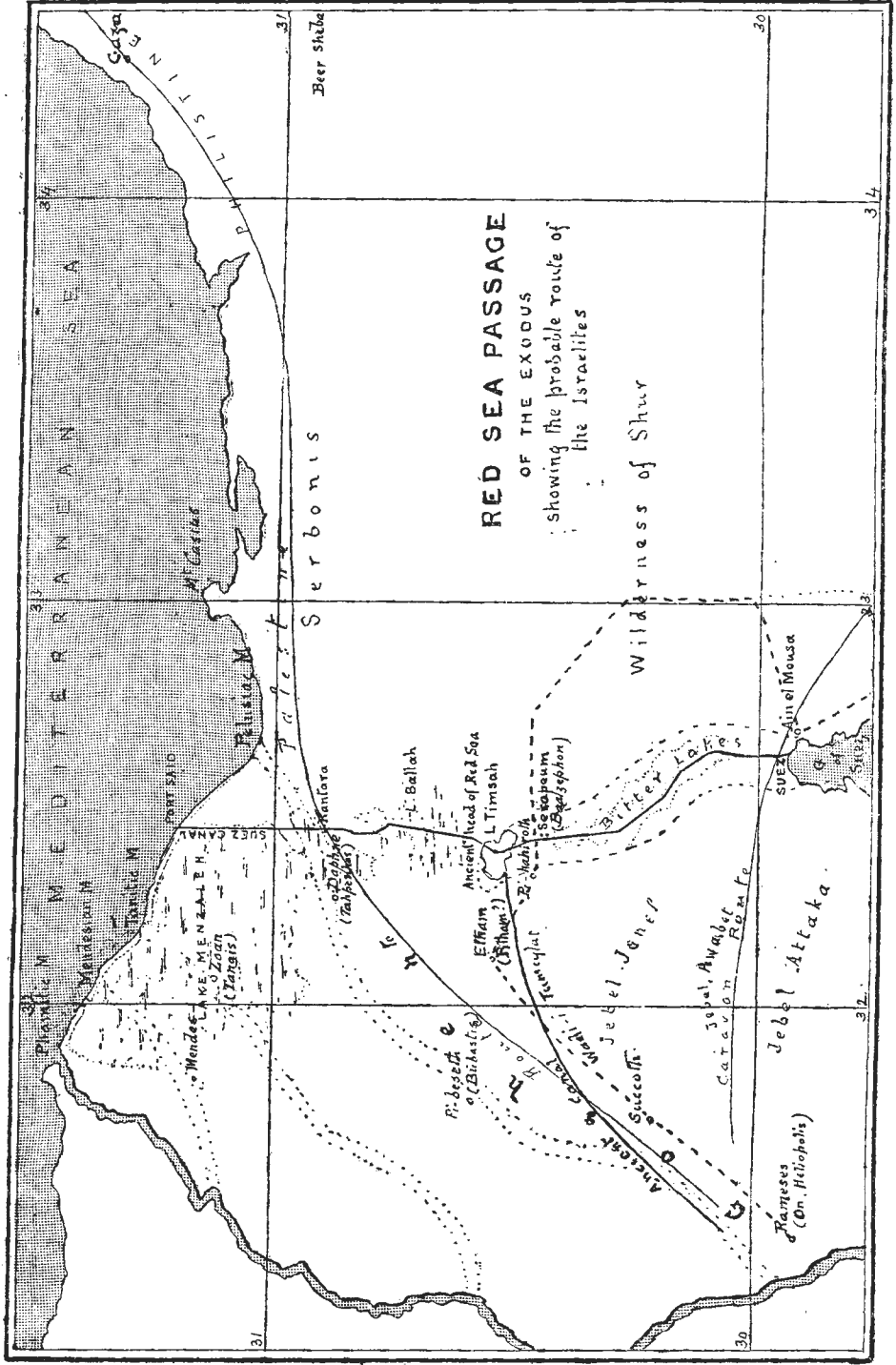
wind on shallow water, yet the very fact of the east wind having blown across the sandy wilderness of Shur impresses us with the conviction that it must have conveyed sand, and, as it was a strong one, that it must have conveyed much sand. This, then, we suggest, was the cause of the division of the waters. Also, the writer, on the passage above referred to, was amazed at the rapid collection of huge mounds formed by drifting sand, on either side of the Canal as far as he could see, to be almost the next minute whirled away and reformed elsewhere in as short a space of time; and all this was noticeable during a moderate wind with the ship going at about four miles an hour. We can, therefore, conceive that immense quantities of sand blown across a limited area would increase in gravity and be precipitated when crossing water; and if the channel of a canal through which ships of great draught can pass be liable to be choked with sand from this cause alone, after a few hours, we ought not to deem it inconceivable that a shallow sea of no more than two or three miles in width, and with no appreciable current, should have been spanned by a causeway of sand during the course of one whole night. The expression "caused the sea to go back," appears to us, also, as liable to misconception. That the waters were divided by the action of the wind we are told, but the same action is primarily responsible for the sea going back. Surely, the gradual division of the waters by the dry land is synonymous with the separation of the waters from each other, without the idea being strained that the water was blown back and held back for a considerable time? Besides, when we come to analyze the theory of the force of wind being able to drive and hold back water, we quite fail to see how it could be effective in this case. For the east wind, presumably, blew across the sea, more or less at right angles, and therefore the collection of water must have been towards the opposite shore, and not on both sides of its direction; and if blown across an oblique channel, only one side would appear to be affected, though the water from the other would assuredly take the place of that displaced, from the very nature of the mechanical force applied. So that,

where feasible, this theory could only hold good of very shallow water blown from the shore for a short distance inwards.

But we are confronted with the objection contained in the word "wall" (ver. 22). There is need of special caution here on both sides of the argument, and we put ours forward under all due reservation. Yet it strikes us that the Hebrew word here used does not express in its etymology an absolute edifice as do almost all the other words similarly translated, but rather bears the underlying sense of *enclosure* or *boundary*, a notable instance being the passage in Nahum iii. 8. If the word be rendered *enclosure*, there would be no difficulty whatever, and, as far as we can judge, no error in translation. The writer is distinctly mindful of a picture of the crossing—a well-known picture, too, he thinks—where the actual walls of water were so depicted as to mirror the forms of those passing close to them on their perpendicular or concave surfaces. But there is, he now thinks, no reason for this extravagant conception under the explanation he has suggested. Again, we are told that when Moses gave the signal in the morning, "the sea returned to his strength," but we should have no difficulty in understanding the reunion of the waters to be the origin of this expression, if there were no more to explain. But there is much. The cause of the division of waters we have suggested to have been the precipitation of sand in a definite area when driven by a strong east wind; it seems desirable to discover what the cause of the reunion could have been. We have already alluded to the historical event described by Hume of the army of Darius Ochus being engulfed in the Serbonian bog. In explanation, Hume says, in effect, that the sand blown by the strong winds over the desert constantly covers the surface of the morass, so as to render it, in appearance, and on trial, firm land, and that Darius' army was thereby deceived, and annihilated at night. Now, as the catastrophe happened at night when all was still in the camp, there is sufficient ground to infer that the subsidence was gradual, owing to the superimposed weight of thousands of men and animals. That it could not have happened otherwise is

obvious, as in such case the first rank of men who felt themselves sinking would have signalled a safe retreat and the disaster been averted ; for it is inconceivable that a whole army should have persisted in marching through a bog till it became more and more overwhelmed. The conclusion, therefore, is that after camp had been pitched, and every arrangement for spending the night on reliable ground had been made, the subsidence must have been so gradual as to have been unnoticed till it was too late. Is it not possible to apply this historical fact as a parallel to the Scripture record ? The whole passage was completed ere morning, but had evidently been detected by the Egyptians while it was still in progress, and an immediate pursuit was begun. We can judge that the Almighty could have so timed the crossing as to be compatible only with the duration of the solidity of the temporary causeway, and that it was designed to hold out only so long as to allow of the last persons getting safely over. Let us imagine the effect of the tread of two millions of men, women, and children, not to speak of cattle and burdens, superimposed upon a causeway of sand which, under ordinary circumstances, would have disappeared of itself in, say, a week, when it had become wet through with the waters between which it had been thrust. We can conceive, without stretch of imagination, that its state of quagmire would be decidedly pronounced, and when we apply this conception to the time of the morning watch, when the Israelites were all across and the Egyptians were well on their way through, the picture is not one of imagination but of realization. We must remember the state of mind of the pursuers, driven by desperate revenge to risk what they would, in any other circumstances, have avoided as absolutely fatal ; for the preordained hardness of Pharaoh's heart proves beyond a doubt that in spite of obvious annihilation he made his last obstinate effort to revenge himself on the Lord's people.

But it may be objected that in the song of Moses, eulogizing the event (Exod. xv. 8), a poetical picture is drawn of the phenomenon in the words, "the floods stood upright as an



RED SEA PASSAGE
 OF THE EXODUS
 : showing the probable route of
 the Israelites

Wilderness of Shur

Isthmus of Suez

Beer Sheva

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

PHILISTINE

SUEZ CANAL

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34

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Phoenicia

Mendes

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heap," which surely must have been founded on fact. Not a doubt about it; but when we are told distinctly that it took all night for the process to be complete, we are bound to argue a gradual and natural means of division. Besides, the same expression is used in the narrative of the passage of Jordan, only that is mentioned as happening in the direction whence the flow came; and therefore the natural cause was, as we may infer from an identical incident of later history in the same locality, a landslide, damming the river temporarily, and causing the water behind to rise till its weight at last became too great for the obstacle. Why should not this solution be equally applicable to what occurred in the Red Sea? For what was a barrier in one case, caused by a landslide, may have been the same in the other, caused by a dyke or dune of sand. But we shall be told that, if there had been a dyke of sand, it would surely have been used for restraining water with some sort of flow, so that the "heap" referred to might be explained as rising water. The meaning of Timsah is "crocodile," so that this at once indicates that the lake was a fresh-water one, before the Suez Canal carried salt water through it. The interesting question of course naturally arises, Whence in an arid country was this fresh water derived, and how has this lake preserved its depth in face of shifting sands in its vicinity? Is there no reason to infer a subterranean current from the Nile? If there is, then we submit there is sufficient reason to warrant us in inferring a flow into the Red Sea above the spot where the Israelites crossed; and this would quite explain how, if a dyke of sand had been thrown across its drainage, the water above the dyke would be held up till its weight overpowered the obstacle, as was the case in Jordan. Very well; but though this may have been true of the north side, what shall we say of that on the south, where there was in all probability no such pronounced marine tide to swell the volume of water? Now, though the walls of water are expressly mentioned as being on both sides, "the floods" that "stood upright" are in no instance so expressly mentioned; and, indeed, the words "an heap" seem to exclude the idea. If, therefore,

“wall” be rendered “enclosure” or “boundary,” there would be no reason whatever to argue from the text a restrained mass of water anywhere but on one side. That Pharaoh’s host was drowned as well as bogged, and that their bodies were seen on the shore, fairly proves that the sea finally broke in upon them, and the cause of that event can now be traced from our suggestions.

Lastly, there is the expression in the same verse of the song of Moses, “the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.” Surely, if this poetical description is capable of explanation at all, it can only be in one way. If the translation is correct, it has certainly reference to the process of water hardening in some way. For, as we know the Israelites went over on dry ground, this congealing process appears to indicate that what was water became hard—we suggest that land took the place of water, and not that the land merely appeared as the water was driven from it; in other words, that it was not the dried-up bed of the retreating sea upon which the Israelites crossed, but on a causeway of sand which displaced the water. And, indeed, if the former were the case, it is not easy to comprehend its tendency to become quicksand; whereas it follows, as a sure consequence, as a matter of course, that a causeway of sand could only be temporary, and would become quick of itself in a short time, the wetter it became. And that time, we are led to infer from the narrative, was made by the Almighty to coincide with the egress of the Israelites and the ingress of the Egyptian chariots.

