

ST. PAUL'S SHIPWRECK.

IN the attempt which I have made, following almost exactly the lead of James Smith, to understand and explain step by step the voyage and shipwreck as described in *Acts* xxvii. there is one point which was left confessedly obscure. Mr. Smith's view did not altogether satisfy me ; but I had nothing better to offer, having never seen the locality of the shipwreck (*St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 341) :—

“ The only difficulty to which he has applied a rather violent solution is the sandy beach, v. 39 ; at the traditional point where the ship was run ashore there is no sandy beach ; but he considers that it is *now worn away by the wasting action of the sea*. On this detail only local knowledge will justify an opinion.”

Mr. A. Emslie Smith, of Aberdeen, as the result of personal inspection of St. Paul's Bay (made in 1892 before my book was written), sends me a careful account of the situation, clears away all difficulty, and shows that even in this detail, which Mr. James Smith and I had failed to understand, the physical features of the Bay agree exactly with the narrative of Luke. The error which Mr. James Smith made, and in which I carelessly followed him, lay in understanding that the ship was run on the sandy beach.

Let us follow the narrative step by step, vers. 27-29, 39-41. About midnight the sailors became aware that land was near, detecting the sound of the breakers on the point of Koura (the eastern bound of St. Paul's Bay), past which the course of the ship carried them. They sounded and got a depth of twenty fathoms ; and after a while they again sounded and found fifteen fathoms. Here they anchored by the stern (for reasons stated on p. 335), and the ship, which was on the starboard tack with her head pointing towards the north,¹ would then swing round, so

¹ Drifting west by north (more exactly W. 8° N.) under the combined influence of a wind E.N.E. and her sails and helm.

that she lay in the line of the wind with her head pointing a little south of west. The reason for anchoring was the fear that they might be cast on rocks; and in fact they were now near the rocky island of Selmonetta, which closes in the Bay on the west; and were running straight on it. The sailors heard the breakers ahead, and anchored, till day should dawn, and they might be able to make an attempt to avoid the rocks.

At day-break they found themselves in the following position, which may be described almost exactly in Mr. Emslie Smith's words. On their right bow, and extending also straight ahead, was a rocky land;¹ and they saw that, if they ran on it, they must go to pieces against the rocks with probable loss of all on board. On the left there opened before them the bay, running up to the south between two low ridges of hard limestone cliffs; these two ridges start respectively from Koura Point, and from Selmonetta Island, and continue away inland, having between them the geological fault or depression, called in different maps Wady Puales and Wied tal Puales. There is no appearance of any material alteration in the main features since St. Paul's time, except that the bay perhaps now extends a little further into the land. The reason for this is that the bay itself has been formed by the erosion of the softer strata that compose the bed of the geological fault; and this erosion has continued to proceed during 1800 years, and has therefore produced some further extension, more or less, of the bay southwards at the expense of the land. But there is now, and must always have been, a broad open sandy beach, at the head of the bay, where Wady Puales runs into it. This beach, upon which boats are drawn up, is composed of sand, pebbles, and light grey

¹ They would not, from this point, know that it was an island that lay in front of them: they would think that the west side of the Bay extended unbroken out to the northern extremity of the island (Selmonetta).

tenacious mud. Here Mr. Emslie Smith spent an hour, with his wife and son; and they gathered some living sponges that were growing in the shallow water.

Accordingly, Luke and the rest, as they looked anxiously from the ship, were aware of a sort of bay with a sandy beach, opening on their left, as the ship lay.¹ The problem, then, which was presented to the sailors, was to avoid the rocks, and to drive the ship on the sandy beach, *if possible*. As the last words (*εἰ δύναϊντο*) imply, this was by no means easy. As they lay anchored by the stern, with the full strength of the wind behind them, they had the rocky ground right before them. It was necessary not merely to drift, but to guide the ship away to the south, off the direct line of the wind. They must therefore get up some sail; and they set the foresail to the breeze. Perhaps, as James Smith thinks, they had cut away the mast during the night; or, for some other reason, on which we need not delay, they preferred not to attempt to hoist the great sail further aft. If they were anchored only about a quarter of a mile from the land, it is obvious that their big ship, lightened of its cargo, with only a small foresail spread and a strong wind blowing, would have great difficulty in keeping off the west shore of the Bay, until they reached the sandy beach at its head.

Accordingly, after they had cast loose the anchor cables and let them go into the sea, and set free the two rudders (which they had, of course, tied up to keep them from being injured by the four stern-cables holding the anchors), and tried to work the ship by the foresail, they soon found that

¹ James Smith goes wrong in taking the bay or creek with a sandy beach to be some small opening in the west side of the Bay; he says there are two such openings, one Mestara (or Wied tal Mistra) valley with a beach, the other beside the passage between the island of Selmonetta and the mainland, where there is no such beach. He thinks rightly that the ship ran ashore at the latter; and unnecessarily suggests that there was formerly a sandy beach there, which has since been worn away. The "bay with a beach" is the whole Bay of St. Paul.

they could not keep off the lee shore long enough to reach the open beach. But as they came nearer the shore, they became aware of what was previously invisible to them: there was a passage where the sea behind Selmonetta communicated with the bay in which they were. They recognised that this opening, on which they had chanced, was a good place for their purpose; and they shifted their course, and drove the ship on the shallows between the island and the mainland. Here there stretches from Selmonetta towards the mainland a narrow or shallow bank of mud, the natural result of settlement arising from the shelter afforded by the island. In this bank of mud the prow stuck and remained immovable, but the after-part began to break up from the beating of the waves, while those on board were able to escape to the land close beside them through the comparatively sheltered water.

Mr. Emslie Smith rightly concludes, from the facts as he expounds them, that you have, as usual, only to place yourself as nearly as possible in the position described, in order to follow exactly Luke's narrative, and see precisely why he selects certain details and omits others.

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