

groups or associations that are supposed to have no soul, and act up to the supposition.

*The Quakers: Their Story and Message*, by A. Neave Brayshaw, B.A., LL.B. (Harrogate: Davis). This book, together with J. W. Graham's *The Faith of a Quaker*, will satisfy any reasonable desire to know what Quakerism is and how it has come to be what it is. There are Quakers, it is true, who do not accept Mr. Graham as an exponent of their faith, counting him too 'liberal,' but Mr. Brayshaw is not one of them. On the contrary, he specially commends the book to our notice. He himself, however, writes more lucidly than Mr. Graham, perhaps also more authoritatively. Every conclusion, almost every opinion, is supported by quotation, and the quotations are carefully chosen. Clearly Mr. Brayshaw is thoroughly furnished in the literature of his religion.

Do not miss a single volume of the Swarthmore Lectures. They are of course Quaker lectures and they are often quite Quakerish. But when most occupied with the Quakers they are most instructive—so near the mind of Christ is that Faith at its finest. The Swarthmore Lecture for 1921 was delivered by T. Edmund Harvey, B.A. Its topic is Human Progress. The title given to it when published is *The Long Pilgrimage* (Harro-

gate: Davis; 1s. 6d. net). The question is whether the civilization reached to-day is likely to be maintained or to go down into chaos again. Mr. Harvey believes that it will be maintained if—but all depends on the if—if Christ becomes the centre of unity for modern society. 'The failure of organised Christianity to prevent the world war and its helplessness in face of that vast physical and moral cataclysm does not stand alone. The newer forces of organised socialism and organised labour also aimed to work for a world brotherhood, transcending national differences, and they broke down completely in the same crisis. The differences separating socialists from each other are perhaps even greater and more bitter to-day than those which separate sect from sect and church from church. The acceptance of a mere theory of life, whether it be theological or political, cannot, it is clear, form a basis of union strong enough to stand the strain of such a time as this. A unity must be sought which is deeper than can be given by mere membership in an organisation professing a common doctrine, whether it be economic or religious: it must be found in the very well-springs of will and aspiration, in our attitude to life, in our way of life itself. In the great Christian society this unity is found in loyalty to Jesus Christ Himself as our Master and Guide.'

## Our Lord's Agony in the Garden.

BY WILLIAM E. WILSON, B.D., WOODBROOKE, BIRMINGHAM.

THE late Professor Denney, in discussing our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane, says: 'The divine necessity to lay down His life for men, which we have been led to regard as a fixed point in His mind, did not preclude such conflicts as are described in the last pages of the Gospel; rather was it the condition of our Lord's victory in them.' He then goes on to suggest that though at a distance our Lord could view with something like equanimity His approaching death, as it came close and the full reality of 'treachery, desertion, hate, mockery, injustice, anguish, shame' was vividly before Him, 'It is not hard to conceive that in these circumstances Jesus should have prayed as He did in the

Garden: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," even though the unmoved conviction of His soul was that He had come to give His life a ransom for many. It is one thing to have the consciousness of so high a calling, another to maintain and give effect to it under conditions from which all that is ideal and divine seems to have withdrawn.'<sup>1</sup>

What Dr. Denney says would no doubt be true of any other than our Lord, for not only would such a one have dreaded the ordeal, but also he would always have been in some doubt as to whether that ordeal was the Father's will for him.

<sup>1</sup> *The Death of Christ* (Revised Ed.), pp. 44, 45.

But according to Dr. Denney's conviction, strongly expressed in the previous chapter in commenting on the words 'The Son of Man must suffer,' there was no doubt whatever in our Lord's mind on this matter. To him it was God's will. 'The divine necessity for a career of suffering and death is primary.' It 'was not simply the moral solution for the situation in which he had found Himself.'<sup>1</sup> That is, the necessity was of the absolute order, definitely preordained by God, and was recognized by Jesus as such. Upon such a hypothesis, great agony and dread on the part of Jesus as the hour approached are natural. Prayer that the Divine strength might uphold Him through it would also be natural. But can we so easily accept the prayer that the cup might be removed? If Dr. Denney's presupposition, that the suffering and death were predetermined by God, and that Jesus knew they were predetermined, is true; and at the same time the common Christian presupposition, that Jesus maintained throughout perfect unity with the will of God, is a fact, it does not seem possible to accept the statement of the Synoptic Gospels that He prayed that He might not have to go through the ordeal. But the episode is mentioned in all three Gospels. Moreover, it was more than a momentary prayer. Matthew and Mark relate that He prayed the prayer twice, and Luke's statement points to prolonged prayer. It is not therefore possible to find a way out of the difficulty (though it would be an unsatisfactory way) by suggesting that the prayer was the sign of a temptation, which was at once overcome. Nor can we reject this part of the narrative on critical grounds. No early Christian would have been likely to invent such a scene. The tendency was rather to eliminate all that seemed to show weakness in Jesus. We may rely upon the Synoptists here. Jesus really prayed these words.

What, then, is the way out? We cannot with good reason reject the statement of the Gospels. We cannot, as Christians, accept the suggestion that Jesus Christ was for a while out of unity with the Divine will. There remains only the possibility that He had not that absolute certainty of His coming death which dogmatic tradition has ascribed to Him. In short, we must conclude that Dr. Denney is going beyond his evidence in maintaining that our Lord's words, 'the Son of Man must suffer,' denote an inward necessity which was

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 22.

more than 'the moral solution which He had discovered for the fatal situation in which He found Himself.' There are degrees of necessity which are all naturally and correctly expressed by 'must.' The Moslem, believing that his smallest acts are preordained from eternity, says 'I must,' and regards himself as the passive victim of a sort of divine coercion; but to most men who say 'I must,' the very most that it means is that an inward necessity compels them to take a certain line of action, because their own conception of duty, arrived at through a review of circumstances, points to that way as right. But when the 'must' is of this sort, an alteration in circumstances may remove the necessity. What seemed at a distance as though it would be a duty, is, as events fall out, no longer required of us. If the necessity which Jesus felt for His death was of this latter sort, His prayer in the Garden was natural and right. If He had seen, as seems probable from the Gospel narrative, that the influential people of Judaism would neither accept Him nor His message, but on the contrary were becoming more and more determinedly opposed to Him; and at the same time had realized, helped to that realization by meditating on the Suffering Servant of Is 53, that His death would bring to God men whom His life had failed to reach, is it not natural that He would have begun to teach His disciples that 'The Son of Man must suffer'? We can, I think, imagine Him intellectually convinced that His work could not be accomplished apart from His death, and therefore that His death was a part of His divine vocation, and yet hoping against hope that His own people might yet recognize and accept Him.

Under these circumstances the prayer in the Garden is seen to have a meaning different from that which has been usually assigned to it. The older dogmatic interpreted it as the outcome of our Lord's terror in contemplation of Divine desertion, and of suffering vicariously the torments of the damned. Such an anticipation was enough to cause agony to any one. But amongst present-day theologians it is no longer believed that He either suffered the torments of the damned or was actually deserted by God, and the tendency is to suggest that the whole scene was simply due to the inevitable shrinking from suffering of an exceptionally sensitive soul. This, in face of the fact that many naturally shrinking and sensitive

souls have gone to death for Him with the greatest fortitude, seems inadequate. It ascribes to Jesus weakness, from which many of His followers have been free. If, on the other hand, it be held that while intellectually He was convinced that His people had rejected Him, yet still conviction alternated with a hope that even at the last they might repent and accept Him,<sup>1</sup> His agony need no longer be explained as shrinking from His own suffering, but as shrinking from the realization that so far His mission had not been accepted, and all that that fact entailed in tragedy for the Jewish race. Thus the intensity of His agony in the Garden may well be a measure of the intensity of His yearning love for His people. It is unselfish through and through. It would then appear that this explanation of our Lord's Agony in the Garden is closely akin to the explanation of His Cry on the Cross, which, in collaboration with Mr. J. A. Smallbone, I suggested in *THE EXPOSITORY TIMES* (August 1920).

There are three passages at least in the Synoptic Gospels which lend confirmation both to my suggestion that the necessity which our Lord saw for His death was not absolute (at any rate to Him), and to the view that the agony in the Garden was due to the intensity of His yearning over the Jewish people rather than to anticipation of His coming suffering. They are the two laments over Jerusalem and the parable of the Vineyard. One lament, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,' occurs in both Matthew and Luke (Mt 23<sup>37</sup>, Lk 13<sup>34</sup>). It combines a full recognition of the guilt of the Jewish people ('which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee') with the tenderest solicitude (the hen and chickens figure); and then goes on to forebode only disaster as the result of the rejection of Him. Yet it concludes with the expectation that Jerusalem may even now turn and welcome Him as the Messiah. When it was said, we can see that the possibility, or perhaps probability, of His rejection was already struggling in Him with the hope that the Jewish people would repent and accept Him. The second lament (Lk 19<sup>41</sup>) 'If thou hadst known!' has the same note of yearning love, the same suggestion that repentance would have brought national salvation, but instead of con-

cluding on a note of hope, there is only certainty of impending calamity. The last words are, 'because thou knewest not the day of thy visitation,' as though He were saying, 'In rejecting me you brought inevitable doom on yourself, because you thereby took the way of death instead of the way of Life.' Thus both laments suggest that Israel might have believed (in which case it would not have been the Jews that compassed His death), and that the disappointment and sorrow of our Lord that they did not believe was so intense that He could scarcely bring Himself to accept it as a fact.

The thought expressed by the parable of the Vineyard is similar. The Jewish nation does not bear fruit. (Surely here the sharing of their heritage of true religion with the Gentiles is the fruit.) Servant after servant is sent to them and rejected. Last the Son is sent, with the words, 'They will reverence my son.' Does not this mean that it had not been a foregone conclusion in our Lord's own mind that He would be rejected? And the rejection and death of the Son are represented as the wicked acts of depraved men, not as predetermined by God. The story itself seems to have been told as one of a number of last appeals to the Jewish rulers. If such appeals had been successful, the death of Christ would not have occurred, or at all events would not have occurred then, or at the instigation of His fellow-countrymen.

The direction in which these considerations point is plain. It is that there seems to be a great deal in the references of our Lord to His death which has been mistakenly interpreted as meaning that His death had a Godward reference. These passages suggest that He foresaw it, not as the inevitable outcome of Divine preordination, but as the result that would certainly come if the Jewish nation did not repent. Yet this does not mean that His death was not *in the circumstances* the Will of God for Him. It rather means that the appeal of love which had characterized His whole life and teaching found its consummation in His death. God's message had to be given so as to be clear to men. Had they been less blinded by prejudice and false principle, it may be that they would have accepted it on the word of Jesus. As it is, it is His death that has been the convincing proof of His love and of the love of the God He represented.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the words 'With God all things are possible,' used with regard to the conversion of unlikely people (Mk 10<sup>27</sup>).