

Samuel Crossman

“MY SONG IS LOVE UNKNOWN . . .”

SAMUEL Crossman's great hymn :

“ My Song is Love unknown,
The Love of Christ to me . . . ”

has become a favourite in many Christian congregations. It was included in the *Congregational Hymnal* of 1887, and when the *Baptist Church Hymnal* was first revised in 1933, the Revisers rendered a signal service to their denomination by adding the hymn (No. 110) to that collection. In 1962, when we were celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of the Great Ejection it was interesting to find that the little-known story of Crossman's life carries us back to that event in which he bore a part of some prominence.

The probable year of his birth—at Monk's Bradfield, near Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk—was 1624. His father, another Samuel Crossman, the incumbent of that parish, had been at Christ's College, Cambridge, and it was to that University he sent his son who was admitted as sizar at Pembroke College in January 1641. His time at Pembroke must have been a stormy one in the disturbances of the Civil War, but he graduated B.A. three years later and apparently took Holy Orders, being appointed Rector of all Saints, Sudbury, Suffolk, in 1647.

Little is known of his activities in these closing years of the reign of Charles I, but with the ascendancy of Cromwell he seems to have fallen into the pattern of the religious life of the Commonwealth. In 1651, as an addition to his living at Sudbury he became Rector of the parish of Little Henny, Essex, where in the preceding year the church is recorded as “fallen down”—the living thus being a sinecure, and in the same year he became minister of the “separated” congregation at Sudbury, a practice not uncommon in those troublous times. Meanwhile he had evidently married, there being three entries in the years 1649-52 in the All Saints' Register of the baptisms of three children of Samuel and Grace Crossman, and similar entries concerning two more children in 1655 and 1657. There is a later record of a marriage in February 1659 “by Mr. Samuel Crossman, Minister of All Saints'.”

The scanty records of Crossman during the years of the Commonwealth thus seem to indicate that he remained loyal to the ecclesiastical system of his day, but the whole background of English religious life was soon to change with the Restoration in

May 1660, when a number of clergy lost their benefices, and one source suggests that Crossman was then ejected from Sudbury. In April of the following year, however, Crossman's position as a leading Puritan was evidenced by his being one of twelve delegates to the Savoy Conference summoned by Royal Warrant to consider possible changes in the Prayer-book. The Church was represented by twelve of its Bishops, but the Conference failed to reach any agreement. A new Parliament assembled in May 1661 and later that year the Corporation Act was passed. The position against the dissenters was tightened by the Act of Uniformity in 1662 whereby every clergyman and every schoolmaster refusing to express by 24 August his unfeigned consent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer was to be prevented from holding a benefice. By the due date about two thousand clergy resigned, and Crossman was apparently then formally ejected from his sinecure living at Little Henny.

It is difficult to say what were Crossman's activities immediately following his ejection, but he had presumably remained pastor of the Separatist congregation at Sudbury. In 1665, however, he again conformed, and on 28 October, being episcopally re-ordained deacon and priest by the Bishop of Norwich, was appointed to a curacy of St. Gregory and St. Peter's, Sudbury. He also became one of the King's chaplains. It is even more difficult to say what led to his re-conformity, but there must have been actuating reasons in a man like Crossman. Efforts made by Parliament to pass a Toleration Bill had failed, as it was feared that the King might try to extend toleration to the Roman Catholics. It may be that Crossman feared this possibility, and even felt that to be in either of the camps protected by a Toleration Act would be less safe than to be within the fold of the Establishment. In the light of his previous service and of subsequent developments in his career it is hard to resist the opinion that he acted with the utmost loyalty and sincerity amidst all that was happening at the time, and having regard to a possible revival of Roman Catholicism under the influence of the King.

But meanwhile Crossman had not been otherwise idle for in 1664 appeared in print his main published legacy to posterity: *The Young Mans Monitor, or A Modest Offer toward the Pious, and Vertuous Composure of Life from Youth to Riper Years*. The book, a small volume of less than three hundred pages in all, has all the characteristics of a 17th century devotional work. A crowded title-page with a scriptural text from Ps. 119—"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? . . ." and two Latin quotations and the imprint "London. Printed by J.H. . . . 1664" is followed by seventeen pages of "The Epistle to the Reader: More Particularly to Parents." Then comes a page of *errata* "which in the Authors

absence have unawares slipt through the Press." Even so, we are not yet into the book itself, for we are met with an address to "Ingenuous Youths"—"upon whom the eyes of all are justly set . . ."—"May your youth be as the Spring for Loveliness; your riper years as the Summer for real fruitfulness." One here begins to suspect an awareness of 17th century juvenile delinquency. But then, at last, we come to the eleven chapters of the book, each with a verbose title. At the end we find a relevant scriptural text: "My son, be wise and make my heart glad: that I may answer him that reproacheth me.—Prov. 27. 11." But we are not yet through the book, as we next discover another title-page—"The Young Mans Meditation, or Some few Sacred Poems upon Select Subjects and Scriptures . . ." with the same imprint as on the main title of the book. There follow nine short poems in all comprising twenty pages only. Right in the middle, as the fifth poem, appears our hymn, with no title but prefaced by the text: "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6 : 14)."

By 1664, then, Crossman had given his great hymn to the world of his day and thence it has come down to us. Perhaps the appearance of his book and the trend of events in the first four years of the restored monarchy led Crossman to feel that he could do his best work within the Established Church. We do not know what happened to him during the terrors of the Great Fire of London and the Plague of the years 1665-6. He was near enough to London to be concerned in the course of both these tragedies, but he was probably in close touch with the Court after his re-ordination in 1665 for two years later he was made a Prebendary of Bristol Cathedral. If this involved him in any visits to the western city at the time of his appointment it would be interesting to have some details of his journeys, but it would seem that he took his family there from Sudbury very soon after as there is a record of a tombstone in the Cathedral to the memory of Elizabeth Crossman, a daughter, who died in 1668, aged thirteen, evidently the child born at Sudbury in 1655. The Latin inscription on this stone was poignant in its simplicity and feeling: "The Hope and Delight of her parents—gone on before, we follow."

Five of Crossman's sermons of his Bristol period have come down to us in print, and there are copies of these in the British Museum library. One dated February 1681 was a sermon preached in London in St. Mildred's Church in the Poultry before the Lord Mayor. This would presume a journey to London in the midst of his busy life in Bristol—no small undertaking in those dark and dangerous years.

Crossman had become treasurer of Bristol Cathedral in 1682 and in April 1683 on the death of the Dean, Richard Towgood, at the advanced age of eighty-nine, he succeeded to the Deanery, being

instituted on 1 July. He died on 4 February 1684 at the age of fifty-nine, having survived less than a year to enjoy the ecclesiastical position to which his previous and somewhat chequered career in the Church had carried him.

Before his decease he had evidently felt a strong desire to consolidate the record of those chequered years by giving to posterity a sort of "apologia" for the progress of his religious adherences, and after his death there was published in Bristol (with a preface by John Knight—probably the Mayor of Bristol) a broadsheet—"The Last Testimony and Declaration of the Reverend Samuel Crossman, D.D. and Dean of Bristol setting forth his dutiful and true affection to the Church of England as by law established . . ." It is a document which rings with the note of sincerity. There is probably to be heard in it stray chords of fear of the contemporary trends of ecclesiastical policy, a fear which seems to have been very real to Crossman.

There is no known extant portrait of him, and his tomb in the south aisle of Bristol Cathedral, although recorded, is now obliterated, but to look on his posthumous broadsheet (there is a copy of this, too, in the British Museum) gives the feeling of looking back over the vista of a troublous period lit up by the loyal faith of an earnest-minded servant of God. Even more intense is the feeling engendered by handling his little devotional book of 1664—intense as are the feelings of those who sing Crossman's magnificent hymn. There we feel a personal contact with one who obviously had a burning love for the Saviour :

" This is my Friend,
In Whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend."

A. W. SAVAGE

We have drawn attention before to the *Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete* (Patmos-Verlag, Düsseldorf), an international review of Biblical studies, listing articles in nearly 300 journals and periodicals. The 9th volume has just appeared and contains 2,199 entries covering the period 1962-63. In each case there is a brief summary of the article. There is little of historical interest, but many of the libraries served by our *Quarterly* would certainly want to add these volumes to their shelves if they have purchased the others. The cost in this country is not stated but will be about £5.