

Thomas Crosby, Baptist Historian

(I) THE FIRST FORTY YEARS 1683-1723.

NO detailed attempt¹ has yet been made to tell the story of the first historian of the English Baptists² either for its own sake or for the light it throws upon the doctrine and practice of the London Baptists during the first quarter of the XVIIIth Century. Thomas Crosby was a Londoner,³ probably by birth and certainly by education whilst, except for a period at sea as a young man, the greater part of his adult life was lived out there as a schoolmaster in Southwark.

In his first book, concerned with commercial arithmetic, Crosby wrote gratefully and proudly of⁴ "that famous and renowned Mathematical School of Christ's Church Hospital, where I had the happiness to have my Education." The Royal Mathematical School, to which he referred, had been founded during the reign of Charles II primarily to provide officers for the Royal Navy though, in point of fact, it quickly began to supply recruits for the mercantile marine also. According to the charter the Mathematical School was to include forty boys chosen from those pupils of Christ's Hospital who had already shewn some elementary⁵ mathematical competence. These were to be taught⁶ "and instructed in the Art of Navigacon and the whole Science of Arithmatique until their age and competent proficiency in these parts of the Mathematiques shall have fitted and qualified them in the judgment of the Master of the Trinity House for the tyme being to bee initiated and to bee bound out as Apprentices for seven yeares to some Captaines or Comanders of Shippes, and that as soon as any shall dye or be Bound out Apprentices as aforesaid Care bee taken to supply theire number out of such other Poore Boyes within the said Hospitall as shall be fitt for such kind of Educacon."

Thomas Crosby's entrance and progress along the lines laid down in the charter can be briefly traced in the Christ's Hospital records. His entry, in April 1691, was recorded as follows⁷ "Thomas Crossby son of Edward Crossby Citizen and Clothworker⁸ decd. bapt. 21 March 1683 admitted from St Stephen⁹ Coleman Streete." His subsequent career was apparently unremarkable until a display of some aptitude for figures brought him to the notice of the governing committee of the schools which, on the 13th July 1697, agreed that he, with four others, should join the

Mathematical School¹⁰ "provided upon search they are found sound and well, And the Parents give their consent by signing the usual petition." Evidentially young Thomas was passed as fit and the parental permission was duly given since on May 23rd, 1701, the Committee learned that Trinity House considered he and five others¹¹ "are soe well knowing in the Theory of ye Arts of Arithmatick & Navigation, as that they are fit & capable to be bound forth apprentices for sea service." At the same meeting the six boys¹² were introduced to their future masters and a final entry was made against Thomas Crosby's name the following day to the effect that¹³ "Thomas Crosby is this day discharged from the charges of this Hospll for ever by Robert Gifford¹⁴ Comander of the Ship Elizab: & Mary burthen 260 Tunns bound for Dantzick in the Baltick Sea with whom he is to serve 7 yeares unless his Matie shall require the last yeares service."

No evidence has come to light concerning Crosby's career at sea but it seems probable that he settled in Southwark soon after his seven years with Captain Gifford were due to expire. In his volume published in 1749, *The Book-Keeper's Guide*, he told his former pupils that his teaching career had then lasted¹⁵ "for the space of about 40 Years." In addition he bore testimony to the character of Benjamin Keach's widow Susannah, who died in 1727, when he wrote¹⁶ "She lived with me for many years, and during the time I was acquainted with her, which was near the last twenty years of her life, I must say, That she walked before God in truth, and with a perfect heart, and did that which was good in his sight." These two pieces of evidence suggest that Crosby may have been teaching in Southwark for some ten years before his first book was printed in 1719; this contained an advertisement for his school in New Street, Horsleydown, Southwark claiming that there¹⁷ "are taught Arithmatic in all its parts. Merchants Accompts after the Italian Manner. Algebra. Geometry. Trigonometry both Plane & Spherical. Navigation. Astronomy, and other Parts of Mathematicks." That Mrs. Keach lived in Crosby's home is explained by the fact¹⁸ that his wife Rebecca was daughter to her and to Benjamin Keach¹⁹, who had been pastor to the church of Horsleydown until his death in 1704.

Thomas Crosby gave some account of how he became a Baptist but this narrative was all too brief and gave no dates.²⁰ "I, from a *Paedobaptist*, became a Baptist. My education, was under the patronage of the Church of *England*. The first light, as to *baptism*, that I received, was from her *catechism* and the *rubrics*; which led me on my first scruples to read the books, written by the reverend gentlemen of her ministry, who were eminent for their piety, learning and moderation. I soon perceived their conces-

sions; and tho' I found by reading others, that many of the learned *Paedobaptists* of all denominations did inveigh most bitterly against the *principles* and practice of the Baptists; yet the few amongst them of more moderation, seeming to speak more agreeably with the scriptures, gained the ascendant: And in the end, I resolved thro' grace to make the Scriptures my only guide in this point; and accordingly submitted to be *baptized* in the manner there prescribed, and was added to the same Church." The context makes it quite clear that "the same Church" was the one to which Keach had been pastor.

Nevertheless it seems unlikely, if Crosby's apprenticeship ran its full course, that he joined the church at Horsleydown in Keach's lifetime and it was certainly Keach's successor, Benjamin Stinton, who influenced him most deeply and whose tragically early death in 1719²¹ was to result in the division of the congregation. Although the Goat Yard Churchbook for the period of Stinton's ministry has not survived his manuscript journal for the years 1714-17²² has and reveals the interests and the activities of the man who supplied a considerable amount of the source material incorporated by Crosby into his later *History*. Stinton's views as much as Stinton's manuscripts were to be responsible for some of the most outstanding characteristics of Crosby's work and so it is necessary to give at this point some account of the man and his programme.

By the time George I came to the English throne in 1714 Stinton was evidently well known in London dissenting circles and he was one of three Baptists invited to join in reviving the Committee of the Three Denominations. However, since the three approached were all Particular Baptists it was decided to call a meeting of both the General and Particular Baptist ministers in London to appoint three to represent the whole Baptist community. The good relations existing between the two groups at this time were shewn by their confirming the original choice. At a later joint meeting it was further agreed²³ "in order to maintain a Good affection & Correspondance among our Selves to keep this Meeting once a Month, that it should consist only of ye Elders of ye Baptized Churches." How far Stinton himself initiated this move is not now clear, but what is clear is that during these last years of his life he gave himself to a deliberate policy of bridge building both within the London Baptist community and also farther afield.

That Stinton's sympathies extended beyond the Particular Baptist fold was evidently widely known since when Thomas Hollis,²⁴ a wealthy Baptist layman in membership with an Independent church, made a gift to be distributed to the needy among the London Baptists in October, 1715, he chose Benjamin Stinton as his almoner. Admittedly most of the churches were staunchly

Particular Baptist but one of them, Virginia Street, was General Baptist and the one at the Mill Yard was Seventh Day General, yet Stinton distributed to them also.

Later, when in his 'journal' Stinton desired to give an account of a Baptist ordination service²⁵ he chose one in which the man to be ordained was to be minister of Paul's Alley, Barbican Church, a congregation not then closely aligned with either the Particulars or the Generals. Furthermore Stinton shared in the service with two other ministers one of them a Particular Baptist and the other a General.

Meanwhile his interests outside his own congregation ranged far beyond the London Baptist community in becoming the secretary for correspondence with the Baptists of the American colonies. The postscript to a letter addressed from the London ministers to those in Pennsylvania advised them in January, 1717,²⁶ "please to direct yor letters to Mr. Benj. Stinton at Horsleydowne in Southwark." Nearer home Stinton joined hands with some London Baptist and Quaker leaders in an attempt to dissuade some Baptists and Quakers in Northamptonshire from a public disputation. The London leaders were concerned lest the flaunting of their theological disagreement might give opportunity for their enemies to accuse them to the friendly Hanoverian government of producing unrest in the country. Unfortunately the Baptist signatories were Particulars and since their belligerent Northamptonshire colleagues were Generals, as Stinton ruefully reported,²⁷ "those in ye Country had little knowledge of them or respect for them" and the debate went ahead. It was, however, indecisive and a further bout was arranged but this time a second letter written over more discreetly chosen signatures persuaded the disputants "tho' with Some reluctancy to drop their intended Disputation."

In 1717 also Stinton undertook the task²⁸ of writing round to some of the other churches for subscriptions towards the cost of renovating the old baptistery (which he reported had been in use for "about 60 Years") at Horsleydown. Again, gratifyingly enough, both General Baptists and Particulars shared in the scheme.

Unfortunately for this gradual growth of co-operation and of united action the scheme launching the Particular Baptist Fund the same year marked a definite step back for the benefits of the new fund were explicitly limited to²⁹ "ye Use and advantage of those Churches only who go under ye Denomination of particular Baptists." Stinton's account of the plans for raising and administering the fund formed his last entry in his journal but among his other papers Crosby discovered a copy of a letter of protest which Stinton wrote against its limitation to Particular Baptists. In it³⁰ he set out his objections at length and one of these clearly shewed

he was aware of the threat the new scheme offered to the hopes he and others shared of closer co-operation between the various members of the Baptist community. He warned that the proposed limitation³¹ "tends to promote disunion, and opposition among the *Baptists* themselves. Several ministers, not only in the country, but in and about *London*, have endeavoured of late, to promote a better union and correspondence among those of this denomination, witness their frequent preaching in one another's places, and their meeting monthly for the common interest of the whole, without any regard to these *party* distinctions. Whereas this will tend to set us wider than ever, and make it necessary always to keep up this party difference." Crosby commented, after printing the letter in full,³² "Tho' this account may not be relished by some; yet I could not pass it by when setting forth the character of a gentleman whose judgment, abilities, and moderation, exceeded those of his brethren, who were concerned with him in this affair. It was his misfortune, indeed, to be outvoted; but we do not always find in such cases, wisdom to be on the *major* side." It is perhaps worth noting that, having made his protest, Stinton thereafter loyally supported the fund. His forebodings proved correct—soon the General Baptists had their own Fund and after his death it seems that there was no leader who had both the desire and the influence to halt the tendency of the two groups to grow apart once more.

Crosby's sympathy with Stinton's policy was underlined in the tribute he paid him some twenty years later.³³ "He was a man of prudent conduct and complaisant behaviour well esteemed of by almost all. And many of those who hated dissenters in general, yet had a reverence and esteem for him. He was of a catholick spirit, and much frequented the company of *Paedobaptist* ministers, yet he firmly adhered to his own principles, and was a great defender of them; and always endeavoured to cultivate a good harmony amongst Christians, tho' of different sentiments; being far from making the principles of religion, wherein Christians differ, an occasion of contempt of any of their persons."

However, Stinton's death not only meant the end of serious efforts after unity within the Baptist family at large but meant also the end of peace within his own congregation. For an account of what happened Thomas Crosby's manuscript narrative recording how³⁴ "some Differences began to arise in the Church, which ended in such a separation that they became almost equally divided" has been taken as the primary source with the two Churchbooks only being cited to clarify detail.

The death of Benjamin Stinton on 11th February, 1719, was not the only factor making the immediate future of the congregation uncertain: the leasehold of their present meetinghouse was

due to expire on June 24th of the same year and, although another site had been obtained in Unicorn Yard, building operations had not yet begun. At an early meeting of the committee entrusted with the arrangements for the new building Abraham Atkins, a leading deacon, suggested that it might be better to end the congregation's separate existence and join up with another fellowship³⁵ nearby led by a Mr. Wallins. Although not all those present were happy about this proposal a meeting was tentatively arranged with some members of Wallin's congregation for³⁶ Monday, April 27th, 1719. When the news of this move spread the reaction among the congregation was so hostile that the plan had to be dropped. The next step was to send a deputation to the board of ministers³⁷ to seek their help in supplying the pulpit. Meanwhile Abraham Atkins, who held the church's funds for the new building, continued obstructive with the consequence that the lease ran out and the congregation found itself³⁸ paying two separate amounts of ground rent.

By the church meeting held on June 22nd it was clear that two of the visiting preachers had particularly commended themselves to different sections of the congregation, and one of the deacons, apparently voicing their recommendation, Mr. Brouse, suggested that a Mr. Scarney be invited to supply the pulpit for a month. It was at this point that Thomas Crosby took a hand and suggested³⁹ that, whilst some were attracted to Scarney,⁴⁰ others were much more impressed with a Mr. Gill and that therefore it would be wise to invite each of them to supply the pulpit for a month. This was apparently agreed and, according to Crosby, it was decided the following Sunday that Scarney should be asked to come first.

Next day one of the deacons⁴¹ told a group of church members that they had misunderstood the decision taken: it had not been decided to have both men but to have Scarney, and Gill only if the church should afterwards decide to do so. On Tuesday, June 30th, at church meeting, a letter inviting Scarney for a month was approved and then Thomas Crosby presented a draft of a similar invitation to John Gill. After some discussion it was agreed that both letters be sent, Gill being invited to preach⁴³ "in succession to Mr. Scarney for the term of one month." It was obvious that there was some tension now between the deacons and those for whom Crosby acted as spokesman and who championed John Gill. Mr. Scarney only preached at Goat Yard on one Sunday, July 19th, and never returned⁴⁴ the reason for this was, and remains, a mystery.⁴⁵ Crosby's comment on his visit is interesting though obviously biased⁴⁶ "His preaching with us was acceptable but to very few his voice so low that it required great attention to hear his discourses and besides his great lameness (had he been every

way else qualified for the pastor of a Baptized Church) rendered him incapable of performing his office amongst us as pastor." The way was now open for John Gill to begin his month's trial preaching on August 9th when, according to Crosby⁴⁷, "so Numerous was the Auditory that the place though a Large one⁴³ could hardly contain them."

Gill's preaching proved popular with many and at a well attended church meeting John York, a deacon who, Crosby believed, feared that the church might wish to invite Gill to the pastorate there and then, sought to block such a proposal by reminding them that it was⁴⁹ "customary to enquire into the Character of a person, before they went about to choose him." The church thereupon instructed Crosby to write to Kettering for a character reference and certain brethren to call upon Gill to invite him to preach before them for a further month's trial. Crosby, intent upon striking whilst the iron was hot, hastily prepared and dispatched a barely coherent letter⁵⁰ to Kettering by that very night's post, to John Gill's minister, Mr. Wallis.

"Revd. Sir,

These by the Order of the Church of Christ at Horselydown met together this Evening are to desire you to inform them of the Character of Mr. Gill attested by the Hands of some of the members of your Church as speedily as Can be. Time would not permit to write with those greetings as usually come from one Church to another the post being near going out therefore desire your Excuse and take liberty to subscribe my self your friend and Servant in Christ Jesus. August 25th, 1719.

Tho: Crosby."

The reply from Kettering was satisfactory and was read on⁵¹ "Sunday, Sept 6 after Service in the afternoon" when, after more debate, the meeting was adjourned until the following Thursday. Then, with about a hundred members present, when a vote was taken to decide⁵² "Whether Mr. Gill should be chosen pastor of the Congregation in a short time" there were only "about 6" votes against. A vote followed to decide whether the final decision should be taken the following Lord's Day evening, September 13th. This also was agreed⁵³ "the whole against 12 or thereabouts." Ominously the next sentence in Crosby's narrative was "Then Mr. Atkins laid down his office of a Deacon." The following Sunday Gill's adherents chose him as their pastor⁵⁴ "by a very great majority." It was the nature of that majority which was at once disputed by Gill's opponents who pointed out that it did not contain a majority of the votes of the *brethren* in member-

ship⁵⁵ "Mr. Gills friends pretending they had ye majority by allowing ye womens Votes as good . . . Proceeded, without the consent of ye majority of ye Brethren and a great many Sisters."

After the meeting the deacons sent to Gill at his lodgings to arrange to meet him next day when they warned him that twenty-one of the brethren in membership were against the decision of the previous evening. This evidence of a divided church, however, did not dissuade Gill from accepting⁵⁶ "readily and willingly" the invitation of his supporters to the pastorate. A letter was promptly dispatched to Kettering asking for the transfer of his membership and signed by Crosby and some twenty others. Meanwhile Gill's opponents packed the ordinary, and therefore sparsely attended, church meeting on September 22nd and reversed the decision taken on Sunday, 13th, delegating two of their number to tell Gill⁵⁷ "he was to preach no Longer than the next Lords day in that place."

On the 27th September Thomas Crosby read over the manuscript account to his friends after service,⁵⁸ "except ye marginal references," which he had prepared of the events since Stinton's death and it was agreed "to lay them before the Elders of the Baptized Congregations, in order to Justify themselves in the Choice they had made of Mr. Gill." They also prepared a signed complaint about the proceedings at the church meeting held the previous Tuesday (the 22nd September). On Monday, 28th September, a lengthy letter setting out their case was presented to the ministers⁵⁹ signed by Crosby and five others. On Thursday the ministers told them that their opponents had insisted that the inclusion of the women's votes in this matter was against their Church's constitution. Furthermore the ministers⁶⁰ "by ye Mouth of Mr. Noble then Moderator earnestly exhorted us all to keep together." With a view to discouraging a final break they refused to allow Gill's party to use⁶¹ "the little Meeting house adjoining to the Baptisterion." But by now the break was inevitable and a meeting was held at Crosby's school which⁶² "agreed to meet there again on the Lord's day next ensuing if a License could by then be obtained."

A second letter to the ministers, signed by Crosby and twenty-two others,⁶³ argued that, whether or not it was true that by custom or constitution the vote of the women members had not traditionally been allowed, in recent practice their votes had been accepted without question right up to, in fact, the 13th September.

Nevertheless the Ministers' judgment, given on October 8th, was that the invitation to Gill was invalid since the majority of brethren present had opposed it, and they therefore advised⁶⁴ that Gill should continue to preach at one service each Sunday on pro-

bation and that those opposed to him should have the man of their choice for the other service. Crosby's reaction to this was strongly hostile and, in the course of some acid comments he pointed out,⁶⁵ "Had we complied, we should thereby have owned the Majority of Brethren to have been the Church : and then at the next Church Meeting Mr. Gill's opponents (being 2 or 3 in Number more than us) would undoubtedly have declared that he should preach no longer."

Gill's supporters now considered themselves a separate fellowship and in their Churchbook they wrote⁶⁶ "We therefore to prevent any misrepresentations with respect to the Separation Do declare ourselves to be The Church at Horselydown lately under the Pastoral Care of the Reverend Mr. Benja. Stinton (being the Major part thereof) and do likewise declare ourselves to be the Church at Horsleydown now under the Pastoral Care of the Reverend Mr. Jno Gill and that we may not be Charged with erring from the Constitution of the Church We do now subscribe our Names to the Solemn Covenant thereof as printed by the Revd. Mr. Bej. Keach 1697." The Keach covenant was transcribed into the book and signed by Gill, twenty-six brethren (including, of course, Thomas Crosby) and sixty-eight sisters. The date of this covenanting together was⁶⁷ October 11th, 1719, and it took place in a disused meetinghouse upon Horsleydown which they had arranged to rent for £10 p.a.

As would be expected friction continued between the two groups for some time but it is not necessary to follow its course at this point except to mention that whilst those hostile to Gill had shewn themselves willing enough to accept the London Ministers' recommendations, his friends had made it very plain that they would not and there is, as will be seen, some evidence that, in fact, the ministers viewed the Crosby-Gill congregation with some coolness.

Meanwhile, after John Gill had been received into membership on November 15th, a church meeting⁶⁸ was held on the following Tuesday at which four significant decisions were taken. Firstly, "Bro Smith and Brother Crosby" were appointed as messengers to the church at White Street, whose minister was Richard Parks, to ask for the transfer of two of their members, Richard and Prudence Leak (or Lake). Secondly it was decided that on November 26th "The Church should meet together and after some time spent in prayer Four Deacons be Chosen to take upon them the administration of the affairs of the Church." Thirdly, it was decided that John Gill and the deacons elect should be ordained on Monday, December 28th. Finally it was agreed that "Brother Crosby do register the Acts of the Church from time to time and

keep a just and true account of all moneys received and paid on the account thereof."

On November 26th, 1719,⁶⁹ Thomas Crosby was elected deacon with three others. It should be noted here that there is no evidence that Crosby was ever a deacon during Stinton's ministry and that the only period of his life for which there is evidence that Crosby was a deacon is that period during which he was in membership with John Gill's congregation. At the same time it was agreed to invite three ministers, Mr. Key, Mr. Rees and Mr. Curtis to share in the ordination service and to send messengers "to both the Boards of Ministers to give them a general invitation to the ordination."

It appears that these invitations were refused and that the letter which Thomas Crosby sent to the Ministers' meeting at the Hanover Coffee House⁷⁰ which is unfortunately undated, complained "I cannot see wherefore the ministers should not concur with us and ordain Mr. Gill" and mentioned that David Rees had preferred their opponents' cause. Crosby further maintained that Gill's congregation had taken the greatest care not to infringe the practice of the Baptist churches; for example, they had not⁷¹ "called forth our Pastor to administer the ordinances to us before his ordination." He further claimed that the blessing of God was manifest in the life of the new congregation "several have been converted and Baptized, very Numerous are our Attendants, and such as liberally contribute towards the support of the poor, and other necessary Charges that attend us." To this communication the ministers made no reply and so Crosby made a further effort to justify the position of Gill's congregation in a letter⁷² to Joseph Burroughes, the Minister at Paul's Alley, Barbican.

But at the December church meeting a further rebuff had to be reported. The Messengers sent to obtain the transfer of Mr. and Mrs. Lake⁷³ "Reported that Mr. Parks disowned the Church and them as Messengers and refused to give any account of Richard Lake and Prudence his wife." In the circumstances they were received into membership without Mr. Parks' recommendation.

At last, however, some at least of the London ministers were won to a more sympathetic attitude and a new date was arranged for the ordination of John Gill and his four deacons. On March 22nd, 1720,⁷⁴ with Thomas Crosby acting as the church's spokesman concerning the history of the Call, the service took place. It must have been with considerable satisfaction that the Churchbook's record of the day's proceedings concluded "There were present at this Solemn Assembly Ten Ministers of the Gospel."

Thereafter Crosby's part in the congregation's life was marked in the Churchbook by his appointment as messenger to represent

them on various occasions including that on which he, with certain others, was deputed to meet Hannah Cooper who was applying for baptism and churchmembership⁷⁵ "to hear the Account she could give of her Faith and Repentance she being not able through Bashfulness to speak before the whole Church." But in November, 1721⁷⁶ he came to speak at Church meeting on behalf of the proprietors of the Baptisterion at Horsleydown and "informed us of an Assessment upon all the Churches concerned there: of thirty shillings. Each Church to defray the Deficiency of building and finishing the same." The church agreed that he, as their treasurer, should pay it.

Nevertheless tensions were arising within the congregation and Thomas Crosby seems to have been in part their cause. Before attempting to trace the course of events which led to his excommunication it is perhaps worthwhile to note that there does not appear to have been any evidence that the break between Crosby and Gill⁷⁷ was a doctrinal one. The first sign of trouble is a note in the Churchbook⁷⁸ for June, 1722, that Crosby complained that Hannah Cooper had criticised him and that "Bro. Crosby who by the appointment of the Church at their meeting of November ye 18th 1719 did keep the Accompts of All Monys received and paid on their Accompt Thought fitt to resign the said Trust reposed in him and Delivered into the hands of Bro. Jones the sum of Nineteen pounds Sixteen shillings and Three pence being the Ballance of his Accompts due to the Church as appears by their publick Accompt Book which he at the same time likewise delivered unto them." His resignation as treasurer was the result of complaints that he had misused his office to buy influence⁷⁹ over the minister. A further, somewhat later, attempt to support a charge of fraud against him from these account books failed, and, according to Crosby's own record, Gill firmly took his side, so resenting the insult⁸⁰ "that he told them with anger, he wondered I had continued so long with them." After the gathering at which this took place Gill paid Thomas Crosby a visit and sought to calm him down promising him "justice" at the next church meeting. But by then he discovered that the pastor had changed his mind, and had turned against him. Crosby, however, was very upset and before he left the meeting⁸¹ "solemnly declared he would no more come at us, but make immediate application to another Church to send their Messengers to us for his dismissal, which the Church by their silence assented to."

However, after a day or two, he had cooled down and had second thoughts. He now wrote to Gill as follows⁸²: "Sr, When I left the church meeting, it was with a full resolution to leave the church, but since finding that I cannot, as I intended singly

do so, I have for the sake of some, and at the importunity of others resolved still to continue with them." But now John Gill was thoroughly tired of his erstwhile friend and supporter⁸³: he rebuked him for not knowing his own mind and complained of an occasion a year or so before when Crosby had taken it upon himself to make some pretty severe complaints about his, Gill's, wife.

The upshot of it all was that at the next church meeting⁸⁴ the church, in Crosby's absence, on the grounds that he had refused "to act ye part of a deacon, before he had declared he would remove his communion, & when he had done so, reassumed the performance of that Office without the Church's consent," expelled him from office. Next, on Gill's complaint that he had slandered him and his wife it was decided that Crosby "be suspended from his communion until such time yt he makes his appearance & either makes good the charge or acknowledges his evils in so doing."

Crosby, apparently despairing of a fair hearing in his own church meeting, now appealed to the Board of Ministers in a long letter rehearsing his side of the dispute in detail. What happened next throws an interesting light upon the limits set to the powers of the ministers' gathered together. It can be told in Crosby's own words⁸⁵ "This was read in the Assembly of ministers then convened, and Mr. Gill being present was asked if he would reply to it? He answered his Church was independant and accountable to no other for what they had done: which put a stop to the Elders proceeding, who could not enter on the merits of the case, unless both sides had consented to refer the same to them."

When this move failed some members of the church who sympathised with Crosby joined in a letter of protest chiefly concerned to object to the way he had been cast off the diaconate. The argument is a theological one and is of considerable interest⁸⁶, not least because the letter is signed by members of the Stinton family: "When we consider, in what a solemn manner, Deacons of Churches are chosen, and appointed to the office, it fills us with wonder, that any Church, professing to walk by the rules of Christ, should be guilty of such weakness as to divest a person, of that office, she had no power to give him. Here is first a Day set apart, in the most serious and solemn manner possible, to beg of the Almighty His direction in our choice; and then another day is appointed in the like serious and solemn manner, to which the Elders are invited; and the persons whom we have chosen, set before them, in order to be in the most solemn manner, by the laying on of their hands, installed into their sacred office, agreeable to the word of God. . . . It is the Elders, and not the Church that makes them Deacons."

It is only fair to say that this is a clear case in which there were

faults on both sides and that no-one comes out of it with any great credit. The end, indeed, was inevitable and this account of Thomas Crosby's first forty years must end with the record of his excommunication by the congregation under the pastoral care of the Reverend John Gill.⁸⁷

December 12th, 1723: "The case of Thomas Crosby & several others who had disorderly withdrawn themselves from the Church came under consideration, & after some debate 'twas agreed yt they be cast out or rejected by ye Church, which was accordingly done by ye Elder in ye following form Viz.,

Whereas Thomas Crosby having had charges and complaints exhibited against him in the Church, & he not appearing to answer to ye same, but contemning the authority of ye Church, & disowning her to be so, has sinfully and disorderly withdrawn himself I do therefore in ye name of the Lord Jesus Christ, & by ye authority of this Church, exclude & reject the said Thomas Crosby from communion with this Church reckoning him a non-member, looking upon him as no more under our watch & care, until due satisfaction is given."

(To be continued.)

NOTES

¹ The article "Crosby, Thomas" written for *D.N.B.* by A. C. Bickley is chiefly notable for the number of errors of fact and inference compressed into so brief a notice. It is quite unreliable. Dr. Whitley made some passing references to Crosby but was more interested in his sources.

² Crosby, Thomas, *The History of the English Baptists* (4 Vols.), London, 1738-40, hereinafter cited as Crosby *H.E.B.*

³ The major sources are (i) scattered references in Crosby's publications. (ii) The Stinton-Crosby MSS. in the Angus Library. (iii) The Unicorn Yard Churchbook in the Baptist Union Library. (iv) The Carter Lane Church Book 1719-1806 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

⁴ Crosby, Thomas, *The London Practice*, 1719. The Preface p. ii.

⁵ Pearce, E. H., *Annals of Christ's Hospital*, Second Edition, 1908. Chapter VI, "The Mathematical School", contains valuable background material. It would appear that Crosby's gratitude was equalled neither by the competence nor the zeal of his teachers.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 100-01.

⁷ *Christ's Hospital Children's Register*, 1687-1704, f. 80 verso.

⁸ The Clothworkers' Company has no records of Edward Crosby.

⁹ Thomas was evidently not born in this parish since there is no record there of his baptism.

¹⁰ *Christ's Hospital Committee Book*, Vol. VI, 1687-98, p. 773.

¹¹ *ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 143.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³ *Christ's Hospital Children's Register*, 1687-1704, f. 81 recto.

¹⁴ No record of Robert Gifford has been found either in the Admiralty Records at the P.R.O. or at Trinity House. The Bristol Baptist family named Gifford had some sea-going connections (cf. L. G. Champion, *Farthing Rushlight*, London, 1961, pp. 3, 13), but no "Robert" has been traced.

¹⁵ Crosby, Thomas, *The Book-Keeper's Guide*, 1749. *Preface to the Author's Scholars*.

¹⁶ Crosby, *H.E.B.*, IV, p. 275.

¹⁷ Crosby, Thomas, *The London Practice*. Advertisement.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁹ *A Perfect and Compleat Register of all Marrages, Nativities, and Burials . . . on Horsely-downe*. In the P.R.O. Rebecca was born to Benjamin and Susannah Keach on November 22nd, 1682.

²⁰ Crosby, *H.E.B.*, IV, p. 208.

²¹ Ivimey, J., *History of the English Baptists*, III, p. 413, cites the Old Style date from Crosby, *H.E.B.*, IV, 363: it should be 1718/19.

²² Stinton, B., "A Journal of the Affairs of the Antipaedobaptists". Hereinafter cited as "Journal". This was continued by Crosby in manuscript from p. 137. He incorporated Stinton's narrative into Crosby, *H.E.B.*, IV, pp. 106-201, but abbreviated it. Consequently the quotations which follow are cited from the "Journal" with parallels in Crosby.

²³ "Journal", p. 6, cf. Crosby, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110, who tartly remarked that the fraternal would have been more effectual if laymen had been included.

²⁴ "Journal", pp. 44-5, cf. Crosby, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5, who explained he printed the details for "an example worthy the imitation of those whom God has so blessed to render able".

²⁵ "Journal", pp. 89-95, cf. Crosby, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-9.

²⁶ "Journal", pp. 59-63, cf. Crosby, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-4.

²⁷ "Journal", pp. 81-87, cf. Crosby, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-83.

²⁸ "Journal", pp. 99-109, cf. Crosby, *ibid.*, pp. 189-93.

²⁹ "Journal", pp. 126-9, cf. Crosby, *ibid.*, pp. 199-201.

³⁰ Crosby, *H.E.B.*, *ibid.*, pp. 349-56.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 355.

³² *ibid.*, p. 356.

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 362-3.

³⁴ Crosby took up the "Journal" at p. 137 and began the story of the split in the congregation at p. 140. The Unicorn Yard and Carter Lane Churchbook also tell the story from the two points of view. The Carter Lane narrative is closely paralleled in the "Journal".

³⁵ "Journal", p. 141. A marginal note says: "Mr. Wallins Church sprang from a party who separated from this Church & opposed singing of Psalms and Laying on of hands."

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ For the "Board of Ministers", cf. Crosby, *H.E.B.*, IV, pp. 158-9, 164.

³⁸ "Journal", p. 142.

³⁹ "Journal", *ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Journal", *ibid.*, margin: Crosby's indignant note: "Note this Mr. Scarney was an unbaptized person and had no call from any Church to preach neither had ever preached publicly to any Church before this & was not so much as a member of any dissenting Church: as we could hear of."

⁴¹ "Journal", p. 143.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ivimey, III, p. 410 said that the meetinghouse could contain "nearly a thousand people".

⁴⁹ "Journal", p. 145.

⁵⁰ Carter Lane Churchbook headed "The Copy of the Letter sent to Kettering to Mr. Wallis for Mr. Gills Character"—under the relevant date.

⁵¹ "Journal", *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Unicorn Yard Churchbook, folio 3 recto. (The date is mistaken, Sept. 11th given instead of Sept. 13th.)

⁵⁶ "Journal", p. 147. The Carter Lane Churchbook, following the "Journal", p. 147, doubted the genuineness of some of the 21. Such doubts may well have stiffened Gill's resolution.

⁵⁷ "Journal", p. 148.

⁵⁸ "Journal", pp. 148-9.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 149-53.

⁶⁰ Unicorn Yard Churchbook, fol. 4 recto.

⁶¹ "Journal", p. 153.

⁶² Unicorn Yard Churchbook, fol. 3 recto.

⁶³ "Journal", pp. 153-7.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 157.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶⁶ Carter Lane Churchbook. "An account of the Proceedings . . .", unnumbered pages.

⁶⁷ "Journal", p. 159.

⁶⁸ Carter Lane Churchbook, 17.11.1719.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 26.11.1719.

⁷⁰ "Journal", pp. 162-9.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

⁷³ Carter Lane Churchbook, 15.12.1719.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 22.3.1720.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 6.4.1720.

⁷⁶ Carter Lane Churchbook, 14.11.1721.

⁷⁷ Spurgeon, C. H., *The Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 1876, p. 38. However, Spurgeon's further comments may come much nearer hitting the nail on the head, p. 39: "men who are warm partizans are apt to become fierce opponents when their man does not prove to be subservient, and will not be moulded at their will. The friend is apt to assume the airs of a patron, and talk about ingratitude, but with men like John Gill this would never succeed."

⁷⁸ Carter Lane Churchbook, 24.6.1722.

⁷⁹ "Journal", pp. 186-7.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸¹ Carter Lane Churchbook, 25.2.1723.

⁸² "Journal", p. 189.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Carter Lane Churchbook, 26.3.1723.

⁸⁵ "Journal", p. 195.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 195.

⁸⁷ Carter Lane Churchbook, 3.12.1723.