

# Thomas Crosby, Baptist Historian

## (II) LATER YEARS

### MEMBERSHIP AT UNICORN YARD 1723-51 (?)

THE sentence of excommunication, dated 12 December 1723, with which the last article concluded, was an empty, if necessary, formality, since at churchmeeting in Unicorn Yard on 20 May 1723 the following letter had been read and afterwards transcribed into the churchbook<sup>1</sup>:

To the Church of Christ under the Pastoral Care of the Rev'd Mr Willm Arnold.

Brethren

We are conscious to our Selves that we greatly erred in our Zeal being carried away by the Strength of our Affections to the disturbance of your Peace and as we know where Strife is there is also Confusion so we are sensible as the Consequence of it much Anger, Evil Surmising and the like.

And whereas God in the course of his providence has so ordered it that we cannot enjoy peace and Comfort with those to whom we had given up our selves, and has made it necessary for us to depart from them. We do esteem it our duty (rather then to apply elsewhere) to return from whence we came submitting our Selves unto you in the fear of God and herein we hope we do make it manifest that we regard the Apostle (*sic*) Exhortation to unity when he said let all bitterness and wrath and anger and Clamour and Evil speaking be put away from you with all Malice and be ye kind one to another forgiving one unto another even as God for Christ Sake hath forgiving (*sic*) you.

We shall not enter into a detail of particulars to revive what ought to be buried in Oblivion. But thus much we think necessary to declare that we are heartily Sorry for every offence and do desire to fill up our places amongst you to the Satisfaction of everyone and as you know our walk amongst you was always agreeable till our last unhappy difference which arose from a too forward Zeal for him whom in Conscience we thought it our duty to adhere to, so we hope our return amongst you will be attended with the like agreeableness that so we come unto you with joy by the will of God.

May 20th 1723.

Yours in the best bonds,

Thos. Crosby, Eliz. Stinton, Susan Keach, Rachell Carter, Rebekah Crosby, Benj. Stinton, Susannah Stinton, Elizabeth Fisher.

At the foot of the transcription appeared the laconic note, "Agreed to Consider of the above Repentance. Adj." The church did not hurry to a decision and it was not until 15 July<sup>2</sup> that a church-meeting was held at which it was decided to receive the wanderers home again. The Unicorn Yard congregation had moved into its new meeting house on Sunday, 26 June 1720 and William Arnold had been ordained their pastor in November that same year. At the time of the secession of Gill's supporters Thomas Crosby had calculated<sup>3</sup> that only about fifty active members had stayed whilst perhaps a further sixty either lived at a distance or lived locally but were inactive. In fact the Unicorn Yard churchbook listed six deacons, twenty-eight men and eighty-eight women as members who remained after the break, and listed twenty-four men and seventy-five women as having departed.

During the two-and-a-half years of Arnold's pastorate before Crosby rejoined there were forty-five baptisms, ten received by transfer, and two members restored. During this period there were no transfers out of membership nor were there any excommunications: hence the only losses were by deaths which, unfortunately, were not recorded.

In October 1723 Crosby was appointed as one of the two who were to visit Elizabeth Fittikett,<sup>4</sup> who had asked for baptism and church membership, and this was the only reference, among the rather brief entries made in the churchbook during the period, to a specific responsibility entrusted to him. At the same churchmeeting it is noteworthy that Thomas Pickering was present asking to be restored to membership "he being much dissatisfied with ye irregular proceedings of Mr Gills Church with Mr Crosby". He was accepted.

When, in 1728, it was decided to elect new deacons there was no apparent move to nominate Crosby. Instead, in May 1729,<sup>5</sup> he was, for the first time, asked to join with others in auditing the deacons' accounts; this task was to be his on a number of occasions over the years and was one that might well be congenial to the author of a book on commercial arithmetic. At this period the decrease in applications for membership and the time spent in churchmeeting upon matters of discipline together indicate that the earlier impetus of Arnold's ministry had begun to spend itself.

In February 1730 a further hint, for which the foregoing narrative might well have prepared the student of his life, that Thomas Crosby was not very able in the management of personal relationships, occurred in the churchbook. Joseph Stinton<sup>6</sup> appeared before the church to allege that his recent absence from worship was due to "a difference with Mr Crosby", and to ask for his transfer to another congregation. The church admonished him to seek reconciliation with Crosby before they would grant him a transfer and there the matter, as far as Crosby was concerned, rested.<sup>7</sup>

As the years passed Crosby continued to climb back into the trust and favour of the church and when Arnold died, after being ill for some months, on 17 May 1734, at the churchmeeting which followed he, together with four others, was appointed to assist the deacons in making arrangements<sup>8</sup> for pulpit supplies. The church left the preachers' fees to the discretion of the deacons "Provided that they do not exceed 10 shills & 6d for a Sermon & £1 1. 0 to a Minister that shall Preach & Administer ye Lords Supper". A fortnight later another churchmeeting, on 10 June, decided that the Deacons, together with seven other brethren, of whom Thomas Crosby was one, should "make a generall Vissit to all ye Members of ye Church". There followed a period of fifteen months in which abortive negotiations with two ministers whom the congregation hoped to secure for the pastorate were carried on. After the second disappointment, however, Thomas Crosby and Samuel Stinton<sup>9</sup> reported to the churchmeeting held 27 October 1735 that several ministers had recommended them to approach Thomas Flower, son to the minister of that name at Bourton-on-the-Water. In due course Flower visited Unicorn Yard and the church finally wrote to invite him to accept the pastorate on 4 January 1736. He accepted the call and was ordained on 29 April.

The new ministry involved the opening of a new subscription list to support it. There were<sup>10</sup> forty-nine subscribers and the amount promised was £64 13. 0: of this Crosby contributed £1 6. 0. During the period that followed Thomas Crosby's part in church affairs was a small one and from 1737 onwards until his excommunication in 1742 his appearances at churchmeetings were infrequent: no doubt his *History of the English Baptists* was making considerable demands both upon his time and his energy. Nevertheless he had kept his interest in the baptistery on Horsleydown<sup>11</sup> and a letter from him, in the name of its trustees, was read at churchmeeting on 14 October 1739. In it he asked that the church should send two messengers to meet the trustees to audit their accounts and to discuss its repair and future support. A fortnight later Samuel Stinton, one of the messengers who had been appointed, reported<sup>12</sup> that "at the baptizing place they had examined both it and the Cloaths, found both much out of repair, and that they agreed each Church should pay twenty shill. towards the said repair and ye arrears of Rent".

Meanwhile the ministry of Thomas Flower was not a very happy one, as the lack of new members and repeated laments in the church-book bear sad testimony. Crosby's own programme, for a man in his late fifties, was busy enough. As he completed his *History* in 1740 he had plans to re-print some of Benjamin Keach's works<sup>13</sup> and, at the same time, he was keeping up his school<sup>14</sup> where young gentlemen were both boarded and taught and other children given courses in book-keeping as soon as they were able to "write a fair

hand". His writing and his school were not at this time, however, his only business ventures: in 1740<sup>15</sup> he advertised his partnership with his son-in-law and fellow churchmember, John Robinson<sup>16</sup> not only in the school but in a bookshop where they stocked "all Sorts of Books in Divinity, Law, History" not to speak of a generous variety of mathematical, nautical and optical instruments.

Meanwhile, early in 1742, one of the members at Unicorn Yard, George Baskerville,<sup>17</sup> was charged at churchmeeting with<sup>18</sup> "walking disorderly, in taking the Sacrament in the Church of England, in order to execute the Office or Trust of a Common Council Man of the City". It was almost universally held in the Baptist churches of the time that, in the words of Baskerville's accuser, to take the sacrament in such circumstances and for such a purpose was "a Profanation of that Sacred Institution". Whilst this affair was to cause a considerable stir in London Baptist circles for some while to come its present interest is that in the vote taken in the first churchmeeting when the matter was raised Thomas Crosby voted with the minority who denied that this was "a Matter of Offence to the Church". Nevertheless, although Baskerville was to remain in membership for some while before the matter was finally settled, his condemnation was carried then and there by twelve votes to six, and "Bro. Robinson" voted with the majority.

At this same time Thomas Flower was himself meditating resignation and, after the communion service held on 28 March 1742, he told the church that "he could no longer sustain the pastoral office with comfort and therefore desired to be dismissed from it". His written statement complaining of the poor attendance both at Sunday services and weekly meetings for prayer was read out at the next churchmeeting but it was decided to ask him to reconsider his request to be allowed to resign. More meetings and discussions followed with, and without, the pastor. At last, however, on 10 May, it was Thomas Crosby who proposed "That it be ye request of ye Church to Mr Flower that he withdraw the request he made to ye Church on Mar: 28, the which if he consents to, That all proceedings upon that request be obliterated made void and of none effect". The motion was carried *nem. con.* and, on 23 May, Flower agreed to withdraw his resignation.

However the succession of events which was to make the year 1742 a memorable one in the records of the congregation at Unicorn Yard was not yet ended. At churchmeeting held on 25 October John Robinson announced that there had been "a difference between his father (*sic*) and him in Affairs of Trade, which had been by them referred to Arbitration, but that his father would not abide by the Award". The report,<sup>19</sup> covering nearly four pages, of the discussions and decisions which followed vividly depicted Crosby in the middle of a scene where he was most certainly in the wrong yet convinced that he, and he alone, was in the right.

The trouble over the partnership had been brewing up for at least six months and, when the report of the arbitrators had been received, giving their judgment that Thomas Crosby owed his partner £153, he had at once refused to pay. A few days before the churchmeeting an attempt had been made to effect a reconciliation but those who had been present reported that Crosby had behaved "in a very obstinate and unchristian manner having called Bro. Robinson abundance of ill Names and the Arbitrators also". George Baskerville had apparently gone into the whole affair and his own view, given at the churchmeeting as a lawyer, was that the decision of the arbitrators had been fully justified. The meeting then unanimously decided to request Crosby to sign the necessary bond promising to pay the award. He flatly refused and, after having announced that they could excommunicate him if they wished in which case he would transfer his membership elsewhere, left the meeting. After some other routine business had been disposed of it was decided that, in view of his general behaviour and his refusal to accept the church's advice, they should move more swiftly than usual to judgment and excommunicate him then and there. Two brethren were deputed to call upon him with this news and to tell him that the church desired that "the Lord may give him Repentance".

A few days later the situation was not greatly eased by a letter, read at churchmeeting 15 November, 1742, whose tone was reflected by the way Crosby signed himself "your greatly Injur'd & oppressed brother in Christ Jesus". Nor was oil poured on troubled waters by the application, at the same meeting, of his wife, Rebekah, and her sister Rachel Carter, for transfer to the neighbouring Maze Pond church.<sup>20</sup> There matters rested until a further letter from Thomas Crosby, of a rather more conciliatory nature, was read at the churchmeeting held a week later, 22 November. Whilst denying that the church had any right to interfere in the matter at issue between him and John Robinson he wrote expressing a general penitence for his misdeeds and asking to be taken back into the fellowship. The latter part of the letter is quoted in some detail as reflecting the reaction of a genuinely devout, if stubborn, church-member to being under the ban of the church:

"I now commit myself to the Lord, and you, and as I doubt not of his compassionate care of me, so I hope under the acknowledgement I now make unto you, That I am truly and heartily sorry, and God knows that I lie not, for all my offences, either by word of mouth, writing, or otherwise, both towards God and you, and therefore humbly intreat, that the fetters with which I am bound may be knocked off, and I left still to have communion with Christ in his Church, and this request God knows when I was writing of it, was attended with a flood of tears.

"Know this my brethren, That the Chastning of the Lord,

respecting ye deprivation of my Substance is to me like a mote in ye Sun, respecting that more grievous one which comes thro' his visible people, and my fellow brethern, his Saints as instruments. For I do not know, that I ever was once absent from the Lords table, since I had a place in his house, till your hasty deprivation, and you must all know, that an absence from Gods house, can never fail of giving sensible uneasiness, and sorrow to such who have tasted the pleasures of Gods sanctuary, unless they are left to a carnal dead frame which I deprecate, desiring to honour and serve my redeemer here, and to be glorified with him hereafter . . . ”

The churchmeeting decided to remit the whole matter to a special committee which was charged to report upon Crosby's letters, the application for transfer to Maze Pond, and a further complaint made by Robinson that “the immediate relatives of his wife” were spreading scandal about him, at the next meeting. The report concerning Crosby himself was delivered to the churchmeeting 13 December. In it the committee recommended that Crosby be not restored to fellowship since he shewed no true repentance in refusing reconciliation with Robinson and in continuing to criticise both the church and its pastor.<sup>21</sup>

The church then summoned Crosby to hear their endorsement of the committee's recommendation that he should not be restored to fellowship. But this was far from the end of the affair. At the same meeting Rebekah Crosby and Rachel Carter were also called in to answer a charge against them that they had been spreading malicious scandal about Robinson. And so the whole miserable family quarrel dragged on its weary way with Crosby out of fellowship and his wife and sister unable to get their desired transfer because they were themselves “under admonition”. It was not until 4 April 1743 that the church finally judged the two women incorrigible and that they, having rent themselves from the fellowship, were no longer to be regarded as members.

It is hard not to feel considerable sympathy with John Robinson. After all, those who knew both men well and those also who were the legal arbitrators between them had, apparently, no shadow of doubt that he was in the right. It appears that the business venture had failed, no doubt the optical instruments alone had swallowed up capital, and the £153 which was awarded to Robinson must have represented part, at least, of what he had sunk in it. He could hardly be blamed for wanting it back! Crosby's present attitude must have been a severe shock to him: he had been taught by him,<sup>22</sup> had enjoyed his hospitality and affection, had married his daughter, and had virtually been designated his heir. Yet now, whilst his father-in-law abused him with all the hard words he could lay to his tongue, his mother-in-law and her sister began an hysterical campaign of slander against him and, claiming she was unwell, kept his own wife away from him in their home.

It was not, in fact, until another letter arrived from Crosby over three years after the last one and rather more than a year after the ministry of Thomas Flower had closed in disappointment and bitterness<sup>23</sup> that the whole matter was re-opened. By this time John Robinson<sup>24</sup> had himself left the church to join John Gill's because of his dissatisfaction with Flower's dismissal. Indeed the very churchmeeting which finally excommunicated him was the one that on 25 November 1745 accepted Rachel Carter and Rebekah Crosby back into membership. Their application had been supported by a report from the deacons "that they had for a considerable time attended the worship of God with us".

It was on 17 March 1746, just after Josiah Thompson had accepted the church's invitation to undertake the pastorate, that a letter of application for reinstatement was read from Thomas Crosby. The last paragraph read as follows<sup>25</sup>:

"As my manner of life is well known amongst you; and as the Providence of God has given you a Pastor whose Ministry has been much blessed to the benefit of my Soul,<sup>26</sup> I hold it my duty to intreat you to remove the bar that lies against my communion with the Church. When I say, what shall I do, under my Affliction? My heart answers, be not careful, God will provide, Therefore I leave it with him, concluding with the words of David, If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again and shew me, both himself and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, Behold here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good to him, I will yet put my trust in him". The church agreed that this letter was satisfactory and he was received back without further conditions to the full communion with the church.

It is, perhaps, noteworthy that this letter differed in no substantial degree from the one which had earlier been considered unacceptable. As far as is now known he never obeyed the church and made up his quarrel with Robinson yet five of those who had served on the committee which had rejected the letter written in 1742 were present among the ten brethren who were willing now to have him back. The dust of the original conflict had subsided, John Robinson was no longer present to protest, and in the early months of a new ministry old quarrels were willingly buried.

During the last, quiet, years at Unicorn Yard there were no more disturbances for Thomas Crosby: he took up his old task as one of the auditors in 1746 and continued to serve every year until 1751. It must have been about that time that he died for there are no further references to him in the churchbook after that year. The last years were, however, fruitful in another way: in 1749 he published *The Book-keeper's Guide* and in the following year *The Mariner's Mirror*,<sup>27</sup> a treatise on navigation.

Such is the story of Thomas Crosby: a story of pride and of prejudice, of passionate obstinacy and lifelong devotion. It now

remains to turn to that work by which he is chiefly remembered : there the lifelong devotion to the Baptist cause is reflected whilst alongside appear the occasional flashes of that proud and prejudiced personality which was also his.

### *The History of the English Baptists*

The history of the project which eventually saw the light of day as Thomas Crosby's *History of the English Baptists* is of some considerable interest in itself. The initial impetus, as has long been recognised,<sup>28</sup> was given by Benjamin Stinton who, at his death in 1719, bequeathed certain of his manuscripts<sup>29</sup> to Crosby. The first news of Crosby's hand in the project was given in a letter written towards the end of 1719 when the controversy about John Gill's appointment was at its height. There Crosby made it clear that he had already begun work upon<sup>30</sup> "Mr Stinton's History of the Baptists" but had laid it on one side until matters had settled down. Indeed Thomas Crosby's own first attempts at historiography were his accounts of the events leading up to and following after the invitation of John Gill to the pastorate at Goat Yard. It seems probable, however, that it was Crosby who saw another manuscript by Stinton entitled *A Short catechism . . . in the words of the sacred scriptures* through the press that year for he mentioned that it had been published after Stinton's death.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless for several years after Gill's settlement and his own return to his former friends at Unicorn Yard Crosby only toyed with the task of preparing Stinton's manuscripts for publication. Spare hours were employed after busy days of teaching in sorting out the manuscript and in gathering other materials but, at last, at the request of his own minister, William Arnold and Edward Wallin, of Maze Pond, he passed them over to Daniel Neal to be used in that scholar's *History of the Puritans*. Eventually Neal's third volume<sup>32</sup> was published but, to Crosby's disgust, the story of the Baptists was passed over in rather less than five unsympathetic pages. As a result he decided to prepare his own book and did the work as well as he could claiming that<sup>33</sup> "what is wanting in it of elegance of phrase, hath been endeavoured to be supplied, in the truth of the relation, which is the only commendation of history". The first volume, though dated upon its title page 1738, may well have appeared late in 1737.<sup>34</sup> In his preface Crosby lamented that his friend had not lived to assemble his own materials but explained that he had incorporated the only complete piece Stinton had completed,<sup>35</sup> namely an account of those who had shared anti-paedobaptist opinions since apostolic times. When this section, together with the extracts from Stinton's other manuscripts, the *Repository* and the *Account* used in the first volume, are counted as



one whole it becomes clear that approximately three-fifths of Crosby's first volume directly derived from Stinton. This underlines Crosby's description of himself as "the Editor" on the title page of the first volume whilst styling himself "the Author" in the other three.

The period covered in the first volume stretched from a vigorous, but largely unconvincing, attempt to claim Wycliffe and the Lollards as early English Baptists, down to the restoration of King Charles II. One immediate consequence of publication was a sharp reaction from an Anglican historian, John Lewis. Lewis not only refuted the attempt to claim Wycliffe and his followers but also counter-attacked with a careful but unflattering account of the continental Anabaptists and their English counterparts.<sup>36</sup> He tried, however, to prove too much when he attempted to claim that no Englishman could have become Anabaptist before 1600 and Crosby, in a pamphlet<sup>37</sup> he published in reply, took the matter up effectively. His comment on the increase of Anabaptists in England during the middle years of the sixteenth century is still worth quoting<sup>38</sup>: "No wise Reader will believe, that all, or even the greatest part of the increase before related, was only among the Refugees; that few or no Natives were brought over to their Opinion. If this had been seen to be the case there would scarce have been so many royal Commissions given to Bishops and Doctors about this Affair; so many Books written and published by royal Direction; so many other measures taken; and particularly so many Severities employ'd."

A second consequence of the appearance of the first volume was, perhaps, more significant. Its publication at once evoked a stream of further offers of information concerning the history of the Baptists. One letter, passed on to Crosby by a certain Mr. Randal, to whom it had originally been addressed, was from the General Baptist leader, Benjamin Miller, of Downton in Wiltshire.

Crosby transcribed the whole of it into the back of Stinton's Repository, and used some of the material it contained in a later volume. However part of the letter has a wider interest in revealing the attitude of a number of Crosby's fellow Baptists to his whole project. This reads as follows:

"As to what you mention of Mr Crosbys History of the Baptists sufferings I had just seen an advertisement with some of the Ministers of the Calvinist persuasion only, and I began to think it was only an account of that side of the question. But you satisfie me to the contrary. But Dear Sir. I am still at a loss to think of what service such a thing can be at this time a day, when we have enjoyed our liberty for near fifty years, and by repeated acts of parliament, so oft established to us. . . . Indeed, it would have been very seasonably at the beginning of K. Williams reign as a foundation of our Toleration and indeed there was one that undertook that work, and wrote down for Instructions but that was stopt as I

heard by some great men, and besides how can there be now so full and just account given of those things, when the persons themselves, and all living witnesses are dead, unless care had been taken by all to commit it to writing. But if it be thought it may yet do good service (I would not that such a thing should come forth to do hurt and to stir up the spirits of some that had no hand in the former persecution and knew but little of it) I therefore give you this short account, that I am able of my own knowledge, and who was about 14 or 15 years of age in the last persecution."

Such timidity from one who had known himself what the persecution had been like is hardly surprising and is an interesting comment on the precariousness of toleration even fifty years on. It may be that a similar desire to let sleeping dogs lie had actuated John Gill, Joseph Stennet and Samuel Wilson when they had earlier sought to dissuade Crosby from publishing.<sup>39</sup> If this were so it should be remembered that their fears were not entirely groundless: Benjamin Miller would not be the only one with family memories of persecution, dissenters were very much second-class citizens as George Baskerville was to find in 1742, Baptists were still suspect even to their fellow-dissenters, their chapels might still be fired by the mob and, though none could then know it, the Forty-Five lay only just ahead.

However Crosby, who had originally intended a two-volume work,<sup>40</sup> expanded his earlier plans to take in the new materials. His second volume, covering the years 1660-67, was printed in 1739; his third volume, taking the story down to the death of William III, came out in 1740; and his last, recording the reign of Anne and the first years of George I, later in the same year. It should be noted that none of the volumes kept too strictly to its period and that the fourth volume embodied a very important section originally written by Stinton<sup>41</sup> with which he had probably planned to round off Volume II when he had first taken up the work.

The completed work can, of course, be criticised with some justification from various points of view by later historians. Crosby's haphazard and chaotic narrative, in spite of the valuable harvest of facts which can be gleaned, is nicely calculated to drive a modern historian to despair. Yet those who followed him, whilst not blind to his faults, did not hesitate to mine from his material. Joseph Ivimey, in his *History*, depended heavily upon Crosby for the earlier period of his own work, and Adam Taylor, the historian of the General Baptists, paid him the discerning compliment that<sup>42</sup> "notwithstanding the inelegance of his style, the perplexity of his arrangement, and the inaccuracy of some of his statements, his volumes will always be valuable as a depository of facts and documents, which will continue to assist every succeeding writer". Crosby's great virtue was that he was the first to carry through such an enterprise.

On the other hand only one example need be taken to illustrate the lack of balance in his work, that is, the way the whole story tends to centre upon the London Baptists. The provinces, though frequently mentioned, hardly came into focus at any point and even the London materials were arranged without much care and with even less art. Nevertheless to demand from the first historian of the English Baptists a strict chronology, a careful sequence of cause and effect, a geographical analysis of denominational development, is utterly to misconceive his intentions, the material available to him and the period in which he lived. Indeed he was less of an historian in the modern, scientific sense, than an apologist. His argument was to be cast in the form of history and in his opening pages he made his intentions plain to the curious reader when he wrote<sup>43</sup>: "I thought it needful as well as just, to have these things set in a clear open light, to disabuse all those who may have been imposed upon by false or partial or defective history in this matter, and to remove, or prevent, or allay, scandal or censure for time to come."

As the narrative proceeded the appeal to the non-Baptist, to "the honest and well-meaning Christian", mentioned in the Preface to his first volume, was made along three main lines.

The first was his claim, since the ghost of Munster still stalked the uneasy pages of paedobaptist apologetics, that the Baptists were a quiet, orderly people, who, far from persecuting, had been the persecuted, in England. Of course he recognised that some black sheep had crept even into the Baptist fold but no church could claim to be free of these, nor would it wish to be condemned for the doings of a tiny minority. On the whole, he claimed for his Baptist brethren,<sup>44</sup> "no one sect of christians in this kingdom have merited more the favour and good esteem of their governors and christian brethren, by their peaceable carriage and behaviour towards them than they have done". The point was illustrated a dozen times in his pages as he discounted the occasional rogue or apostate and underlined the sufferings of innocent virtue.

Secondly, Crosby laid considerable stress, particularly in the course of his various prefaces, upon the theological and historical arguments he could adduce for believers' baptism. In tracing, for example, a thin red line of Baptists in the Church back to the Apostles he sought to refute the popular view that the English Baptists<sup>45</sup> "sprung from those mad and heretical people at Munster in Germany". With the same ends in view he paused, in the mainstream of his narrative, to emphasise the essential orthodoxy of the London *Confession* of 1644,<sup>46</sup> or to include an account of a debate about baptism,<sup>47</sup> or to discuss through one of Stinton's letters, a point of biblical interpretation.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, Crosby was at great pains to refute the view that Baptist ministers were generally<sup>49</sup> "illiterate, and chosen from the meanest of the people". Indeed he gave the better part of two long chapters

in his book to a number of brief biographies<sup>50</sup> with the intention of shewing<sup>51</sup> "that men of the greatest *learning* and *piety* have neither been ashamed nor afraid in the worst of times to stand up in vindication of a principle so truly apostolical". Knowing, however, that many Baptist ministers of his time had neither a university degree nor a congregation able wholly to support them and so had to work at a trade he was careful to draw attention to a period when Anglicans<sup>52</sup> were reduced to like circumstances. On the other hand he would not have been the man he was had he failed to point out that without a personal experience of God's grace mere human learning never qualified a minister of Christ<sup>53</sup> "a great *scholar* in secular or human *learning* may possibly be *unlearned* in *divinity*, yea tho' he can read *Greek* and *Hebrew*".

Nevertheless Crosby was not merely content to defend the Baptists to the outside world, but he also shared Stinton's desire that the division between the Particular and the General Baptists should be brought to an end. Consequently he took the opportunity several times in his work to plead that the division be overcome, claiming that, at the time he wrote,<sup>54</sup> "there are several churches, ministers, and many particular persons, among the *English Baptists* who desire not to go under the name either of *Generals* or *Particulars*, nor indeed can justly be ranked under either of these heads because they receive what they think to be truth, without regarding with what human schemes it agrees or disagrees". Whilst on the one hand he wrote of his conviction that<sup>55</sup> "this difference in opinion is not a sufficient or reasonable ground of renouncing christian communion with one another", on the other he explained that his policy had been to make no distinction between the two groups in his narrative. It is interesting to notice that Crosby laid the blame for the growing gulf upon the two groups upon the ministers<sup>56</sup> and attacked the Particular Baptists for their current tendency to isolationism even among themselves. Indeed he suspected the growth of a certain clericalism among the ministers in London who had their own board but had no interest in the revival of association life<sup>57</sup> "with some of the judicious lay-brethren . . . to consult together for the good of the whole". He accused the London Baptist Board of being small both in numbers and in charity and instanced their exclusion of Sayer Rhudd for Trinitarian heresy.<sup>58</sup> This passage is interesting not only for its indication of Crosby's own lack of concern for orthodoxy but for its clear implication that he believed that a properly constituted association with ministers and laymen acting in concert had some moral authority over the churches; a meeting merely of ministers alone had none.

Whether his suspicions, which seem entirely plausible, were entirely justified only further research can confirm, but it is clear that among the London Baptist ministers of the seventeen-thirties he feared the development of high Calvinism,<sup>59</sup> of clericalism and

of a deepening division between the two wings of the English Baptists.

Crosby's own contribution to Baptist history writing can be summed up as the first attempt to chronicle the story of the English Baptists actually to be completed. What cannot be claimed for him is originality in the major themes he expounded. Whilst it must be admitted that, on occasion, Crosby added the spice of his own acid prose, the major themes of Baptist innocence under persecution and independence of Munster, of the case for believers' baptism, of the respectability and quality of Baptist ministers and of the need for unity within the English Baptist community were his inheritance from both the ministry of Benjamin Stinton and the materials the latter had assembled.

With all his faults, however, and the faults of his book, some part of his closing appeal to his fellow-Baptists may stand as a word to their descendants<sup>60</sup>:

"And thus, my brethren, I hope, in the course of this History, I have made it appear, that you are the only people who closely adhere to the *apostolical* practice, and the practice of the *primitive* churches; I lament that disunion you maintain, upon principles, which, at most can be deemed but *mental errors*. You all profess *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all*, why cannot you then maintain one communion?" Perhaps his own life story provided the sad answer to his own question.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Unicorn Yard Churchbook*, 20 May 1723. Note: all references in this article are to dated entries in this Churchbook unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 15 July 1723.

<sup>3</sup> Crosby, "Journal", p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Ironically enough, this woman on 17 May 1731, with another, Mary Barrot, sought transfer to Gill's congregation on the grounds of their uneasiness with Arnold's preaching. Mary Barrot's complaint was specific and theological arising from "our Pastor's preaching up the necessity of inherent righteousness to make a Soul meet for ye enjoyment of God in another world".

<sup>5</sup> Crosby apparently performed this task, with others, annually, 1729-42 (although no reference was made to auditors in 1731 and records are missing in 1732). After his restoration to membership in 1746 he thereafter acted annually until 1751. His last appearance at church meeting was 21 January 1751 and his last appointment as auditor was 22 April 1751. Either he became incapable of acting or died between April 1751 and the appointment of the new auditors in 1752. There was no later reference to him in the churchbook after April 1751.

<sup>6</sup> 10 February 1730, Joseph Stinton's baptism by Arnold and reception into church membership had been recorded 25 December 1720. On 13 January 1730 the churchmeeting had decided to require him to attend the February meeting "to give ye Church Satisfaction with respect to his neglect of his place".

<sup>7</sup> The affair dragged on until 4 September 1732 when the church finally recognised that he had abandoned his membership with them. In fairness

to Crosby it should be said that there is no other evidence that he was thought to be at fault in this matter.

<sup>8</sup> A churchmeeting held on 30 June 1735 added two further members, one of them Thomas Pickering, to the committee responsible for providing pulpit supplies.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Stinton, with Thomas Pickering and others, had signed the letter (see "Thomas Crosby—the First Forty Years", note 86) opposing Crosby's ejection from Gill's diaconate in 1723. Stinton joined Arnold's congregation from Gill's on 20 May 1723, the day on which Crosby's own application for restoration was received. He was one of two deacons elected during the interregnum after Arnold's death. They were both ordained on the same occasion as was Flower.

<sup>10</sup> "A Copy of ye Subscription to ye Ministry &c. . . ." transcribed into the churchbook and dated 21 March 1736. The congregation also subscribed £6 18. towards othr expenses. Crosby's contribution of £1 6. towards the Ministry and 4 shillings towards the other costs remained the same until his excommunication. After 1744 the list was no longer transcribed into the churchbook.

<sup>11</sup> Presumably he had inherited this interest from Benjamin Stinton (see former article, notes 28, 76). He had shared in choosing new trustees on 27 March 1737.

<sup>12</sup> 29 October 1739.

<sup>13</sup> Crosby, *H.E.B.*, Vols. II and IV, back endpaper advertisements.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. I, back endpaper advertisement.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. III, back endpaper advertisement.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, on 20 March 1737 after afternoon service "gave an Account of his faith and Experience to Satisfaction, desired to be admitted to the ordinance of Baptism and fellowship with this church, a Good account being given of his life and conversation was accepted". He was received into full communion at the Lord's Supper 27 March 1737 "having first been asked whether if admitted he would from time to time and att all times seek its good, labouring to walk with them in all godly manner, to which he answered in ye affirmative".

<sup>17</sup> 14 February 1742. He had been accepted for baptism and membership 11 April 1737 and had been received in 24 April.

<sup>18</sup> A fairly full report of this affair is preserved in Ivimey's *Baptists*, III, pp. 228-33.

<sup>19</sup> The account that follows is taken entirely from the evidence provided by the Churchbook and detailed references are not given for that reason.

<sup>20</sup> Their joint letter asking for their dismissal (dated 15 November) was also transcribed into the churchbook and spoke of "an ungrateful contest . . . raised by Mr. Robinson . . . to the almost breaking of our hearts".

<sup>21</sup> It is noteworthy that Samuel Stinton and Thomas Pickering were two of the committee of seven who signed this document.

<sup>22</sup> These statements are, in part, deductions from the following florid claims of Crosby in the course of the dispute: that he had maintained Robinson "and a growing family and taken his Mother into the House &c.". In his letter to the church read 22 November 1742 Crosby described Robinson as one "whom I had trained up in my bosom, and in whom my soul delighted". In the same document he implied that Robinson was to have been his heir saying "I intended Mr. Robinson to have my all".

<sup>23</sup> See the reports of meetings leading up to the decision on 25 November 1744 that "Bro. Flower be and he is hereby desired (now) to lay down his Pastoral office" which was passed "by a great Majority".

<sup>24</sup> Cf. meetings held 21 January 1745, 25 February 1745, 29 April 1745 when he asked for a transfer to Gill "on whose Ministry I have attended for some time and found it Usefull and Comfortable to my Soul". 27 May messengers from Gill's congregation were refused the transfer because

Robinson had not obeyed the church's admonition to "make good his place with us". On 30 September it was reported that he had been again admonished. On 25 November the church accepted that he "has rent himself from the Communion of this Church". On 27 January 1746 it was reported that Robinson and one other who had been refused a transfer had been received into Gill's congregation and agreed that "the Conduct of Mr. Gills Church with respect to the Cases above has been irregular and Disorderly, and that thereby they have on their part made a breach in the Communion of Churches".

<sup>25</sup> Oddly, one paragraph of this letter was transcribed almost verbatim from the one read at churchmeeting on 22 November 1742. It has been transcribed earlier in this article beginning "I now commit myself . . ." and ending ". . . a flood of tears".

<sup>26</sup> This statement obviously indicates that Crosby had been attending worship at Unicorn Yard recently.

<sup>27</sup> This has been overlooked by Crosby's bibliographers. It was advertised in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1750. A third edition is to be found in the Library of the Maritime Museum, Greenwich. I have not been able to trace any other copies.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. useful series of articles by W. T. Whitley in *Trans. B.H.S.*, Vols. I and II where Crosby's use of Stinton's manuscripts was discussed.

<sup>29</sup> The MSS., which are all deposited in the Angus Library are:

- i. Stinton's "A Repository of Divers Historical Matters . . .".
  - ii. Stinton's "An Account of some of . . . the English Baptists".
  - iii. Stinton's "A Journal of the Affairs of the Antipaedobaptists".
- Cited in this article as: Crosby, "Journal", since Crosby's additions are most relevant.

<sup>30</sup> Crosby, "Journal", p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> Neal, Daniel, *A History of the Puritans*, Vol. III, 1732.

<sup>33</sup> Crosby, *H.E.B.*, I, p. xvii.

<sup>34</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. VII, December 1737, p. 770, advertised at 5 shillings.

<sup>35</sup> Crosby, *op. cit.*, p. ii.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis, John, *A Brief History of the Rise and Progress of Anabaptism in England*, London, 1738.

<sup>37</sup> Crosby, Thomas, *A Brief Reply to the Reverend John Lewis's brief history . . .*, London, 1738.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Crosby, *H.E.B.*, I. "To the Reader." The names are given on an unnumbered page of Crosby, "Journal".

<sup>40</sup> Crosby, *H.E.B.*, II. "To the Reader."

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, IV, pp. 106-21 is drawn from Crosby, "Journal", pp. 1-139.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, Adam, *The History of the English General Baptists*, London, 1818, p. v.

<sup>43</sup> Crosby, *op. cit.*, I. "To the Reader."

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* Preface lvii.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, III, pp. 313-53.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, IV, pp. 357-62.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, I, Chapter 4, IV, Chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, I, p. 265.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 58f., cf. IV, pp. 132-36.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, I, p. 262.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 173f.

- <sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, III, p. 271.  
<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, IV, pp. 16f.  
<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, III, pp. 285-88.  
<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, IV, pp. 393f.  
<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 419.

B. R. WHITE

**Lincoln, Mint Street Baptist Church.** The following books are lodged with the Lincolnshire Archives Office: Book of misc. entries, lists of members, birth, baptisms, deaths and dismissals, 1767-1802, misc. entries 1785-93, 1818, collections 1847-50, subscriptions 1851; Book of accounts for building and chapel, 1818; Church meeting book, minutes 1800-04, list of members 1811, list of collections for foreign missions, 1826; Church book, Church covenant and members' subscriptions, 1812, list of members, minutes, 1812-69; Lists of members, 1844, 1847, 1852, 1858; printed statement on some business of the General Baptist Church, St. Benedict's Square, by S. Wright, pastor, 1843; Statement on Mint Lane improvement, the Lincoln Corporation, 1885; church manuals and year books, printed 1884, 1899, 1910. For fuller details see *Archivists' Report 11* (15th March, 1959-23rd March, 1960), Lincolnshire Archives Committee, Exchequer Gate, Lincoln.

**Jenkins, Rev. Joseph** (1742-1819), minister at Wrexham, Blandford Street, London, and East Street, Walworth. Mr. G. Vernon Price, M.B.E., has lodged with the National Library of Wales his biographical essay on Jenkins. Bound with the MS. is an annotated list of Jenkins' writings, a genealogical chart with notes of his family, his confession of faith delivered at his ordination at Wrexham, a sermon preached at Wrexham, a discourse concerning him by George Pritchard, and the address at his interment.