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A FORGOTTEN ENGLISH VERSION OF THE ADORO TE AND THE LAUDA SION OF SAINT THOMAS

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It is rather remarkable that so low a place in popular esteem is awarded to English Catholic poets and especially those of the Post-Reformation period and it is equally noteworthy that the only Catholic poet of that period who has any important rank among his non-Catholic fellows, Alexander Pope, displays, in his verse, more of the Deism of Bolingbroke than of the Faith of the Church. Yet the end of the sixteenth century had been rendered glorious by the martyrdom of one great poet, the Jesuit Robert Southwell, recently beatified by Pope Pius XI, while the next fifty years were to produce a still greater poet for, among the honey swarm of religious lyricists of the Catholic era, the age of Herbert and Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, the Catholic, is perhaps the greatest.

Crashaw was born in London in 1613, his father being a Puritan divine of some reputation who relieved his anti-papal sentiments in print to the extent of some dozen volumes. His early scholastic education, while thoroughly Protestant, was achieved under the roof which had sheltered the first of the Henrician martyrs, the London Charterhouse. Thence he proceeded to Pembroke College, Cambridge.¹ At the time, Cambridge had be-

¹ It is remarkable how little Cambridge, as a whole, has influenced religious and philosophical thought in England. In this connection it is of interest to note that Sir Bertram Windle in his *Who's Who of the Oxford Movement* lists only thirteen Cambridge converts as against fifty Oxonians and the three most outstanding of these, de Lisle, Digby and Spencer, all became Catholics before the Oxford Movement was really under way.

come thoroughly imbued with the Anglo-Catholicism of Laud and, finding it more in accord with his poetic mind than the unlovely rigidity of Puritanism, he naturally embraced it and thus set foot on the Romeward trail. In 1636, he became a Fellow of Peterhouse and prepared himself for the quiet and easy life of a University Don. He was a ripe scholar and an accomplished linguist and showed no small poetic ability. He was a man of lovable disposition and deep piety and was greatly interested in the famous attempt to revive the religious life at Little Gidding.

Seven calm years were spent as a Cambridge Fellow and then came confusion. The Civil War broke out and, in 1643, to quote the vivid words of R. A. E. Shepherd, "the Parliamentary authorities swooped down upon Cambridge and administered the Covenant, like a nauseous black draught, to the reluctant members of that University."² Less pliable than the majority of his colleagues, Crashaw refused the Covenant, was deprived of his fellowship and fled to Oxford to join the King.

This University city, now the capital of Royalist England, was an armed camp and its wars and rumours of wars made it no fit place for a quiet and studious soul with poetic ambitions. Consequently Crashaw disappears from the picture for three years till Cowley, who had the gift of looking after his own interest to a degree unusual in a poet and who was attached to the exiled court of Charles' Queen, discovered him in Paris in the accustomed penury of the poet. Sometime previously, when exactly we do not know, he had become a Catholic. He was introduced at the court of Henrietta Maria where he was exceptionally popular but he gained little therefrom financially, for the King, hard pressed in England, could grant but small aid to his exiled Queen and her friends. However, the Queen sent him to Rome with an introduction to Cardinal Palotta, whose secretary he became for a time. In 1649, the Cardinal secured for him, though not a priest, a canonry at Loretto which occasioned a fine allusion in Cowley's poem, *On the Death of Mr. Crashaw*.

. thou most sublime
And richest offering at Loretto's shrine!
Where like some holy sacrifice to expire,
A fever burns thee, and Love lights the fire.

² *The Religious Poems of Richard Crashaw with an Introductory Study* by R. A. Eric Shepherd. (Herder 1914) p. 6. We heartily commend both this study and the collection to those interested in Crashaw.

³ This poem may be found in that unique collection *Poets on Poets* edited by Mrs. Richard Strachey.

This office he held for only three months, dying at the all too early age of thirty-six, one of the gentlest and sublimest of Catholic poets.

II

Cowley, who though a poet of no small calibre, was hardly a saint, begins his tribute to Crashaw, from which we have quoted above, as follows :

Poet and Saint! to thee alone are given
The two most sacred names of earth and Heaven.
The hard and rarest union which can be. . . .

and further on, finely expresses the spiritual bent of Crashaw's muse⁴ in a simile which Crashaw would have approved, yet smilingly disclaimed.

Thy spotless Must, like Mary, did contain
The boundless Godhead; she did well disdain
That her eternal verse employ'd should be
On a less subject than Eternity.

Yet to the modern reader there is a distinctly unfamiliar note in Crashaw. He is decidedly of his day, and, if he excels Herbert and Vaughan, as the writer thinks he does, yet he emphatically belongs to their school. He has the same niceness of diction, the same liking for quaint conceits, and above all, though in this he far transcends them, the same mystic note, rising with him to rare heights of ecstasy, to heights probably never attained, at least so frequently, by any other English poet. In fact, there is at times something strangely un-English about Crashaw, something redolent of mediaeval Italy. Shepherd sums this up well.

If Crashaw had lived in Italy in the thirteenth century, there might have been no poems of Richard Crashaw for me to descant upon, but an extra chapter or so in the *Fioretti* concerning the doings of the saintly Brother Richard of the Order of Saint Francis.⁵

Despite this, there is an occasional robustness, a breadth both of diction and of thought which will reassure those who fear the strange, yet Crashaw remains the poet of ecstasy. We must refrain from quoting, lest we do a great poet an injustice and we confine ourselves to the remark that the two poems to which this

⁴ Nevertheless Crashaw could and did write splendid profane lyrics; for example, the one which represents him in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* entitled *Wishes for the supposed mistress*. But his genius was essentially a religious one.

⁵ *op. cit.* p. 21.

is an introduction, fine as they are, pale in comparison with his magnificent trilogy upon Saint Teresa of Avila. And now to Saint Thomas' hymns and Crashaw's version of them.

III

It is no easy task to attempt a translation of the Eucharistic Hymns of Saint Thomas. Their nervous style and compressed diction combine with a theological precision to present an almost baffling problem to the translator. Few have succeeded, especially when they have complicated matters by attempting to preserve the rhythm and rhyme scheme of the original. Crashaw, wisely, has not attempted a translation, strictly so called, but has contented himself with a species of paraphrase and has amply succeeded in giving thought for thought, but he has also made use of his own ecstatic style. One feels that he did not sit down with the Latin original before him and merely turn Latin into English, for the resultant version palpitates with loving faith. It suggests a long and meditative acquaintance with the words and thoughts of the Angelic Doctor. It is Saint Thomas, the mystic, we hear speaking from the foot of the altar rather than the *Doctor Communis* speaking from the rostrum; Saint Thomas, the poet, rather than the intellectual genius. We feel that the English poet has merely drawn out what the Italian poet placed there, half concealed, and we feel that the poet whom Cowley called a saint has deserved well of the Saint whom those who know call a poet.

In Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Adoro Te

With all the powers my poor heart hath
Of humble love and loyal faith,
Thus low (my hidden life) I bow to Thee,
Whom too much love hath bow'd more low for me.
Down, down, proud Sense! discourses die!
Keep close, my soul's inquiring eye!
Nor touch nor taste must look for more,
But each sit still in his own door.

Your ports are all superfluous here,
Save that which lets in Faith, the ear.
Faith is my skill; Faith can believe
As fast as Love new laws can give.
Faith is my force: Faith strength affords
To keep pace with those pow'rful words.
And words more sure, more sweet than they,
Love could not think, Truth could not say.

O let Thy wretch find that relief
 Thou didst afford the faithful thief.
 Plead for me, Love! allege and show
 That Faith has farther here to go,
 And less to lean on: because then
 Though hid as God, wounds writ Thee man;
 Thomas might touch, none but might see
 At least the suffering side of Thee;
 And that too was Thyself which Thee did cover,
 But here ev'n that's hid too which hides the other.

Sweet, consider then, that I,
 Though allowed nor hand nor eye,
 To reached at Thy loved face; nor can
 Taste Thee God, nor touch Thee man,
 Both yet believe, and witness Thee
 My Lord too, and my God, as loud as he.

Help, Lord, my faith, my hope increase,
 And fill my portion in Thy peace:
 Give love for life; nor let my days
 Grow, but in new powers to Thy name and praise.

O dear memorial of that Death
 Which lives still, and allows us breath!
 Rich, royal food! Bountiful bread!
 Whose use denies us to the dead;
 Whose vital gust alone can give
 The same leave both to eat and live.
 Live ever, bread of loves, and be
 My life, my soul, my surer self to me.

O soft, self-wounding Pelican!
 Whose breast weeps balm for wounded man:
 Ah, this way bend Thy benign flood
 To a bleeding heart that gasps for blood.
 That blood, whose least drops sovereign be
 To wash my world of sins from me.
 Come Love! come Lord! and that long day
 For which I languish, come away.
 When this dry soul those eyes shall see,
 And drink the unseal'd source of Thee:
 When Glory's sun Faith's shades shall chase,
 And for Thy veil give me Thy face. Amen.

The Hymn for the Bl(essed) Sacrament

Lauda Sion Salvatorem

Rise, royal Sion! rise and sing
 Thy soul's kind Shepherd, thy heart's King.
 Stretch all thy powers; call if you can
 Harps of heaven to hands of man.
 This sovereign subject sits above
 The best ambition of thy love.

Lo, the Bread of Life, this day's
 Triumphant text, provokes thy praise;
 The living and life-giving bread,

To the great twelve distributed;
 When Life, Himself, at point to die
 Of love, was His Own legacy.

Come Love! and let us work a song
 Loud and pleasant, sweet and long;
 Let lips and hearts lift high the noise
 Of so just and solemn joys,
 Which on His white brows this bright day
 Shall hence for ever bear away.

Lo, the new law of a new Lord
 With a new Lamb blesses the board:
 The aged Pascha pleads not years,
 But spies Love's dawn, and disappears.
 Types yield to truths; shades shrink away;
 And their Night dies into our Day.

But lest that die too, we are bid
 Ever to do what He once did:
 And by a mindful, mystic breath,
 That we may live, revive His death;
 With a well-bless'd bread and wine,
 Transumed, and taught to turn divine.

The Heaven-instructed house of Faith
 Here a holy dictate hath,
 That they but lend their form and face;—
 Themselves with reverence leave their place,
 Nature, and name, to be made good,
 By a nobler bread, more needful blood.

Where Nature's laws no leave will give,
 Bold Faith takes heart, and dares believe
 In different species: name not things,
 Himself to me my Saviour brings;
 As meat in that, as drink in this,
 But still in both one Christ He is.

The receiving mouth here makes
 Nor wound nor breach in what he takes.
 Let one, or one thousand be
 Here dividers, single he
 Bears home no less, all they no more,
 Nor leave they both less than before.

Though in itself this sov'reign Feast
 Be all the same to every guest,
 Yet on the same (life-meaning) Bread
 The child of death eats himself dead:
 Nor is't Love's fault, but Sin's dire skill
 That thus from Life can death distil.

When the blest signs thou broke shalt see,
 Hold but thy faith entire as He,
 Who, howsoe'er clad, cannot come
 Less than whole Christ in every crumb.
 In broken forms a stable Faith
 Untouch'd her precious total hath.

Lo, the life-food of angels then
 Bow'd to the lowly mouths of men!
 The children's Bread, the Bridegroom's Wine,
 Not to be cast to dogs or swine.

Lo, the full, final Sacrifice
 On which all figures fix'd their eyes:
 The ransom'd Isaac, and his ram;
 The manna, and the paschal lamb.

Jesu Master, just and true!
 Our food, and faithful Shepherd too!
 O by Thyself vouchsafe to keep,
 As with Thyself Thou feed'st Thy sheep.

O let that love which thus makes Thee
 Mix with our low mortality,
 Lift our lean souls, and set us up
 Convictors of Thine Own full cup,
 Coheirs of saints. That so all may
 Drink the same wine; and the same way:
 Nor change the pasture, but the place,
 To feed of Thee in Thine Own face. Amen.

YOUNG TREES SPEAK AT NIGHT

JOHN DOMINIC REDMOND, O.P.

Young trees speak at night.
 The magic of the evening breeze
 Transforms to tongues their rustling leaves,
 To prophesy with sybil's sight.

One speaks in lordly manner
 It's fate: to mast a ship of war.
 Another as a crossed staff shall soar,
 Bearing aloft a Bloody Banner.

Sweet as a gentle chord
 A young tree sings: "Manger of beasts
 I'll be, but chosen for greater feasts,
 For I shall hold my Lord."