

FRANK CROSSLEY — SAINT OR SINNER?

Edward Mynott

1997 marks the centenary of the death of the highly successful Victorian capitalist Frank Crossley who, with his brother William, founded Crossley Brothers Engineering in Manchester. By the 1890s Crossley was probably the city's most famous philanthropist and certainly its most eccentric. Yet a century after his death he has largely been forgotten, his business part of the Rolls Royce conglomerate, the engineering works in Openshaw, a shadow of its former glory. What follows is a short biography of Crossley, giving an account of his philanthropic activities — in particular the key role he played in “social purity” campaigning — and an appraisal of the religious views which informed every part of his life.¹

Frank Crossley was born in County Antrim in Ireland in 1839. He came from a strongly puritan tradition. On his mother's side the family had been Huguenots who fled France in the 1680s and founded the linen industry in Co. Antrim. His father was a retired army major who had served in the East India Company, had been attached to the Fourth European Regiment and had been the Governor of the Andaman Islands. The “old Irish home” was a mansion with a mile long driveway and a lake in the grounds. It was a deeply religious family, low Church Calvinist evangelicals, in which the Lord's second coming was a constant topic of conversation. According to Crossley's daughter, “In that godly household the children learnt early the fear of the Lord.”²

After a brief spell as an officer in the Tyrone Fusiliers, the eighteen-year-old Frank came to England to take up a four-year apprenticeship at Sir Robert Stephenson's engineering works in Newcastle. From there he worked as a draughtsman at a Liverpool firm, before he and his brother William set up their own business in Manchester in the 1860s. However, despite Crossley's undoubted engineering talent, that alone could not have set him on the road to success in business and huge wealth. The Crossley brothers were able to take over Dunlop's business of manufacturing India-rubber making machinery because it was bought by their uncle, Hastings Irwin of Liverpool, to give his nephews an independent start. In addition the Crossley brothers received loans from their aunts.

Still, the business nearly failed, and it was as much by luck as anything else that Crossley came across and bought the patent of the German “Otto” gas engine. It was this patent which, with his own modifications, enabled the firm of Crossley Brothers Engineering to expand and make vast profits. By the 1870s the firm had moved from Hulme to Openshaw and eventually occupied the largest site of its kind in the world.

Christian Philanthropy

Crossley continued to run the firm with his brother right up to his death in 1897, but it was not as a business man — even a very rich and successful one — that Crossley was to become famous; it was through his philanthropy and efforts in support of numerous Christian charities and causes. As the *Guardian* wrote on his death: “Few men have been more widely known among us in connection with the movements of recent years for the elevation of public morals, the spread of true religion, the rescue of the fallen,

the relief of the distressed, and the awakening of the conscience of the nation to a higher standard of right.”³ Crossley had experienced his religious conversion while in Liverpool in his twenties. Before his business had taken off he wrote in a letter to his wife:

If my business did become lucrative, I would never think it right to live in such a way as conventional morality pronounces in favour of . . . Until the poor, who have always been with us so far have departed or become well to do, the principle, I take it, ought to be: Spend on yourself that only which will enable you to contribute to the well-being of others in the greatest degree.⁴

As the business became increasingly profitable, Crossley was able to use his money to fund evangelical efforts. He threw himself into enthusiastic support of the American evangelist, D.L. Moody, when he visited Manchester. Crossley's concern to reclaim the “masses” led him to build a Mission Hall adjacent to the works in Openshaw. About 700 workers would meet there on Sunday evenings, and the “Lad's Club” was reckoned to be “probably the most successful example of its kind in the country.”⁵



Frank Crossley in 1894.

Ed. Crossley. M. Ward from G&P

Crossley gave away hundreds of thousands of pounds to numerous causes, including over £100,000 to the Salvation Army. He wrote to Dr Mackennal, minister of the Downs Congregational Church he attended in Bowdon, "Don't be afraid of bleeding me. I am the possessor of a patent . . . While I am making money I ought to give it away."⁶ On one occasion, after giving to a family on the verge of destitution he remarked, "To think, only £30 to keep a man from ruin and despair!"⁷ It was these donations to individuals as well as the £100 cheque to a missionary here, or to a deserving society there, which led his daughter to comment that "[He] gave away his money almost as fast as he made it, dispensing it with both hands. Many a time by the payment of rent or by the lifting of some crushing burden of debt, he made the widow's heart to sing for joy."⁸

Soon after coming to Manchester, Crossley began to attend the Congregational Union Chapel where Dr Alexander Maclaren preached. Their close friendship was strengthened when Crossley's sister married Maclaren's cousin. Marriage ties also linked Crossley to John Thomson a member of the board of the Manchester City Mission who, fresh from India, opened a mission in Hulme. Thomson had married Leila Kerr whose younger sister, Emily, married Crossley in 1871.

By the 1880s Crossley was throwing himself into various evangelical activities. He proposed the establishment of a large central hall for evangelistic work in the heart of the city but, unable to achieve this aim, he involved himself in the work of the existing missions, primarily the Manchester City Mission. It was also in the 1880s that Crossley first became involved in social purity campaigning.

Social Purity

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the social purity movement flourished in Britain. In many ways these puritans appear as almost a caricature of Victorian attitudes to sexuality — prudish, harsh and repressive. Essentially the movement consisted of:

an attempt on the part of a disparate collection of reformers to change social attitudes about sex. For most purity reformers, the achievement of a single standard of sexual morality for men and women was a prime goal. The single standard was conceived of as a high one — men were to conform to the standards of chastity Victorian society enjoined on women.⁹

Social purity grew out of a number of sources: the long-running and ultimately successful campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts (which attempted to regulate prostitution in naval ports and garrison towns between the 1860s and 1883); the efforts, known as "rescue work", of respectable middle-class Christians to "save" and rehabilitate the "fallen women" who plied their trade on the streets and in brothels; and the various attempts across the country to use the police and legislation to drive prostitution and other expressions of immorality from public view. The major achievement of social purity was to use mass agitation to secure a new Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885. This provided harsher penalties for prostitution, raised the age of consent to sixteen and criminalised male homosexuality.

In the main the social purity movement consisted of numerous bodies and initiatives cooperating together in a range of activities — patrolling the streets for repentant prostitutes and setting up institutions to retrain them;

campaigning for the police and local authorities to close brothels and sweep the streetwalkers out of sight; holding public meetings to denounce impurity and urge young men to band together into male chastity leagues; and of course agitating for new state legislation. At the core of social purity's concerns was prostitution and the movement had a two-pronged approach of "vigilance" (repression) and rescue. This reflected the ambivalence toward fallen women themselves who were alternately treated as pitiful victims or "vicious" criminals.

This was also the pattern of the movement in Manchester where the purity campaign began to take off in 1882 following a visit by the moral reformer, Ellice Hopkins. Hopkins was one of the most significant influences on the emerging movement through her writings and public speaking in which she advocated the setting up of Ladies' Associations, vigilance groups and male chastity leagues. According to one account of her visit: "Probably there were few who attended that meeting, with its revelation of what were the duties of a true Manhood, who will ever forget what they heard."¹⁰ Crossley was one of those who attended and was lastingly affected by Hopkins such that a close friendship was formed which lasted until he died.

Soon after Hopkins' visit, in January 1883, Crossley used his personal influence to organise another meeting of religious leaders and leading businessmen of the city, which resulted in the formation of the Society for the Prevention of the Degradation of Women and Children (which was afterwards known as the "Vigilance Society" by Crossley and all other contemporaries). Crossley was the chairman and driving force behind the Society which had a committee of worthy gentlemen and employed one full-time worker. Crossley believed that the purpose of a Vigilance Society was "to mark its sense, by practical repressive effort, of the horrors connected with the corruption of innumerable young women by young men, and of some young men by young women . . . the formation of this and similar societies marks a distinct step in the rise of woman to her proper place as the equal of man."¹¹ He did not believe that the law could radically change people's hearts in the way that Christians strove for, nevertheless, the law could be "magnified and made honourable".¹²

The Vigilance Society made its mark only a month after its foundation when, in February 1883, a deputation including Crossley and Dr Greenwood of Owen's College presented a "Memorial" (an elaborate petition) to the Manchester Watch Committee. Signed by 208 "residents and ratepayers", all of whom were prominent local churchmen, businessmen, Justices of the Peace and politicians, the Memorial "respectfully" drew attention to "the increasing number of brothels and the alarming and degrading prevalence of prostitution, which continually forces itself into notice . . . We believe that public opinion is now ripe for the adoption of strongly repressive measures, which we are assured would greatly reduce both open and secret traffic of this sort."¹³ Soon afterwards another deputation led by Bishop Fraser of Manchester presented the same Memorial to a full bench of Manchester's magistrates, urging that brothel keepers be imprisoned instead of merely fined.

The "practical repressive effort" hit women soliciting on the streets, but was concerned mainly with the closure of brothels. The Vigilance Society set out to use middle-class public opinion as a lever to make sure that the police used the power which the law gave them to close such houses down. Crossley believed that if only public opinion could

be motivated it would be perfectly simple to close down "houses of ill-fame":

Compare, for example, the difference between the difficulty of catching an expert thief and of suppressing a house of ill-fame. The thief can run away: the house cannot. It is there. It is known by its customers, and its customers are commonly ready to divulge its location if properly approached and questioned. Not only its tenant, but its owner, can be strenuously dealt with . . . In order to bring the [owners] within the reach of the law, we have sometimes issued a circular to them . . . following on the conviction of the keeping of a house, pointing out to the owner to what purpose the tenant had been found in court to have put the property; and that, if this is continued, the owner would at once become liable to heavy fine or imprisonment. I think this is one of the best weapons at the disposal of the law-abiding section of the community, and is one of the very easiest to put into operation. Its effect is very far-reaching.¹⁴

The Vigilance Society appointed one officer, who remained mainly under Crossley's own direction for many years. His job was to identify the keepers of the houses and encourage the Manchester police to prosecute, fine and imprison them. Certainly it seemed on the surface that the strategy of the Vigilance Society had met with great success. In 1882, before the Society began its work, the number of houses of ill-fame "known to the police" stood at 402. Over the next decade the number steadily declined, until by 1892 it stood at three! Crossley was not so blind or naive as to believe that such figures were absolutely accurate, but he was convinced that they were a "remarkable set of figures"

which indicated a real and dramatic drop in the number of brothels. Yet there were very good reasons to question the accuracy of these figures. The efforts of the Vigilance Society did lead to an increased level of repression from police and magistrates in the early 1880s; but it was almost certain that such repression simply affected the location and type of prostitution rather than reducing or eliminating it. Worse was to come, when in 1897, shortly before Crossley's death, the Manchester Police Scandal erupted, shocking the city's respectable citizens with its revelations of how police ignored and even collaborated with the prostitution business.

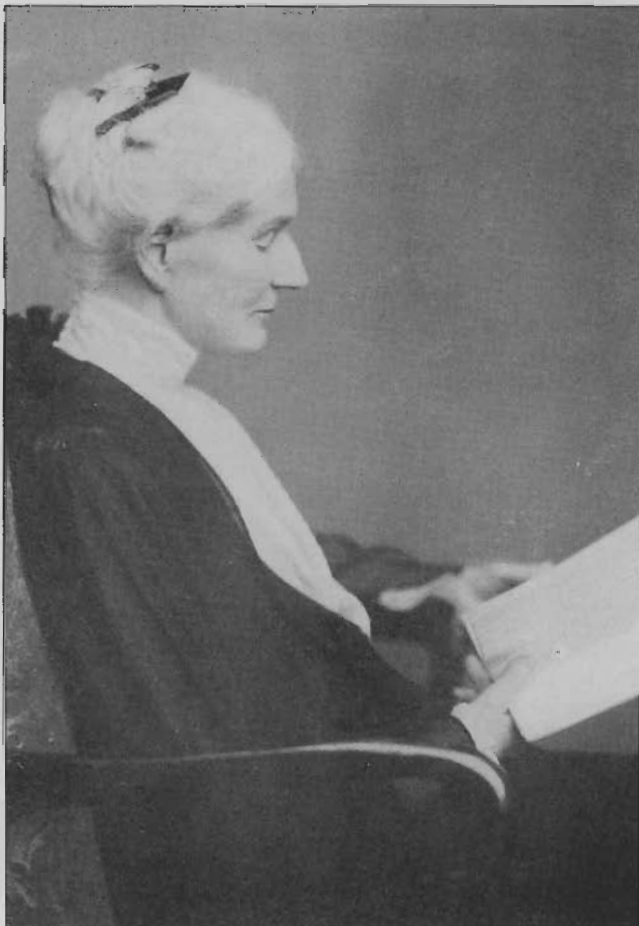
Another criticism made of the Vigilance Society was that it was causing even worse hardship to fallen women by closing brothels. In response, Crossley pointed to the increased accommodation provided at the City Mission's new rescue home: "No hardship whatever need, therefore, follow the closing of the houses. On the contrary, the action of the Police can but have the happy effect of inducing the girls to listen to those who, through the agency of the Homes, offer them the opportunity of returning to a useful and respectable life."¹⁵ Here we see how for Crossley, and so many other Christians, the seemingly contradictory approaches of vigilance and rescue actually went hand in hand.

Crossley had joined the board of the Manchester City Mission at some time in 1884 or early 1885. The City Mission had thrown itself into rescue work at the beginning of 1885 under its dynamic new secretary, J. Wakefield MacGill. After attending the Mission's "midnight meetings" Crossley concluded that only mission work could bring home the "appalling state of corruption" of sections of the population:

To me there was a strange mixture of pain and pleasure in the experience — pain to gaze into the depths of degradation revealed, and pleasure to watch the divine tenderness and self-abnegation of the workers engaged in this most Christ-like service . . . A motherly woman sat on a low form. On the floor at her feet were two girls, about thirteen and sixteen years of age. The woman had an arm around the neck of each of the girls, who were looking up into her face. She was speaking to them about Jesus and Salvation; she had come miles to do it. My friend then told me the history of the girls — revolting is too weak a word to describe the horrible state of unnatural vice in which, by their own confession, they were living. During tea, a man, fresh from a dreadful crime, burst into the room, demanding these girls to be given up to him. He was mad with rage and drink, and a worse looking wretch could hardly be conceived. My friend remarked, "Do you wonder at the daughters now that you have seen the father?"

He was dragged out by a policeman. It was a not-to-be-forgotten scene.¹⁶

Having already been central to the vigilance work for two years, Crossley was now devoting more time and money to rescue work. He was clearly impressed with the energy and self sacrifice of the Missionaries: "This work demands a rare devotion, and for those who have spent many long and weary night hours at it every week, an amount of self-forgetfulness seldom met with. Work like this is the sort of 'evidence' a sceptical though anxious world is in want



E. K. Crossley, in *Portrait from 1926*

Emily Crossley in 1926.



F.W. Crossley at the age of twenty.

of."¹⁷ Indeed, so impressed was Crossley that MacGill persuaded him to give £3,500 to increase the accommodation at local rescue homes and fund the City Mission's new Manchester Probationary Home (Oakhill). These rescue homes had one basic task: to rehabilitate the fallen women by training them to accept a life of respectable domestic service. Without Crossley's money the City Mission could never have undertaken rescue work on the scale that it did.

The rising tide of social purity reached its peak in the summer of 1885 when the *Pall Mall Gazette*, under editor W.T. Stead, published a sensational exposé of child prostitution. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" may have been a highly dubious and unreliable piece of journalism, but it nonetheless struck a chord of popular anger. Huge public meetings took place across the country culminating in a massive demonstration in Hyde Park. More than anything else the "Maiden Tribute" was responsible for the popular agitation which delivered the new Criminal Law Amendment Act which purity campaigners had long been working for.

As one of those who had already been prominent in the Vigilance Society and the rejuvenated rescue work of the City Mission, Crossley was ideally placed to throw himself into the agitation in Manchester. He shared platforms with purity speakers at thousands strong meetings at the Free Trade Hall; he opened up the dining hall in his factory for a special women's meeting on the question; and when Stead visited Manchester on a nationwide speaking tour after the government decided to prosecute him, Crossley organised the meeting and shared the platform. As a result of discussions with Stead, a few days later Crossley gave £500 to the newly formed National Vigilance Association (hereafter NVA). In 1887 Crossley chaired and gave the opening address at the NVA's Annual Meeting and there he gave what was probably the fullest explanation of why he fought for social purity.

Crossley was an extreme representative of the repressive wing of social purity. In a sense he took social purity in thought and deed to its logical conclusion, strengthened in his own mind not just by religious conviction but by the practical and apparently enormously successful example of Manchester. He associated himself with the NVA despite the fact that it did not go as far as he wanted: "I rejoice in the piece of loaf you have secured but I shall not be satisfied until you have got the whole loaf; that whole which a great legislator put on the ancient statute book when he wrote 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'." In opposition to those who claimed that the law should not interfere in matters of "sin", Crossley appealed to the holy law of the Ten Commandments which he believed should be enforced through legislation:

How can we omit the Seventh Command from our criminal legislation, while adopting the eighth, without giving a tacit sanction to adultery? What shall be thought of us for praying Sunday after Sunday, "incline our hearts to keep this law," and deliberately effacing it at the same time from the national statute book? We willingly follow theft to its most distant ramifications, ferreting it from its last hiding place; but the commonest — and worst because the commonest — breach of the seventh commandment albeit entails so huge an aggregate of unspeakable inevitable misery, we pass by with indifference, and often with toleration.

Prostitution was conceived of as immoral because it breached the injunction not to commit "adultery", thus defining adultery as all forms of extra-marital sex. The commercial nature of prostitution was not the significant point; it was the worst kind of adultery "because the commonest". Crossley also suggested that there were class-based reasons why impurity was tolerated whereas robbery was not:

The Parliament (sic) men of the past could not defend their own property with their own hands, so they clubbed together, and had it done by lawyers and policemen. But they could in the main protect their own daughters, while they were not over anxious for the protection of the daughters of their weaker brethren . . . But let the daughters of the strong be as liable to seduction and prostitution as the daughters of the suffering poor, and the Seventh Commandment, in its widest sense, would stand an excellent chance of immediate appearance as the law of the land.¹⁸

Here is an echo of that theme in the "Maiden Tribute" agitation which played on the justified feelings of injustice among many working-class people that the rich believed they had a right of sexual access to working-class women through prostitution. However, the talk of protecting "the daughters of the people" played on attitudes of paternalist control by men over the women in their families; and for a puritan of Crossley's repressive stamp to use this argument was hypocritical when he had engineered an intensified prosecution, fining and jailing of working-class women — but then they could be represented not as "fallen women", or even "sin-stricken mothers", but as "pitiable harlots".¹⁹

Crossley's defence of the need for "greater or entire legal restriction" was certainly unachievable and perhaps unpalatable to some of the other supporters of vigilance, but it represented the logical conclusion of social purity and far from being the approach of a few marginal cranks,

it was favoured by many of the most successful campaigners such as Ellice Hopkins and W.A. Coote, organiser of the NVA. Against the criticism that publicising “exceptional vice” would only pollute young hearts and minds, Crossley saw no dangers in “tearing the tinsel gossamer from vice and showing to everyone the filthy garments which are worn below. While tricked out in its flaunting finery our critics can see no danger, but it is just there, in the lewd though gorgeous dance and the degrading play and song that the danger lies.” For Crossley the essence of purity was not that one lived morally but that one fought against those who did not:

Knowledge is not necessarily defilement, nor is purity mere ignorance of vice. Pure mindedness in this world is best shown by a struggle against vice. Those who never heard a whisper about the infamies amid which so many dwell — living as in hell — are either pure or impure. They are not tried yet, they may be anything. True purity is shown by resistance and resistance alone. Purity in short depends exclusively on what you like, not upon what you know. Let the “Pall Mall Gazette” publications be judged like that. If vice in its hideousness stripped of every gilded lie can make men like it, then all such publications should be abandoned. But the danger is not there. Publish its real nature and consequences, that will make it possible to put it down.²⁰

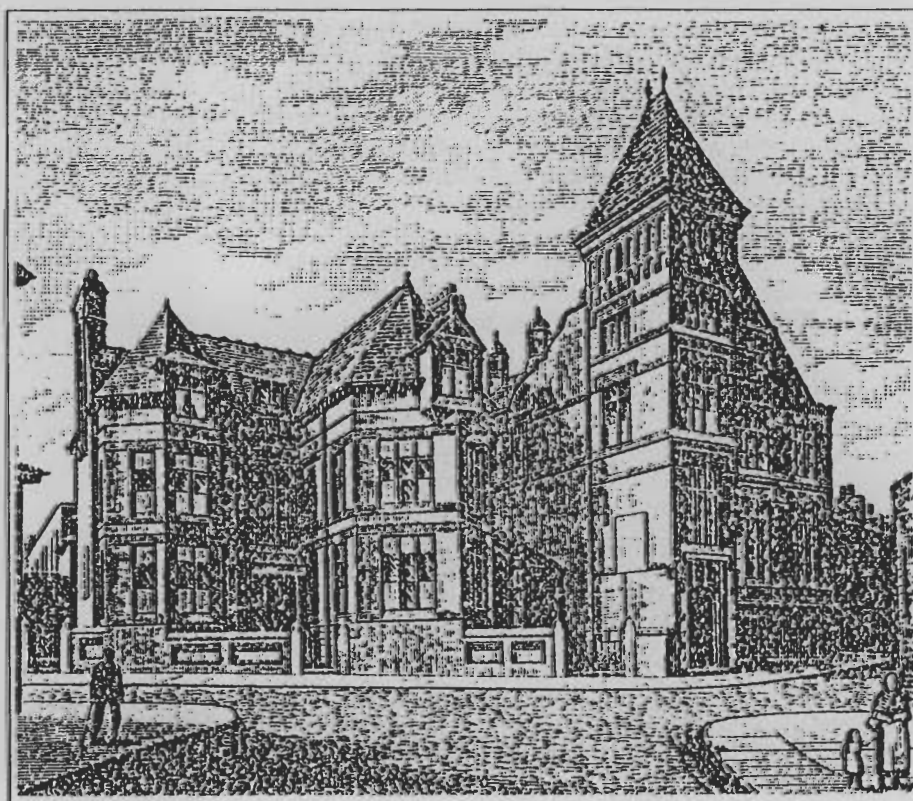
For Crossley there existed purity and vice: purity was the bourgeois familial ideal of chastity before marriage, and marriage the only legitimate place for sexual relations; vice was everything else, all of which was to be condemned and fought — from prostitution, to adultery, to rape, to premarital sex. Moreover, the emphasis was just as likely to be on the temptation of men by immoral women, as the seduction or “victimization” of women by men. More than anything, his philosophy was a concentrated version of the moralistic, prescriptive attitude to sexuality which had come to be the dominant tradition within Christianity. Combined with the energy of highly motivated philanthropy, he was the epitome of Victorian social purity.

The Move to Ancoats

Until the 1890s the pattern of Crossley’s philanthropy had been to provide the funds for an enterprise which was then run by others, such as the rescue homes associated with the City Mission. Similarly, he funded the Salvation Army to the tune of £100,000 allowing them to conduct their overseas missionary work. This gained him the title of “The Paymaster” in Army circles. However, this pattern changed when Crossley made the decision not just to set up a new mission hall in the poor working-class district of Ancoats but to go and live there. It was this decision which really marked him out as a philanthropist and made him the talk of Manchester.

While he was still living in his purpose-built mansion, “Fairlie”, in the exclusive enclave of Bowdon, he had confided to an American evangelist: “We think a great deal about consecration and talk a great deal about it, but I do not think this house looks consecration.”²¹ Nor did he only express this view privately. He was a member of the Downs Congregational Church in Bowdon and at one meeting, after the assembly refused his urgings that they should pray on their knees, he astonished everyone with his outburst: “To some of you this place is sacred for its quiet, refined associations: you love it: as for me, I hate it all. Let us leave this respectable neighbourhood and go right down among the poor folks: this is where a church should be!”²² And that is precisely what he did.

In 1889 Crossley spent about £20,000 in converting the old Star Music Hall into the Star Mission Hall. All the old buildings were pulled down and replaced with a meeting hall which held a thousand people, with residences attached for the workers, and bathrooms and coffee rooms for the use of the surrounding population. Crossley and his wife and daughter lived in a modest house adjoining. Later a row of houses was built to be used as training homes for missionaries. His friends had warned him not to go to Ancoats “for they themselves never ventured there without a revolver in their pockets. He learned, too, that it was so rough that the police refused to patrol the streets on Saturday afternoon unless they walked three abreast.”²³ Originally the Salvation Army were to have been put in charge of the Star Hall but in the end the Crossleys decided to work there themselves. However, neither Frank nor Emily Crossley carried out the day-to-day operation of the Star — that was the job of an overseer (the improbably named Mr S. Horatio Hodges) recruited from the Salvation Army. Indeed, it was only a year or so after the Crossleys had moved to Ancoats that they also took over the running of Oakhill rescue home from the City Mission. In both cases they were managing, or in the language of the time, the “superintendents” of these institutions geared to saving souls with the help of



The New Star Hall.

material aids from bathrooms to laundry work. So it was not only out of a sense of the need to share the hardships of the poorest (or more precisely to live alongside those who were enduring actual poverty) that Crossley moved to Ancoats. He wanted to know and directly control where his money was going rather than rely on other evangelical bodies as he had before. In his own words: "It is not hard to give; it is very hard to be sure you are not doing harm rather than good by giving."²⁴

Nonetheless, Crossley's move to Ancoats — the act of, so to speak, putting his mouth where his money was — had an immediate impact especially on working-class people:

*Manchester opened its eyes to see what was going on, and kept them open, for a while at least in astonishment. It was talked about on 'change; the baths, the forum, gabbled thereof; but better than that, it was talked about amongst the working classes, and working men have been overheard saying that 'there may be many more as ought to do the same.'*²⁵

Even after Crossley moved to Ancoats he was not sure whether he had "made the sacrifice complete". That is, he was living with and for the poor but he was not poor himself. In 1890 he wrote in his notebook: "I had told the lord to take away my money if it would glorify Him to do so. It proved a struggle, but it was done, and the evening was full of heavenly ecstasy and sense of cleansing."²⁶ Naturally, the only way in which Crossley could have made himself poor would have been to sever ties with his business. This he did not do. If he had willingly impoverished himself it would have undermined all his philanthropic efforts; and few other Ancoats residents owned a holiday home in Derbyshire where the family could be together during their sons' break from boarding school!

For the next seven years Crossley oversaw the work of the Star Hall, often holding special evangelist meetings which filled the Hall entirely. The atmosphere surrounding the "Star" may well have been a harsh one judging from Rendel Harris's description: "No doubt the place is 'too hot' for some folks and sometimes they have been frightened at the standard that is set up. Besides they enjoy other places of worship more, and our friends were more anxious to make people thoroughly miserable to begin with than to make them enjoy themselves."²⁷

In addition, like most Christian bodies and all the evangelicals, Crossley placed a special emphasis on temperance. He was a vice-president of the United Kingdom Alliance, the temperance organisation, and the family had become teetotal in 1882. Emily Crossley had emptied the wine cellar at "Fairlie" and poured all the claret, port, sherry and champagne down the drain. Yet there was another side to Crossley's philanthropy. Now and again he would go and talk to the men standing around at street corners:

At times tears filled his eyes when he witnessed the sin and poverty around him and he would slip his hand into his pocket and help these men . . . he was sure that everyone, however seemingly hostile, could be raised to a new life and won for the Master, so he loved the 'down and outs'.

He sometimes paid visits to people in the area and "he could be seen carrying a lotion for someone with sore eyes, a coat for a child, or hot broth for an ailing mother." It was on one such visit that he turned to his companion and exclaimed: "This is Heaven!"²⁸

Crossley's Death

When Crossley finally died in March 1897 we get some impression of the respect in which he was held by other prominent bourgeois Christians and the workers of the city. He had asked to be buried on a Saturday afternoon so that those he had tried to save could attend: "Don't let the poor lose half a day's pay, for I know they will wish to come." This was not self delusion. Between 10,000 and 15,000 mourners did attend — perhaps as many as 20,000, according to one estimate. After the funeral service the streets around the Star Hall were densely crowded with spectators. Along the route to the cemetery the roadsides were lined with "many of the very wrecks of humanity" and most shopkeepers had put up their shutters out of respect. In the cemetery itself very large numbers lined the procession from the gates to the burial place. "But the scene, never to be forgotten, was at the graveside when thousands upon thousands assembled and sang the hymn 'Jesus lover of my soul'."

In his funeral address, Dr Maclaren argued that Crossley's example "had pricked many a conscience of luxurious and idle and well-to-do professing Christian people", he asked whether that example could not be repeated and whether its memory "did not come with a very loud rebuke to the average half-and-half torpid worldly, Christian that put a drag upon all their Christian work?"²⁹ He later wrote that: "Frank Crossley was a nineteenth-century saint. His life was recognized by all who knew it, even slightly and unsympathetically, as beautiful in its unworldliness, its faithfulness to conscience, its unstinted liberality, and its self oblivion." Even allowing for the excess which characterises obituaries, the conclusion of the *Manchester Guardian* was shared by many:

*Had Mr F.W. Crossley lived in ancient times he would have been a prophet; had he lived in the Middle Ages he would have been a saint, somewhat after the style of Francis of Assisi; living in the end of the nineteenth century, he was and remains a witness to the reality of those things to which the prophet and the saint bore witness.*³⁰

Crossley's fame lasted for many years to come. In Forman's 1933 anthology of Great Christians, Crossley was considered by his biographer to be perhaps the greatest of the Victorian Christian philanthropists; and in the late 1920s, Edmund Oldfield, who was described by Crossley's daughter as "one of the business heads in Manchester," remembered the philanthropist with these words: "Frank Crossley was more like Christ than any man I have known."³¹

So, Crossley made a lasting impression on many people by his combination of fervour, philanthropy and self denial. Yet we also know that many of his contemporaries thought him misguided and eccentric if not downright mad — especially when he moved from his beautiful Bowdon mansion to the Star Hall. This impression even comes through the memories of his family and closest friends. In Maclaren's Sunday sermon after the funeral he refers to Crossley's example "so tenderly beloved by some of us, so sharply criticised by many . . ." He added: "Our brother had his limitations, the defects of his qualities, his peculiarities and his weaknesses. Many of us, no doubt, did not sympathise with all the positions which he held, or with all the modes of action which commended themselves to him."³² Rendel Harris, in a chapter entitled "A Descent into Hades (which may be passed over by the ordinary reader)", dealt with Crossley's social publicity work. He commented

that, "It is not necessary, nor would it be useful to enumerate all of the societies to which he belonged, nor all the Quixotisms (as the world counts them) in which he assisted."³³ Certainly, sections of the Manchester police were scathing toward the "puritans" and "philanthropists" who they came to see as trouble-makers though Crossley was never named by them in public. Even his daughter recalled that, "throughout his life my father often seemed far away in his thinking-absent-minded many called it . . ." to the point that he would often have to be reminded to eat the meal in front of him!³⁴ A picture begins to emerge of a man who was increasingly preoccupied with putting his religion into practice. The engineering business is one way to glorify God but his mind is grasping for more. He seizes on new causes and new schemes, jumps from one religious sect to another. Like Don Quixote he seems to be tilting at windmills but through it all he remains convinced that God is speaking directly to him, guiding his endeavours this way and that. After all he did, how could he appear anything but eccentric?

How, then, are we to evaluate this man who watched his champagne poured down the drain; who wore his watch on a bootlace because he and his wife had given up their jewellery; who swapped his seat on the magistrate's bench for a place alongside a Salvation Army "lassie" who appeared in the dock before him; and who was prone to suddenly slide to his knees to pray, even in the middle of dictation?

Saint or Sinner?

It is undoubtedly true that Crossley was a sexual puritan, the epitome of Victorian social purity. He believed the music halls to be "the fruitful incubators of low-class vice on the most thoroughgoing principles." He also attacked the theatres, saying, "Let the Christian public demand a pure stage if they want a stage, and enforce their demand by unitedly refusing to be present if absolute purity is not to be had." In addition, the dresses of the ball-room or assembly aggravated the festering social evils "by half-indecently stripping its maidens for the dance."³⁵ Sexual purity was integral to his protestant, evangelical religion. But as Dr Mackennal, the Congregational minister, remarked, he was "a mystic of a severely practical type. He believed that whatever was good was practicable . . . Moral disorder was something that demanded immediate rectification."³⁶ How this rectification was to be carried out was a secondary matter — police repression, philanthropy, training homes, all were ways to put into practice one interpretation of Biblical morality. In this sense Crossley was not really different from other Christian philanthropists. Most Christians, however, were not Mystics. When Crossley cited his influences they included George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, and the Methodist founder, John Wesley. Without giving a full explanation of Mysticism, we can say that it informed Crossley's fervour — he was driven by his belief.

Eric Hobsbawm has written of the Protestant sectarian tradition that, "Its exclusiveness and insistence on the individual communication between man and God, as well as its moral austerity, made it attractive to, or a school for, rising entrepreneurs and small businessmen."³⁷ The centrality of personal "conversion" remained from the "intensely emotional, irrationalist, personal salvationism"

of Wesley and his Methodists through to the Salvation Army.³⁸ In the seventeenth century, George Fox had "passed through a succession of mystical experiences, which impressed him with the central insight that knowledge of God and holiness come from direct communion with his spirit."³⁹ For Crossley, too, it was important to listen to the voice of God. He wrote in his pamphlet, *Guidance an Essential to Holiness*, "Direct, divine, personal guidance is the privilege of the sanctified." Protestantism has rightly been connected with the rise of individualism, but the abasement of the faithful before God could be a way of undermining individualism and selfishness. As Crossley wrote: "The sinner prays, 'Not Thy will but mine be done.' Jesus, our leader, and His people pray, 'Not as I will but as Thou wilt.' How beautiful is this exchanged will! This is no other than that death to self or self-will which we hear so much about."⁴⁰

By taking his religion to these extremes Crossley was driven to go further than his contemporaries and make what appeared to them crazy sacrifices. Dr Mackennal related the direction in which his ideas could lead:

[H]e read a paper to our Sunday School teachers which went very far in sympathy with the extremist social schemes of the beginning of the century. The natural end of his reasonings seemed to me a system of absolute communism, where private possession and family life and individual responsibility would alike be destroyed.⁴¹

Yet Crossley was hardly the Robert Owen of his generation! He was no utopian socialist — he did not share Owen's anti-clericalism and his critique of marriage. Nor did he go beyond schemes and actually set up model communities. Instead he tried to purify working class districts. His view that one could reject as well as embrace sin was the closest he came to the Owenite "perfectibility of man". But the sincerity of his belief in "good works" and the brotherhood of man which led him to forsake his mansion for a slum did win him the respect of many workers — and the suspicion of the bourgeoisie. Eulogised as a saint when he was safely dead, derided as an eccentric while he lived, he had stepped too far over the boundary of respectability; he was not really dangerous — just not quite reliable any more. Ultimately, however, our evaluation must be a harsh one. Despite his personal generosity and sincerity, Crossley never ceased to be a successful industrial capitalist and strict puritan. A much closer parallel than Owen would be the bourgeois philanthropy of quaker industrialists like Cadbury or Rowntree. He had the same belief in material improvement amongst the working-class as an aid to their spiritual salvation, but with power always remaining in the hands of the benign capitalist. Finally, let us remember where Crossley's money and effort actually went — to the training of missionaries at home and abroad, appendages of imperialism and emissaries of bourgeois morality who were more likely to be reviled or ignored than loved. There was the funding of institutions which trained the most desperate of the fallen women to be obedient, grateful servants; and the campaign to strengthen the police to hunt down prostitutes and brothel-keepers. He may have been moved to tears by the misery he saw but, in his efforts to eradicate that misery, he caused rather more heartbreak than he cured.

NOTES

- 1 The material in this article is drawn from the account of social purity in my, 'Purity, Prostitution and Politics: Social Purity in Manchester 1880-1900' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1995).
- 2 E.K. Crossley, *He Heard From God* (Salvationist Publishing), 1959, p.2.
- 3 *Manchester Guardian*, 'Sermons and Articles in Memory of F.W. Crossley', Manchester, 1897, p.33.
- 4 Frank Crossley, cited in R.S. Forman, *Great Christians* (1933), p.153.
- 5 J. Rendel Harris, *The Life of Francis William Crossley* (1899), p.107.
- 6 Crossley, cited in *ibid.*, p.234.
- 7 Crossley, cited in E.K. Crossley, *He Heard*, p.25.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.18.
- 9 Deborah Gorham, 'The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-examined', *Victorian Studies*, Vol.21, No.3 (Spring, 1978) p.357.
- 10 Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, p.147.
- 11 Frank Crossley, cited in *ibid.*, p.240.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.248.
- 13 'Memorial to the Watch Committees and Magistrates of Manchester and Salford', in Watch Committee Minutes, Vol.14, 18 February 1883, p.68.
- 14 Frank Crossley, cited in Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, pp.242-3, 247.
- 15 Open Letter from Vigilance Society, *Vigilance Record*, 15 February 1887, p.8.
- 16 Crossley, cited in J. Wakefield MacGill, *Manchester at Night: Its Sins and Sufferings* (Manchester, 1885), p.16.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Crossley, cited in *Vigilance Record*, 15 November 1887, pp.73-4.
- 19 Crossley, 'Social Purity and Legislation', *Vigilance Record*, 15 September 1887, p.61.
- 20 Crossley, cited in *Vigilance Record*, 15 November 1887, pp.73-4.
- 21 Crossley, cited in Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, p.127.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.111.
- 23 Crossley, *He Heard*, p.64.
- 24 Crossley, cited in Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, p.237.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p.132.
- 26 Crossley, cited in *ibid.*, p.142.
- 27 Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, p.137.
- 28 Crossley, *He Heard*, pp.74-6.
- 29 All quotations from: *Obituaries of Frank Crossley*, Manchester Central Reference Library, ref: f942.7389 M119 Vol.4, pp.16-17.
- 30 *Manchester Guardian*, 'Sermons and Articles', pp.37-38.
- 31 Edmund Oldfield, cited in Crossley, *He Heard*, p.97.
- 32 Maclaren, in *Manchester Guardian*, 'Sermons and Articles', p.16.
- 33 Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, p.143.
- 34 Crossley, *He Heard*, p.37.
- 35 Crossley, cited in *Sentinel*, February 1887, pp.23-4.
- 36 Dr Mackennal, cited in Alexander Maclaren, 'A Review of J. Rendel Harris' *The Life of Francis William Crossley*'. This newspaper review appeared c.1900. It may be found in Manchester Central Reference Library, Ref: f942.7389 M119 Vol.5, p.195.
- 37 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution* (1977) p.276.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.277.
- 39 Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (1969), p.xxiii.
- 40 Crossley, cited in Crossley, *He Heard*, pp.28-29.
- 41 Rendel Harris, *Francis William Crossley*, p.235.