

**THE LIFE OF
FRANCIS WILLIAM
CROSSLEY**

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The Life of Francis William Crossley by J. Rendel Harris

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PREFACE

FRANK CROSSLEY was a nineteenth-century saint, whom Francis of Assisi might have recognised as a brother in faith and spirit. It was my happiness to make his acquaintance on his first settling in Manchester, and to know him intimately in times of trial and of success, when struggling and when prosperous, through many phases of belief and modes of action, and in all to see him like himself and not unlike his Lord. I am thankful, therefore, for the opportunity of thus associating myself with the loving hands which, in the following pages, have outlined so truly Christian a life, even though a preface may seem superfluous. That life was recognised 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. To many it brought inspiration and grave questionings as to their own duty as Christians. To those who were closest to him, his character seemed like some pellucid sea which could never "cast up mire and dirt," however disturbed, but was pure, and translucent to its deepest depths.

Their hope in taking part in this volume is that it may help to perpetuate the impression made by its subject on all who came in contact with him, and may carry to a wider public something of the influence which a narrower one so strongly felt. Surely the present type of Christians need few things more than to be brought face to face with a life, which was one long endeavour to make Christian principles realities, and to follow them, and the Christ who is assumed to be our pattern, wherever they led, no matter how "odd" or how hard the resulting course might be.

"Whence had the man the balm that brightens all?"

The basis of his life, and the mightiest force in moulding his character was his intense realisation of his personal relation to Christ who had died for him, and now lived in him. The wholesome mysticism which belongs to all deep Christian experience, and consists in faith in, and possession of direct communion with, the living Christ, made Frank Crossley what he was. From it "beauty, born of" something better than "murmuring sound," had passed into his face, and a great peace into his heart, and an all-shaping impulse into his life.

The natural character on which his religion worked was remarkable, both in its sweetness and its strength. On one side it was scientific, on another it was a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams.

The combination of great inventive capacity in a mechanical direction, of great organising and commercial power, which were proved by his extraordinary success in business, with the pure idealism and unworldly aspiration which dominated him, struck outsiders as strange, but was not singular to those who knew how he made gas engines, as he did everything, "to the greater glory of God." A nineteenth-century saint does not live in a cloister, but in the grime of Manchester's grimiest suburb, passes his mornings in his Works, his evenings in trying to bring wanderers back to the Good Shepherd, and in both is doing the same work, and serving the same Lord.

A similar unity ran through Mr. Crossley's life in regard to its religious development, which was marked by considerable variation of intellectual position. Beginning with the ordinary "Low Church" evangelicalism, he was for a time powerfully influenced by Maurice, and Maurice's teacher, Erskine. Then came a period of obscuration of faith, through which he passed, emerging into firmer grasp of central truths. The work of the Salvation Army appealed to his yearnings for a live religion, and to his concern for the masses whom no church touched. Finally, he threw his whole soul into independent efforts to live the Christ-life amidst them, and, giving up his pleasant home and the usual surroundings of his position, built the Star Hall, Ancoats, Manchester, where for the rest of his days, with inexhaustible

pecuniary generosity, and as inexhaustible spiritual fervour, he preached and toiled, lived and at last died, leaving Manchester the poorer for his loss, and the richer for the example of a life utterly given to and for Jesus Christ. May this little volume help, not only to keep his memory green, but to set some other Christians thinking whether their lives could not be more completely offered on the same altar as was this life!

ALEXANDER M'LAREN.