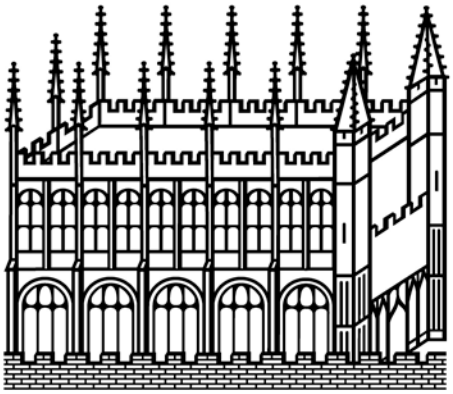

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What Manchester Owes To Cross Street Chapel

AN ADDRESS

BY

The Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A.

Delivered in the Chapel without notes on May 20, 1922, on the occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the formation of the Congregation, and taken down and printed verbatim, the Rev. Dr. McLachlan presiding.

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CROSS STREET CHAPEL,
MANCHESTER.

"Looking round the world to-day, and looking round Manchester in particular, I know of no church which has larger opportunities of service than Cross Street Chapel. We have a noble history behind us. There is not an unclean page in it: I have not found one. Read down its line of ministers from the beginning—not a blot on the escutcheon of any of them. Their spirit and their life-blood have poured into, and through, every institution of any age and standing in this city. We have a great heritage: none better. And we have only to live as our great forefathers lived; we have only to get hold of that deep Puritan moral earnestness, that strong individual inward religious conviction, that were theirs; their catholicity; to make the power of this chapel for truth and righteousness and charity as great as it has ever been. The prospects for liberal Religion and liberal Christianity were never brighter in Manchester than they are to-day. It is for us to ensure that this 'venerable house' shall stand for our children, and our children's children, for the generations that are to come. Cross Street Chapel, along with the Cathedral, should be to Manchester what Westminster Abbey is to the Nation."

From an address by the present minister, the Rev. H. H. Johnson, *May* 21, 1922, *on the occasion of the* 250*th anniversary.*

WHAT MANCHESTER OWES TO CROSS STREET CHAPEL.*

REV. ALEXANDER GORDON, M.A.

HONESTLY, Mr. Chairman and Friends, I distrust my capacity to do justice to the theme to which I stand committed, and which indeed I myself suggested. It is a topic both large and delicate, and calls for discrimination. I must pick and choose. I cannot be like the young man who told me once that he was engaged to one of a large family of daughters, and when I asked him which, said "No picking and choosing, I took the first that came." That will never do when you are trying to bring within reasonable limits the account of any matter which you have got to place before the public. Well, at any rate, I shall shelter behind a phrase which I find in the first publication of the Founder of this congregation—of this Chapel—when he expressed himself as a little diffident about his task. He added: "I will bungle at it as well as I can."

THE ORIGINAL CONGREGATION.

The retrospect of two hundred and fifty years carries us a good way back

* *Reprinted from* THE INQUIRER.

beyond the actual foundation of this building. The congregation, indeed, takes a start, and a very obvious start, from the year 1672. It must have existed before that. I will tell you why. In the Record Office there is a document, which I venture to call the Charter of this congregation. It is a petition from Manchester men, bearing still their authentic signatures, asking that a licence might be granted to Henry Newcome to preach to them and to be their pastor. It is signed only by men. Women did not sign petitions in those days, and therefore, did not get them rejected, as a lady has had her petition rejected, I observe, by the House of Lords. Now, besides the petition, there were two agents at work to get the licence for Henry Newcome. One was a sort of ordinary tout for this purpose, and the other, though the brother of a well-known Non-juring Divine, was a gentleman who had different politics from those of the High Church, for, alas, he lost his life through coming into complicity with the Monmouth Rebellion. The licence was granted. Public worship began in 1672, but it was soon broken. The licence which was assumed to be a Royal Indulgence, turned out to be a rotten reed, for it was an illegal invasion in the name of the Royal Prerogative on the liberty of the people and the

Parliament. Consequently, for the next 15 years public worship by this congregation, whether conducted by Newcome or any one else, was a mere intermittent thing.

In 1687 there was another Royal Indulgence, or, rather, as James the Second called it, a Declaration for Liberty of Conscience. That was allowed to pass. Parliament did not exactly fall in with James's notion of the Royal Prerogative; but they thought it just as well to let there be liberty in the meantime, and they could rectify it themselves; for the Parliament of that day had got a little wiser, and a little more tolerant, than the Parliament of the early days of Charles II. So, in 1687, Newcome with his congregation started worship again in a barn. They enlarged the barn, and Newcome, a mild and modest man, evidently thought that was enough. The project of building a new Chapel did not appeal to him very strongly. As he says; "I did not set my heart much upon it."

The Original Chapel.

Yet an event had taken place which I think made a much larger building than even the enlarged barn absolutely necessary. In 1693, what was known in 1691 in London as the "Happy Union" took place in Lancashire. The Presby-

terian and the Congregational ministers came together in agreeing to throw aside these dividing names and to act jointly as one body. That Happy Union, nearly wrecked already in London, where it began, reached Lancashire in 1693. So that the Cross Street Chapel of 1694 cannot be called either a Presbyterian building or a Congregational building, for it was built for an assemblage of men and women the result of a union between these two former denominational divisions. The building was not quite as large as this one in which we stand. The southern bay was a very much later addition. There was no gallery. The date of the contract for the north gallery, February 12, 1694, must obviously have been the Old Style, what we call February 12, 1695, and the gallery was to be finished by October. I dare say it was, as we are told, a sort of private speculation, but, in any case, the ground floor was very soon fully occupied.

Now in endeavouring to estimate what Manchester owes to Cross Street Chapel, I take it that the first debt is this goodly building itself. I do not call this a structure. I call it an institution, which brought out from itself, and gathered in from outside, some of the most vital forces of living religion, and which, I venture to say, has preserved throughout, with such lapses, no doubt, as human

nature is liable to, a consistent temper in matters religious. Changes there have been, of course, in spiritual outlook. This congregation has moved with the times, but it has never moved in a sectarian direction. It has never shown an appetite for contested topics. Indeed the genius neither of its ministry nor of its people has been specially theological, as distinct from purely and mainly religious.

Typical Preachers.

I have a very clear vision before me of the style of preaching of four of the Cross Street Ministers.

There was John Chorlton, a very faithful man. In his speaking of the sins of those whom he was addressing he did not veil matters. If he had to talk about the sins of the flesh he did so in plain language which no one could misunderstand. He was not afraid to talk about drunkards, or cheats, openly and distinctly. He was that sort of preacher.

Joseph Mottershead was a very business-like preacher to a very business-like people. He laid stress upon the citizens' daily difficulties and daily duties. He is sometimes amusing in the way in which he endeavours to pin his people to their obvious tasks. He has just as much reprobation for the man who "spends his time with dog or gun" as

for the man who is " curious and busy in distinguishing a number of shells," in either case " to the neglect of his trade."

With Doctor Thomas Barnes, we come upon an emotional preacher, who moved men by playing upon the chords of their hearts. If you want to know the kind of impression which he made upon somewhat intellectual material, look at the life of Jabez Bunting, the second founder of Wesleyan Methodism, who during his early days was a hearer of Dr. Barnes.

Then, my fourth sample is William Gaskell. There are many of us who recollect the singular charm and the wonderful literary flavour of his preaching, and it says much both for the taste and for the culture of our country congregations at that time, that no preacher was so acceptable as was William Gaskell for special sermons on different occasions of every sort. John Chorlton in his funeral sermon over Newcome speaks of Newcome's preaching, and says it was " solid and weighty, with a practical tendency to change men's natures and reform their lives." At the other end of the story I find William Gaskell choosing as the text for the funeral sermon of one of the magnates at Cross Street: " As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men." Put these two together, and I

think you have the spirit of the Cross Street religion.

Now I admit that if the six discourses of John Seddon delivered in 1761 had then been printed, he might have been looked upon as a pioneer in the theory of Doctrinal Development which we associate with the name of Dr. Priestley ; but his sermons did not see the light until 1793, and, though they caused some amazement at the time of their delivery, they made very few converts, and the secession from Cross Street in consequence of them was of very small dimensions. I hear tell of another secession in a different direction, but there must be some mistake about that. The Mosley Street Chapel was no daughter of Cross Street. It was engineered from Birmingham, and it was Dr. Priestley who was instrumental in the raising up of that congregation, Contemporary with its erection was the addition to Cross Street Chapel, in 1788, of its southern bay, to accommodate the increasing hearers of Dr. Barnes. As a matter of fact, if we are to speak of secession it was the other way about, and the later history of Cross Street shows that some of its most prominent and useful members had migrated to Cross Street from Upper Brook Street, the successor of Mosley Street. There was, indeed, after Dr. Barnes's death in 1810,

not an organized secession but a gradual drift from Cross Street, though the preaching of John Grundy, his successor, while it caused great excitement, was defensive and expository rather than aggressive. Dr. Halley, who found a number of former hearers and admirers of Dr. Barnes among Congregationalists in his time, remarks that "Above all things they disliked controversial preaching, whether on the side of Arianism or of Calvinism."

Educative Efforts.

The next point I would make is that the characteristic influence of Cross Street Chapel on Manchester was mainly educative, and that in no restricted sense of the term. A series of experiments emanated from Cross Street which endeavoured to secure for the citizens of Manchester, ay, and the neighbourhood as well, the advantages of the highest education which could then be procured. John Chorlton it was who began this, five years after this Chapel was erected. He opened his house for instruction in "University learning." Chorlton's effort has a history. As far back as 1641 there was a proposal before the Long Parliament to place a University in Manchester. Yorkshire intervened. Why should Manchester have a university? Why, it hadn't even a corporation!

Why should Yorkshire be put in the background? So the thing fell through. As a sort of compromise, I presume, in 1657, Cromwell granted a patent for a University at Durham. That fell through, no doubt naturally, at the Restoration. One of those for whom a position in the University at Durham — Cromwell's University — not the one that is now — one of those for whom a position in that University had been designed, Richard Frankland by name, used his house at Rathmell for a University, calling it after the name of his old Cambridge college, Christ's College, Rathmell. Chorlton was one of his pupils, and a few months after Frankland's death, Chorlton transferred the Northern Academy, as they called it, from Rathmell to Manchester. (I believe the pronunciation acádemy dates from the time when "academy" meant a girls' school. John James Tayler always used the old accentuation ácademy. We cannot go back to that. Old things are sometimes better than new, but we have to make the best we can of the things that are). One great help towards instruction in this Northern Academy at Manchester was the Chetham Library. The students resorted thither, and found some things in that library which they did not find in Chorlton's lectures or in the lectures of

Chorlton's assistant. Chorlton died six years after the opening of this Academy. His colleague James Coningham, carried it on until 1712. Then he went to London. Then the Academy ceased to be a Manchester institution; but there had been trained in it a man, Thomas Dixon by name, who carried it on, not at Manchester, yet not very far off, namely at Bolton.

Thomas Percival and His Circle.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century to near the end of the eighteenth century is a great jump, but we have to make that leap to get to the second Manchester Academy. This was officered by Dr. Barnes and his colleague Ralph Harrison, yet I would not say that either Barnes or Harrison was the founder of the Manchester Academy in 1786. It is due, if to any one, to a layman, a very remarkable man, a man who, I think, represents in his own person, all the best things that Cross Street has been able to put forth in rendering Manchester its debtor. This was Thomas Percival. Born in Warrington, educated first in the Warrington Academy, which made him a Dissenter and an Arian—then studying in Edinburgh, where he made the acquaintance of Hume and of Robertson the historian—then going across the sea to Leyden where he gained the

degree of Doctor of Medicine—and from Leyden passing to Paris—in 1767, being seven and twenty years of age, he came and settled in Manchester as a physician. The first thing that struck him as needing attention in Manchester was revealed to him by what were then known as the Bills of Mortality. The rate of death in this town was much higher than in the surrounding district. Hence, Percival's plans, which were carried out and were largely successful—for sanitation, for ventilation, for hospitals, for baths, for considering the conditions of factory life and factory labour until, in 1796, he caused a Board of Health to be established. The proceedings of that Board of Health are very good reading, worth looking back upon, to see what Manchester once had been, and what the wisdom and vigilance of an individual was able to change it into. Of course, Percival did not act in a moment, nor by himself. He gathered about him a number who were like-minded with him. For example, Thomas Butterworth Bayley, F.R.S., high sheriff of Lancashire, who was a trustee of this Chapel. This contemporary of Percival was a founder of the Humane Society. Percival drew his friends together, first of all, meeting weekly at his own house, then, as the number grew, at a tavern, and at last under the name of the Literary

and Philosophical Society, established in the year 1781; an institution which has gone on to this day and has brought about remarkable and beneficial results and influences on the thought and life—the outer life—the conditions of living, I should perhaps be better advised in saying, in this now city of Manchester. A paper by Dr. Barnes at this Literary and Philosophical Society gave, I believe, the first inkling of the idea from which Mechanics Institutes sprang. Percival's grandson, Sir Benjamin Heywood, was in 1824 the man to realize what had been Barnes's dream of a Mechanics' Institute. Sir Benjamin Heywood, I should say, in 1841, left Cross Street and conformed.

BARNES and Harrison together for a couple of winters had lectured under the name of a College of Arts and Sciences. This was not a very successful experiment; but in 1786 Percival, to use a familiar expression, took the bull by the horns, and was the real founder, almost at first the solitary individual founder, of the second Manchester Academy. I am not going to say much about it, but I will say one thing. That Academy introduced to Manchester, Dalton, whose statue we see in Piccadilly, and that introduction was in itself one of the great things Cross Street did for Manchester. Moreover, that Dalton should be a co-adjutor, he a Friend and a Friend of the

old-fashioned orthodox type; that he should thus co-operate with members of this congregation, was a healthy indication that an outsider could have confidence in the men who worshipped here.

The Chapel Room.

This second Manchester Academy takes us out of this actual building to the one that adjoins it on the east, the Chapel Room. I don't know the date of that building, but Mr. Richard Wade tells us that it was the scene of a school from the year 1734 to the year 1815. It was the birth-place of the Manchester Academy, which is now Manchester College in Oxford; the birthplace also of the Unitarian Home Missionary Board in 1854, this being now the College of which the Chairman is Principal. It was the birthplace, too, of the Memorial Hall, in Albert Square. More than this, it was the home of the Literary Society in which Richard Cobden learned the art of public speaking, as did seven or eight future Members of Parliament, including an Attorney-General. When we are speaking of a school, we must not forget in connection with Cross Street one of the great joint deeds which Cross Street, in conjunction with Upper Brook Street, did in establishing the Lower Mosley

Street Schools, that wonderful institution which grew in such a marvellous way. We older onlookers associate it with the dearly loved name of Travers Madge. We must remember that Manchester owes this institution largely to this congregation.

Other Notables.

When John Owens died in 1846, it appeared that he had chosen as his executors his old friends, George Faulkner, a churchman, and Samuel Allcock, the latter being then treasurer of this congregation and chairman of its trustees. Now Owens had no connection at all, devotionally or denominationally, with Cross Street, though he enjoyed the acquaintance and friendship of many of its members. I take this as another sign of the confidence which was reposed in a Cross Street man, as one who could be guaranteed to carry out faithfully any civic or philanthropic work with which he might be entrusted. Similarly, of the thirteen original trustees under Owens' will, four were members of this congregation. There was Samuel Allcock, and James Heywood—and remember, James Heywood was one of the first Nonconformists who took his degrees at the University of Cambridge. In the year 1857 he took the degree of B.A., which

he had won in the year 1833, but was not then able to take, owing to the condition that no one could then be a Bachelor of Arts at Cambridge who would not certify himself as a bona-fide member of the Church of England. Then there was John Benjamin Smith, who co-operated with Cobden and Bright in the Anti-Corn Law Crusade; and there was Mark Phillips, who was Member for Manchester in his time.

Owens College was opened in 1851. It did not prosper very well for a time, and in 1858, evening classes under the name of the Working Men's College were instituted. One of those who was most active and zealous in the matter of these evening classes for the Working Men's College was William Gaskell who, though he had already undertaken work in connection with the Home Missionary Board as lecturer, was lecturer in English language and literature for the workingmen. This so-called Working Men's College was absorbed in 1861 into Owens College. It had done its work. It had helped Owens on. A later trustee of Owens College was Robert Dukinfield Darbishire, whose father, Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire, was, in conjunction with Richard Cobden and others, a chief founder of our Athenæum; just as Samuel Kay, who for forty-six years was not only trustee here, but secretary

to the trustees, had in his time been chief promoter of our Portico Library.

Robert Dukinfield Darbishire, however, is entitled to higher praise than this. In 1887 Sir Joseph Whitworth, as is well-known, left a large estate; and Richard Copley Christie, the well-known Anglican, who was holding one of the highest positions which a layman can hold in the Church, and Robert Dukinfield Darbishire were made joint Almoners of Whitworth's property, amounting to over half a million—knowing, as Whitworth says, that they were "each of them aware of the kind of objects to which I should myself have applied such property." I do not know what the proportion is, but certainly we must allocate some considerable share of the wonderful results of the Whitworth property to the wisdom shown by Robert Darbishire. You remember the institution of the Whitworth Park and Institute, the large amount given to Owens College, the erection of hospitals, baths, technical schools, and libraries in various directions in and near Manchester, and some farther away, as at Darley Dale. These things constitute part of the debt which Manchester owes to Cross Street Chapel.

Sir John Potter, who was thrice Mayor of Manchester, and was a member and trustee of this congregation, in

1852 was the first to put into operation the Free Library Act, said to be, in an account which I have read, the first case in the world; but I do not know where in the world except here at that time there was the possibility of making free libraries by the means supplied by the Act, namely, by an easy rate raised from the population, who were to be benefited by the books. I must mention, too, James Aspinall Turner, Member of Parliament for Manchester, a member of this congregation, because he was the founder of the Manchester Field Naturalists' Club. In this Chapel there is a mural monument, and in Greaf Ancoats Street there is an obelisk, erected in 1860 "by the Working Men of Manchester," commemorating the educational and other public services of one of our young laymen, John Ashton Nicholls, in whose memory the Hospital in Hyde Road was built and endowed by his sorrowing parents.

Influence on the Civic Life.

If we pass now to consider further the question of the indebtedness of Manchester to Cross Street Chapel in regard to its civic and public life, we may note that the very first Mayor of Manchester, and the first Mayor elected in this country under the new Corporations Act, was Sir Thomas Potter, in

1838. He was the father of the Sir John Potter whom I have already mentioned. Sir Thomas Baker, who wrote an admirable book about the history of Cross Street, was himself a Mayor of this city; and if in that book you glance through the hundred and seventy-three names of those who, from the first, had acted as trustees of this Chapel up to date, I think you will wonder at the magnitude of the benefits showered upon Manchester by those who were this Chapel's trustees. Men of invention and enterprise like Sir William Fairbairn; men of finance and bankers, like Samuel Jones; men of merchandise of all sorts; men who took part in the municipal government of the borough—afterwards the city—these names are recorded there, and they are worth consulting and worth remembering.

Contributions to Literature and Art.

What contributions to literature are we to credit this congregation with? If you go to the Free Library, you will see in a couple of cases, on view just now, all the extant publications of the Ministers of this congregation—those of Newcome, I suppose, are of most importance; and I think there is a book that should be added to them, a book which, though not written by a minister of Cross Street, was written

at the instigation of a minister of Cross Street, and a book which certainly lays Manchester under a debt, I mean 'Mary Barton, a story of Manchester Life.' Then there is Samuel Hibbert-Ware, who was a trustee of this chapel, and put Manchester under a debt by his publication of 'The Foundations of Manchester.'

Before I pass from literature, what about journalism? I do not find it necessary to say much about *The Manchester Guardian* which had its centennial last year, for its story, I am sure, is fresh in your memory. J. E. Taylor, who was the founder of that newspaper, was himself a trustee of this chapel. I remember when some of the members of Manchester families took *The Manchester Guardian* and others took *The Manchester Examiner and Times*. That paper fell through; I do not know much of its history. I suppose, like *The Times* with which it amalgamated, it may have been founded to support divergent views; but I did know a great deal of one of its editors, Alexander Ireland, who was a member of Cross Street till he migrated to Altrincham. And I knew, also very well, one of its proprietors, who was a member at Cross Street, William Ballantyne Hodgson, who ended up as Professor of Political Economy in Edinburgh, he, like

Ireland, being an Edinburgh man. I venture to tell you this little story. I have said that families in Manchester were sometimes, in the eighties and earlier, divided about *The Guardian* on one side of the table and *The Examiner* on the other. There was on old gentleman, not a member of this congregation, whom I sometimes visited. I found on his hall-table both *The Guardian* and *The Examiner*. I mentioned it to him. He said "Oh, I don't read them, I take them for the servants; I look at the London papers at the Club." Well, that was a patriotic valuation, was it not, now ?

If we pass from literature to Art—Music is an art, is it not ?—one of the Ministers of this congregation was famous for his hymn-tunes, and we have heard of people coming into Manchester in order to see Ralph Harrison, the author of the tune "Warrington." Talk about Puritans having no feeling for art, look round this building ! Whether the legend is true or not, that this beautiful pulpit with its carving and its wonderful inlaying was originally meant for St. Ann's, and they thought it too dear at the price, and that it was bought, therefore, by the heads of this congregation—even if it is true, if this really is the way the pulpit came here, it shows, at any rate, that the congrega-

tion knew a good thing when they saw it, and were willing to pay a good price for it. Further, in that north-east corner there, hidden under present veiling, there is a beautiful monument with sculptured babes—cherubs, I suppose they're meant for—which I am sorry is hidden; and there is the clock and the dial above it, and hanging above all, look! I was showing that little 'Story of Cross Street,'* with its illustrations, to a friend of mine in Ireland. He said, the best illustration is that one of the candelabra. I think he was probably right, although there are some very good-looking men and one good looking woman among the illustrations. I do not know that you could easily find anything from the artistic point of view more beautiful, and more satisfying in its beauty, than one of these candelabra.

Well, I must close. I will only say this in finishing: I have not a word to say against Re-union. Let those go for it who want it, but I am not myself much concerned about it. I sometimes think that the isolation in which a community situated like this congregation is found, has acted as a safeguard, and has made, and left, and kept it free for healthier and more useful modes of thought, conduct, and life, than are

* A very few copies still in print, price 1*s*.

usually to be found in severely ecclesiastical associations.

William Gaskell once told me that when he was a student lad visiting London and staying with the Rev. Thomas Belsham, who was a sort of patron of his, Belsham took him off to some celebration at Bath, and the coach stayed for the night, I think, at Swindon. In the early morning, it was winter and dark, when Gaskell climbed on to the top of the coach, he found Belsham sitting there. The first greeting from the old man was, "William, have you shaved?" "No, sir." "William, why not?" "Well, sir, I had no candle, and there was no hot water." "William, no man is fully qualified for the Christian ministry, if he cannot shave himself in the dark and with cold water." With that I leave it.

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