

Cruden of the Concordance 1701-1770 by Ronald Pearsall

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What Roget is to authors, Gibbons is to philatelists, and Bradshaw is to railway enthusiasts of the steam age, so Cruden was to clergymen. One writes *was* because one has the feeling that his *Concordance* to the Bible is not used so much now as it was, when a text for a sermon was influenced by parochial arbitrary matters, when a wasps' nest in the churchyard or a particularly menacing thunderstorm would encourage a rapt inspection of Cruden to see if there were convenient analogies.

The fact that Alexander Cruden died two hundred years ago makes it convenient to view a man who was not only erudite and scholarly, but eccentric and irrational to a degree. In the June of the year that Cruden died, Samuel Johnson wrote: 'Every man naturally persuades himself that he can keep his resolutions, nor is he convinced of his imbecility but by length of time and frequency of experiment.' Cruden would have been wise had he taken note of this. Length of time and frequency of experiment had no effect at all on Cruden. He had fixed ideas that led him into series upon series of blunders, and many times he was incarcerated in lunatic asylums. Each time he was released he sued those who in his own interest had had him put away; and each time his suit failed.

Cruden's was not by any means the first of the Biblical concordances. The first was drawn up by Anthony of Padua (fl. 1195-1231), the basis of the more important concordance of Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro, who died in 1262. The first English concordance was that of Thomas Gybson to the New Testament, published some time before 1540, and the entire Bible was dealt with in Marbeck's of 1550. Several more concordances of this nature were published, but all were superseded by Cruden's of 1737.

It was a considerable work by a young man in his mid-thirties. The *Concordance of the Holy Scriptures* had been completed despite a series of personal disasters. He was educated at Aberdeen Grammar School, and was well set on the traditional route into the ministry, taking his M.A., but a disappointment in love unhinged him, and after a period of confinement he went to London. In 1722 he became tutor to the son of a country squire, and did the same sort of duties at Ware in Hertfordshire. 1729 found Cruden as reader and secretary to the aged 10th Earl of Derby, but the 10th Earl found Cruden deficient in French and discharged him. Cruden persisted, lodging in a house in Soho, then an area greatly frequented by Frenchmen, taking lessons so that he was certain that when he went back to Knowsley in Lancashire the Earl of Derby would welcome him with open arms and reinstate him. But this was not to be; the Earl refused to see him, so, with the sense of having been hard done by, Cruden

returned to London where he opened a bookshop in the Royal Exchange. He was fortunate in that he had not opened it a few years earlier, for Cruden was the type of man to antagonize Alexander Pope, and he would assuredly have had a mention in *The Dunciad* (1728).

In 1735, Cruden obtained the title of bookseller to the queen. Although this was an unremunerative sinecure, it encouraged Cruden to feel that he would have the ear of Queen Caroline when his concordance was due for publication. According to him, he was permitted to present a copy of it to her, whereupon she smiled and told him that she was obliged to him, but the obligation was short-lived, for within sixteen days the queen was dead, and the queen's approval meant nothing in terms of cash. In a pique, Cruden decided that bookselling was not for him. He paid unwelcome addresses to a widow, and was so persistent that he was thrown into a madhouse in Bethnal Green, and the pattern was repeated when he was in his fifties, when he pestered the daughter of Sir Thomas Abney (1640-1722), who ignored his scholastic status and repulsed him, a repulse he carefully noted down and published, much in the same way as William Hazlitt, the essayist, recorded his humiliation at the hands of a tailor's daughter in *Liber Amoris* (1823).

After his release from the Bethnal Green asylum he wrote and sent an account of his trial to the king. He again had been hard done by. Cruden next turns up as a Latin usher at a school in Enfield, then found work as a proof-reader. Editions of Greek and Latin classics of the mid-eighteenth century owe much to Cruden's scholarly care. Yet at the same time he was casting lustre on the literary scene, his expeditions in other fields led him again into the lunatic asylum. He was involved in a Chelsea brawl in 1753, and his sister had him put away. Predictably he sued her after his seventeen days' internment, and proposed that she and her minions should be likewise confined as 'atonement'. But he was still a man of consequence, just as the great scholar Richard Porson (1759-1808) was despite his eccentricities and massive intemperance. So much so that in 1754 Cruden was nominated as parliamentary candidate for the City of London. He did not appear at the poll.

The year after he visited Oxford and Cambridge. To the dons he was the author of *the Concordance*; but to the undergraduates he was an eccentric novelty, for Cruden had taken upon himself the title of *Alexander the Corrector*, and in this capacity he stopped persons whom he met on Sundays and told them to go home and keep the Sabbath holy. The larger part of his income he used in issuing tracts and pamphlets, and he expended a good deal of zeal in encouraging the king to appoint him *Corrector of Morals*, a fantasy post the king had no intention of starting. Everywhere Cruden went he took with him a sponge, and any slogans of which he disapproved he wiped off the many blank walls of eighteenth-century London. This also

extended to *graffiti*—obscene messages in chalk were as much the part of the London scene then as they are now, and Cruden took great delight in getting rid of these noxious phenomena. Cruden visited Newgate Gaol to encourage the denizens to reform and to heed the words of the scriptures, and the more promising he rewarded with gifts of money, but this duty he relinquished when he found that these ‘promising’ creatures were using his money to buy drink.

Knowing Cruden’s desire for a knighthood, the Cambridge undergraduates knighted him in a mock ceremony, and pleased by this homage, Cruden appointed ‘deputy correctors’ at the two universities, and went on to the various public schools—Eton, Tonbridge, Westminster—to appoint deputies there. He does not appear to have realized that the boys were making fun of him. In his later years, when he was suffering from intermittent attacks of insanity, Ruskin had the same difficulty, with the dons suffused in embarrassment and the undergraduates delirious with suppressed glee.

In his quest for a knighthood, Cruden badgered everyone who could possibly be of service to his cause, and the noble lords had no compunction about cutting and running for it, with the exception of Earl Paulett, who, ‘being goutish in his feet, could not run away from the Corrector as others were apt to do’. It is sufficient to state that Cruden did not get his knighthood, but he had a consolation when he published further editions of his *Concordance* in 1761 and 1769. These editions made for him £800, but he had little time to enjoy this money, or expend it on further tracts and pamphlets, for he died in 1770 in his lodgings in Camden Passage, Islington. He was buried in a Protestant dissenting burial ground in Dead Man’s Place, Southwark. In the lay sense there can have been no more vigorous dissenter.

Alexander Cruden’s great talents and scholastic ability were to a degree nullified by a sharp dichotomy in his nature. He is not the first scholar to be embittered by choosing inappropriate partners for his vows of love, and his energetic pursuit of purity for other people can be seen as the logical reaction to what he considered his betrayal by the women in his life. He is fortunate in that his great concordance was recognized for what it was during his lifetime, and however maladroit his expeditions into social life were there is no evidence that he did anyone any harm. And, almost by accident, he did good. Sentence of death had been passed against Richard Potter for forging a will. Cruden managed to get this transmuted to one of transportation. Cruden is well worth remembering on the two hundredth anniversary of his death.