

When I came to University College in 1954, I met Jeremy Bentham and, at this Foundation in 1955, I met Joseph Crabtree. It is no exaggeration to say that I have lived with those two great men ever since. So much in common, so few known links between them! When Crabtree was born in 1754, Bentham was only six; at the turn of the century Bentham was 52 and Crabtree (hanging grimly on) was, at 46, still only six years younger. This remarkable parallelism in their ages persisted until Bentham's relatively early death in 1832 at the age of 84. In a brief six years Crabtree caught up at last to achieve the same age in 1838. For 78 years between 1754 and 1832 they were alive together. Both went to Oxford. Both went to France. Both escaped marriage several times under dramatic circumstances — Bentham once by jumping out of a window. Both became the friends and confidantes of the educational reformers and scientists of the early 19th century. My first clue to any link between them was given at this Foundation, when Geoffrey Tillotson in 1956 delivered a recruiting speech for The Lamb Society and later invited me to it.

In reading Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age*, I found the first evidence of the link between Crabtree and Bentham. As evidence, it was as solid as a rock. Indeed, as you shall hear, it was a rock! In his essay on Jeremy Bentham, Hazlitt tells us of the 'stone in the wall at the end of his garden (over-arched by two beautiful cotton trees) *Inscribed to the Prince of Poets* which marks the house where Milton formerly lived'. I felt immediately that Crabtree was the only poet whom Bentham, who did not normally like poetry, would have enjoyed, and certainly the only one he would call 'Prince of Poets'. But let us, as our first Orator warned us, 'proceed with cautious speculation and scholarly deduction'. The long footnote on this 'stone in the wall' in P.P. Howe's centenary edition of Hazlitt confuses the evidence. It repeats the claim of Hazlitt's son that the stone was set up by his father; it mentions a sketch made by Bentham's amanuensis, Doane, now at the Pennsylvania Historical Society, showing that the tablet clearly reads 'Sacred to Milton, Prince of Poets.' It also mentions an earlier sketch by J.W. Archer (the frontispiece of Vol. V of Howe's edition), where no inscription can be seen on the stone at all! We also notice that Bentham's statement on the back of Doane's drawing (also quoted in the Howe edition footnote) says nothing of the wording of the inscription. Here was a mystery: were the words on the stone 'To the Prince of Poets' (and therefore Bentham's Tribute to Crabtree) or were they 'Sacred to Milton, Prince of Poets'? My next evidence was Bowring's description of his first meeting with Bentham in his garden. This took place in 1820, when Bowring was 28 and Bentham was 72. Let me read it in full from Bentham's *Works* (ed. by Bowring after Bentham's death) at Vol. XI, page 81:

A usual phrase on the arrival of a visitor for dinner was 'Let me whisk you round the garden. I always indulge in an ante-prandial circumgyration'. When he came to the corner of the garden in which is a fine sycamore tree, and behind it an obscure house, he suddenly stopped, and laying Dapple on my shoulders, shouted out, 'On your narrow lanes I saw on a slab to which he pointed 'Sacred to Milton, Prince of Poets'. It was Milton's house, the house he occupied when he was secretary to Cromwell'.

So Hazlitt's son (when he published his father's *Literary Remains* in 1836) and Bowring (when he published Bentham's *Works* in 1843) both say that the words 'Sacred to Milton' were on the stone in the wall. But both carefully waited until after Bentham's death in 1832 so that he could not give the lie to this fabrication. How wise of Jeremy not only to endorse Doane's drawing, but to leave on these two scraps of paper the same statement. You will notice it is dated 1821, the year immediately after Bentham's first meeting with Bowring.

However, the case against Hazlitt and Bowring is overwhelming. There can be no doubt that Bentham set up the stone to Crabtree. Firstly, let us recall the internal contradictions in the two stories. Hazlitt speaks of two cotton trees, Bowring of one sycamore tree. Hazlitt calls the house 'the cradle of *Paradise Lost*' (1667), Bowring says he lived there as Cromwell's secretary (a job which ended with the Restoration in 1660). But Milton lived in Bread Street until the plague drove him to Chalfont St. Giles in 1665 (his cottage still stands there) and was there after the publication of *Paradise Lost*. So both Hazlitt and Bowring are wrong. We must remember (with the *Cambridge History of English Literature*):

these were the years of the Milton legend; for sentimental legends grew as naturally around the blind Milton as about the deaf Beethoven.

Secondly, let us hear Bentham himself (at *Works* Vol. X, page 583): 'I never read poetry with enjoyment. I read

Milton as a duty'. Was such a man likely to call Milton 'Prince of Poets'? Thirdly, let us think about Hazlitt's cotton trees — a common 18th century term for cotoneasters. The word cotoneaster was invented by the botanist Gerson from the Latin words *cotoneum* (quince) and *aster* (wild). The wild quince tree! Not a bad shot at putting Crabtree into horticultural Latin!

Fourthly, let us look at Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*. She records the journey to see Annette Vallon and young Charlotte which Wordsworth made in the August of 1802 immediately before he married Mary Hutchinson. Her entry for 30 August 1802 is full of interest:

Landed at Dover at one on Monday the 30th. I was sick all the way. It was very pleasant to me when we were in harbour at Dover to breathe the fresh air, and to look up and see the stars among the ropes of the vessels. The next day was very hot. We both bathed, and sate upon the Dover cliffs, and looked upon France with many a melancholy and tender thought. We mounted the coach at ½ past and arrived in London at 6, the 30th August. It was misty and we could see nothing. We stayed in London till Wednesday the 22nd of September.

The next entry is September 24th. A month in London — and silence! We know from Sutherland and Jones that from 1800 until 1802 Wordsworth was full of grief supposing Crabtree dead. On this melancholy return from France, after seeing little Charlotte (surely Apple Charlotte?), Wordsworth must have visited Crabtree's London friend Bentham to see the stone in the wall. Hearing the early forms of the Milton rumour, he noted that splendid sonnet (dated 1802) and so often mispunctuated by later editions:

Milton?? *Thou* should'st be living at this hour.

But the fifth official piece of evidence to smash the Hazlitt/Bowring fabrication is found at *Works*, X, page 71, where we read:

In the journal of Bentham's father dated 1773, verses by a young gentleman of Oxford, in the report of a design to make barracks for recruits, of the building in St. James' Park adjoining to the garden of Jeremiah Bentham (Jeremy's *father*) in which is erected a temple to the memory of Milton whose house it was and where he lived when he wrote his immortal poem *Paradise Lost*.

Peace to these shades! Where once our Milton trod —
Where yet his spirit reigns, a guardian god!
Far off let Mars his crimson standard rear
Divine poetic peace inhabits here
Where hireling troops with wanton license stray
Milton's free spirit won't disdain to stay
Hence thou stern god! other mansions choose
Be these reserved for Milton and the Muse!

Bowring says Bentham was probably the author of these verses, airily ignoring the fact that it was ten years since Jeremy had left Oxford. Would a bencher of Lincoln's Inn of ten years' standing in the very year 1773 describe himself as a 'young gentleman of Oxford'? But 1773 was the very year when Crabtree was sent down, not for drunken frolics, but for his satirical verses on his tutor — the infamous Jacob Jefferson of Queen's, who, only twelve years earlier, had made Bentham's life so wretched. Poor little dwarf, he was only twelve years three months and thirteen days. What more natural for Crabtree, alone, penniless and in disgrace, than to seek out Jeremy (who had already become a legend at Queen's). How reasonable that he should flatter Jeremiah Bentham's obsession for Milton by penning eight easy lines for a temple which was *to be pulled down!*

Bentham (we remember) never read poetry with enjoyment, and Milton only as a duty. He also asked of every book he picked up 'Is it complete? Is it correct? Is it useful?' Gradually Crabtree, after his first meeting in 1773, began to apply this same three-fold question, this Trident of Utility, to his own verse until, to Bentham's great joy, he made himself the first Utilitarian poet. Indeed Bentham found some of his verses so useful that he embodied them into his own works. As at X, page 69, Bentham condenses his rules of composition under the heading of:

NOMOGRAPHY 1828, FEB 3rd
Eadem natura, eadem nomenclatura

RULE

For thoughts the same, the same the words should be
Where differ thoughts, words different let us see.

REASON

Sameness of thought, sameness of words attests
Take that half verse, then add who will what rests.

As also at *Works*, XI, page 71:

A Hudibrastic Attack on Chancellor Brougham's Defence of many-seated Judicatories

"While lawyer craft sits still on high,
And men make law they can't tell why,
'Give me,' quoth Brougham, 'the prime judges,
For much I need the pliant drudges.
Reasons, as prunes, may plenty be –
No reasons shall you have from me.' "

The final couplet has the ring of a Crabtree code.

To accept Crabtree as a Utilitarian poet critically illuminates his whole corpus for the modern reader. His great *Ars Salutandi* and the *Marching Song* first mentioned by Brown were both written when England was beset by fears of invasion, and when the air was ringing with the stuttering irregular sound of the marching and drilling of volunteer militia. What more useful at such a time than a military manual in verse on how to salute? With what consummate skill it was written (we now see) as an allegory on Crabtree's life. For many can still remember that the secret of a good salute was (like Crabtree's life) 'the longest way up and the shortest way down'.

Equally, the marching song *We march we know not whither* was still in the 20th century the finest poetic description of the Home Guard at drill, but at the time it was written looked back also to Cromwell's military dictum 'A man goes far who knows not whither he be going'. Obviously written for the use of the volunteers, its haunting one-line refrain which later carried our troops to Waterloo is *Great Unaffected Vampires And The Moon*. Why? What is the use of that? The initial letters of this refrain G.U.V.A.T.M. would remind the half-baked and half-trained volunteers whenever they forgot who they were that they were the Grand United Voluntary and Territorial Militia.

Indeed his skilful utilitarian verse was one of his three great contributions to the foundation of the London University. Few of the educational reformers who founded College and none of our leading professors did not quote from his long-forgotten work:

What is the use? or, a grammatico-ethical excursion of divertimathic instruction displayed, extended and fore-cast for the young and the younger.

Many of these verses have been embodied into our national oral tradition.

His second contribution to our Foundation was the sale of our site Crabtree Fields. Bought because he understood planning was approved for the erection of Carmarthen Square, retained (with difficulty) after the bankruptcy of 1821 which our President recently described, sold with little profit to help us. The whole deal is stamped with Crabtree's mark. The price rose from £22,000 to £30,000 in seven days and after the sale 'the agent complained that Mr. Bevan the banker shabbily paid me only 50 gns. for my commission'.

His third contribution was his catering skill. Ten years' training at an Orléans wine firm, added to his inborn gifts, had turned the promising trencherman of Oxford into the *Cordon bleu* of Bloomsbury — the inspired architect of glorious meals such as we have eaten tonight. Our foundation was planned and celebrated at 'The King's Head', 'The Crown and Anchor', 'The Freemason's Tavern' and other public houses, and Crabtree had early realized that he amongst our founders must take over all arrangements for catering. Just as Brougham brought the Whigs in, just as Isaac Lyon Goldsmith brought the City of London in, just as the Duke of Norfolk brought the Catholics in, so Crabtree brought the food and drink in.

In an indirect way his friendship with Bentham was a determining factor in Crabtree's catering, just as it had been in developing his Utilitarian verse. Crabtree had long known that Bentham's ideas on food were odd and had suffered enough meals at Queen's Square Place to know that Bentham's meals would not enhance these important academic occasions when good food and wine 'Lay the Foundation'. Turning to a letter of Jeremy's to his little brother Sam in B.M. Add. MS. 33537 written in 1773 (the year when our two men met) we read:

I have now become a housekeeper and will give you a dinner. I have laid in a stock of crab apples, which your friend Mrs. Greene covers for me with a coat of rice – by the help of a fillip of wine and butter they make a very pleasant Bolus.

Bentham did not improve with age. We find in the *Works*, X, page 314 in a letter dated 1796 to Lord Landsdowne:

... my baker and butcher have humanely joined with a compassionate barrow-woman at the end of the lane in supplying me every Lord's Day with a shoulder of mutton supported in a trivet and forming a dripping canopy distilling fatness over a mess of potatoes sufficiently ample to furnish satisfaction to the cravings of nature during the remainder of the week.

It must have been meals such as these which made Crabtree say to Bentham after supper:

If the soup had been as hot as the claret, the claret as old as the bird, and the bird had had the breast of the parlourmaid, it would have been a damned good dinner.