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JOSEPH CRABTREE AND THE NORTH  
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It is a reasonable inference that Crabtree in his early years at Chipping Sodbury became acquainted with the world of Northern letters, simply because this was a subject much discussed in the periodical literature of the time. His interest would certainly have been aroused, for example, by reading an old number of *The Monthly Review* (1758), in which a writer pointed out that it was 'mere calumny to accuse the Icelanders of addiction to brandy'. Later on it must have amused him hugely to see his own ornate and ceremonious version of a popular low ballad unceremoniously lifted by Mathias in his *Runic Odes*, published in 1781. Mathias printed, in what purported to be a translation from Icelandic, these lines:

No more this pensile mundane ball  
Rolls through the wide aerial hall;  
Ingulphed sinks the vast machine —

but Crabtree of course had used the plural, not the singular, in his Augustan exercise on this poem, which, as you will be aware, is otherwise only known to us in an insipid modernised text, often attributed to an anonymous aviator.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1786 a reviewer of Thorkelin's *Diplomatarium Arna Magnaeorum* speaks of the support the study of antiquities receives in Denmark while, as he says, 'in Great Britain the best and most curious manuscripts are allowed to rot in silence'. Beside these words in the British Museum copy there is pencilled in, in a hand suspiciously like Crabtree's, the additional words 'and books'. I think we can only conclude that our poet, presumably in advanced years, had run into difficulties with material in locked cupboards in the Museum at the same time as he was continuing his studies in northern antiquities.

More important still in thus briefly tracing Crabtree's connections with Northern literature is his acquaintance with the youthful Joseph Cottle whom, Bennett has shown, Crabtree met in Bristol as early as 1783 or 1784. For Cottle's elder brother, Amos Simon, was already showing a precocious interest in northern poetry, an interest which bore fruit in his volume called *Icelandic Poetry*, published in 1797. A writer in the *Critical Review* for 1798 said that these poems offered any poet inspiration for images 'peculiarly adapted for poetry by their novelty, their strangeness, and their sublimity'. It seems to me not too bold, gentlemen, to say that these three words, novelty, strangeness and sublimity, are peculiarly adapted for Crabtree's own most moving line: 'Great unaffected vampires and the moon'. And here, gentlemen, arises a problem which I cannot forbear from presenting to our skilled critics and bibliographers. For in pursuit of Crabtree and Northern Studies, I have come upon a variant of this line, which runs: 'Great unaffected valkyrs and the moon' — valkyrs being a common English form (nowadays usually valkyries) for *valkyrjur*, the choosers of the slain of Germanic myth.

In order to return to this, I must first advance to William Herbert, third son of the first Earl of Carnarvon. This young gentleman was a person of some attainments but led the sheltered and studious life one would expect of the third son of a new Welsh earl, and which one would also expect of a man who one day was to become Dean of Manchester. Nevertheless, he seems to have sought Crabtree's acquaintance about the year 1800. I suspect that he gained it through Amos Cottle, or perhaps through Walter Scott. Herbert was interested in Icelandic poetry too, and we can detect in his first publications in the field, two small volumes called *Select Icelandic Poetry* printed in 1804 and 1806, undeniable marks of Crabtree's beneficent influence. I shall take only the most obvious instance of this to serve as a demonstration. There is a famous couplet in the twelfth-century romantic poem *Krákumál* in which the hero, Ragnar shaggy-breeches, exclaims that fighting that day was *not* like kissing a young widow in the hall's seat of honour. This poem was particularly popular with foreigners in the eighteenth century, but the translators to a man missed the negative in the sentence and came out with renderings like: 'The pleasure of that day was like kissing a young widow at the highest seat of the table'; or in the decorous words of the Rev. James Johnstone, published as late as 1802: 'The scene was sweet as when I welcomed the youthful widow to my throne preeminent'. Now William Herbert got his translation right and put the negative in ('Twas not like kissing widow sweet / Reclining in the highest seat'), and both in this piece of erudition and in a note on it elsewhere Crabtree's hand is clearly seen. The note reads thus:

What notion the learned translators entertained of kissing young widows I cannot pretend to say; but it is singular that they should have imagined ... it like breaking heads with a broadsword.

But we may ask: What notions could the callow youth, the future Dean of Manchester, Herbert himself, entertain about kissing young widows? Is it reasonable to suppose he had ever been near a young widow in his young life? Certainly not, gentlemen: for such a comment as this, he needed the guidance of the author of an *Ars Salutandi*, a friend of riper years and richer experience, of more enthusiastic passions and more passionate enthusiasm than could ever be looked for in the future Dean of Manchester. I have no hesitation in seeing this as yet another instance of the manifold services rendered by Crabtree, ever prodigal in his bounty, to younger poets. Herbert in this but makes one with Wordsworth.

This introduction to Herbert allows me now in this brief disquisition to return to Crabtree's superlative line, 'Great unaffected vampires and the moon', for in some later lines of Herbert's own, in *Helga* (1815), there is, I am sorry to say, good evidence to show that the other version, 'Great unaffected valkyrs and the moon', not merely existed but had gained currency, and if we find this in Herbert's writing, then I fear we must take it that the variant came to him from Crabtree himself. Herbert is describing a battle scene, where beside the doomed hero there appear six unearthly females — valkyries sent by Odin to bring the slain to his hall:

So mildly firm their placid air,  
So resolute, yet heavenly fair.  
But not one ray of pity's beam  
From their dark eyelids seemed to gleam;  
Nor gentle mercy's melting tear,  
Nor love might ever harbour there.  
Was never beauteous woman's face  
So stern and yet so passionless!

The description here is entirely built up on the most strikingly original of the words in Crabtree's magnificent line, the word 'unaffected', and what Herbert gives us is indeed a picture of great valkyries completely unaffected by anything.

This is not the time to pursue this subject, though it is of crucial importance to Crabtree criticism to know when and under what circumstances 'valkyrs' became 'vampires'; or — I hesitate to mention it — when 'vampires' became 'valkyrs'. For 'vampires' might be thought the earlier, representative of his Gothick phase; 'valkyrs' the later, significant of his maturest, Icelandic period. It is interesting to recall, on the one hand, that *Helga*, Herbert's poem, was published in 1815 and is undoubtedly based on 'Great unaffected valkyrs —'; while, on the other hand, tradition has it, according to Brown, that the line 'Great unaffected vampires and the moon' was sung at Waterloo in the same year by some contingents of Wellington's army. Now, Wellington's conservatism needs no stressing; and one could well believe that he refused to accept Crabtree's new-fangled version.

I shall make no attempt to elucidate the whole range of our poet's connections with Northern scholarship and his love of Northern poetry. We can imagine the ways in which he and Sir Walter Scott encouraged each other's interest in the past and the North. Crabtree was still active in the field in his last years, and among other things evidently encouraged Dasent's translation of Rask's *Icelandic Grammar*, published in 1843. In Dasent's preface we find a statement of Crabtree's great educational principle characteristically expressed in the phrase, 'learning by suction', but since the phrase is misapplied by Dasent, we may suspect that he did not properly understand his mentor's sublime notion.

But this I am sure is enough to make it clear that, come the 1820s, if anyone in the kingdom was familiar with the Scandinavian past, it was Crabtree; and if anyone was eager to extend still further the range of his experience by a visit to a Northern country, it was our mighty poet. And Joseph Crabtree, our great luminary, did in fact do so — and now I draw near the heart of my communication — he visited Norway and, as we should expect, he set his mark on the artistic and intellectual history of that noble nation in a way no other foreigner has ever done. The immediate circumstances belong to a hitherto obscure part of his career, the later 1820s.

I must begin by mentioning a man who is fast becoming as well known in Crabtree scholarship as he is in the history of British science: I mean Crabtree's inveterate foe and detractor, Sir Humphrey Davy. A concise biographical notice of Davy, which appears to depend on a contemporary source, says among other things this: 'A passionate angler. Invented system for protecting copper bottoms of Royal Navy ships. Proved his invention and assuaged his passion on a Naval voyage to Norway in 1824'. He is further lauded as the first man to cast a fly in Norwegian waters but, as his own tedious account of his journey (in letters to his mother, published in his

brother's *Memoirs* in 1836) makes clear, he never in fact took a salmon in Norway, except one he bought for two shillings — after it had been netted. He blamed this lack of success on the sawmills on the rivers. Crabtree had heard of Davy's failure and enjoyed the news, but he too was a passionate angler ('Of Crabtree wrapt in glory and in joy, Casting his fly along the riverside' — we remember Wordsworth's lovely lines) and he longed, we may be sure, for an opportunity to succeed where Davy had cut so poor a figure.

I must now introduce a newcomer in the Crabtree circle. George Warde Norman was born in 1793. As early as 1821 he became a Governor of the Bank of England, and he was throughout the nineteenth century an influential thinker and writer on banking and financial subjects. He and his brother took over their father's business and this had very close connections with Norway. They were timber importers and engaged in general investment and insurance. After the Napoleonic wars were over, there was a feverish time in Norwegian business circles; speculation was rife and many a good name was sucked down in the financial maelstrom. So bad was the situation that when George Norman first went to Norway in 1819, the debts he had to collect amounted to no less than £70,000. He went again on the same kind of business in 1826 and 1828: but note well, gentlemen, that he did not go in 1827. In 1827 he did not need to go, for he then did a far finer thing: he made it possible for Joseph Crabtree to see the land of whose antiquities he had read so much, and possible for him to cast a better fly than Davy in Norwegian waters. At the same time he seems to have entrusted the supervision of his business affairs to Crabtree, although this is not at all surprising when we recall that Crabtree, turned 70, was still at the height of his physical and intellectual powers; and we know what affection he regularly inspired in others. The circumstances of his attachment to Norman I have not been able to trace, but that Norman was a man entirely after Crabtree's heart is shown by Norman's own statement about his five years at Eton:

Of Greek and Latin, the only subjects taught, I learnt little; but I learnt all the better to play cricket, football and other sports, in all of which I attained great proficiency.

Crabtree went by Norman's usual route, by packet from Harwich to Arendal and Christiansand, and so to Norman's friends and business associates in Christiania, Drammen and Skien. It is probable that he travelled with J. W. Cowell, a friend of Norman's and a keen angler; certainly there was an Englishman in the party besides himself. Norman in his visits had learnt some Norwegian but otherwise managed pretty well with English and French. Our poet's linguistic attainments were no worse than Norman's; and indeed, as we shall see, he also had opportunity to put his Chipping Sodbury Latin to good use.

The journey and visit lasted some weeks and we have no full account of it. It is especially sad that we have no detailed record, though we need have no doubt, of Crabtree's success with the fly. Sufficient to say, however, that by Whitsun weekend he was in the busy little town of Skien and by then familiar with Norwegian ideas of hospitality. His chief connection in the town was Diderik Cappelen, one of Norman's most important associates and one of the leading men in what Halvdan Koht has termed Skien's 'aristocracy'. It is in consequence not surprising that we find Crabtree present at a dinner party in the house of Cappelen's nephew by marriage, Knud Ibsen, a thriving extrovert businessman who just now was at the height of his prosperity. The party was held on Monday 18 June 1827, to celebrate the anniversary of Waterloo, and it was a party of the kind recalled by Dean Ramsay of Edinburgh, where boys were especially hired to go round loosening the neckties of the guests under the table.

After the ladies had retired, there was more drink, more speeches, more toasts, and, as we should expect, Crabtree was the cornerstone of the festivity. We know very well what his views on Waterloo and Wellington were because he had transmitted them to Byron, who then watered them down to use in *The Vision of Judgment* and *Don Juan*, but Crabtree was not prepared to disturb his hosts by voicing those views at this time, genial and generous soul as he was, he would not be a spectre at the feast. So the hours passed.

Now, I must admit, gentlemen, that what follows is to some extent a reconstruction, based upon a pencilled leaf, by Cowell — if Cowell it was — and upon a certain ineluctable event in what was then the future.

Many hours of merriment had passed, until Crabtree finally looked around and found only one Norwegian in view, at least only one perpendicular Norwegian in view. This, needless to say, was the worthy pastor of Skien, and he was now on his feet and wagging a friendly finger in Crabtree's direction and making a speech in his honour, a speech in Latin. When he came to an end, he drained his glass and joined his recumbent countrymen. Crabtree had spoken English and French that evening, but he had avoided making a speech: now he felt he had no choice, and he rose in reply to the prostrate pastor and he too spoke in Latin. The sonorous phrases flowed over the insensible assembly but, fortunately for us, Cowell was there — if Cowell it was — and he got his words down in a pencil scrawl hard to decipher. They are words which we now know to have been put to good

use by Lord Dufferin in Iceland some 30 years later. I will not quote the whole speech. The solemn, modest humanity of the beginning — 'Viri illustres, insolitus ut sum ad publicum loquendum' — cannot be omitted; and Crabtree went on to praise good drink and Norwegian womanhood (indeed, all that Dufferin had to do 30 years later was to change the adjective 'Norwegian' to 'Icelandic' wherever it occurred). His words in praise of drinking are so much in keeping with the *Ode to Claret* that these we must certainly hear now:

Bibere, res est quae in omnibus terris ... requirit 'haustum longum, haustum fortem, et haustum omnes simul'; ut canit Poeta, 'unum tactum Naturae totum orbem fecit consanguineum', et hominis Natura est — bibere.

It is interesting to note, gentlemen, that, according to Dufferin, the poet of the latter quotation was playfully identified by Crabtree as Jeremy Bentham.

It may seem strange that the only reference to Waterloo in Crabtree's speech should thus be a quotation of Nelson's words at the Nile, 'Haustum longum' and so on — 'A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together' — but when we recall how Byron also comes thus obliquely at Waterloo and such like in *The Vision of Judgment*, we can understand that Crabtree in his delicacy was prepared to go no further than this in hinting his real attitude towards the Duke (perhaps occasioned in part by Wellington's postulated refusal to accept the emendment to 'valkyrs') in order to be sure of not offending his hosts and companions, quite apart from the fact, of course, that these by now were entirely oblivious of his words (this only enhances Crabtree's delicacy), with the sole exception of Cowell — if Cowell it was — and even he, to judge by his writing, succumbed just as Crabtree ended a grand period wishing health to the Norwegian nation in *saeculo saeculorum*.

So Crabtree stood there alone and upright, in his eyes and bearing that mingling of dignity and compassion we know so well from the portrait, and surveyed the scene. Not a vertical Norwegian in sight. He went to the street door, in the mild, bright Northern night of midsummer, as light as day — indeed, it was almost day by now — the air full of the stirrings of birds and the murmured roar of the waterfalls, but again — not a vertical Norwegian in sight. And he could be satisfied. He had outfished Davy, and he had outspoken him, for Davy, when called on to propose a toast in Norway, had been so gravelled that he could do no more than stammer out 'Freiheit' in German. As for the invention to do with copper bottoms, had he, Joseph Crabtree, not proved his invention to be infinitely superior just now in that beautiful Latin? But now it also came into his mind that it was said that Davy had 'assuaged his passion' in Norway: and could it be said that he, Joseph Crabtree, had done that? And at that moment, gentlemen, Crabtree must have forgotten the context, forgotten that it was Davy's passion for angling that he had assuaged in Norway. And, in truth, Crabtree at this moment was a little enflamed, partly with claret and partly with his own praise of Norwegian womanhood (well deserved indeed), and he sometimes found it hard to contain himself; like his young friend Byron, he had not — not in any regular way — the 'gift of continency'.

Now, Crabtree's hostess, Fru Marichen Ibsen, was not a light woman, far from it, but with Crabtree in his prime and, as his Latin showed, in such potent, creative mood, she really had very little say in the matter; and perhaps, who knows, she had some prophetic stirrings within her, longings that might well be termed immortal, some dim apprehension that, coupled with Crabtree now, her name would also be coupled with his forever. Crabtree seems to have thought well of the experience himself, because it was in his fervour on this occasion that he let fall words that expressed the wish that the Norwegian night he was enjoying so much might last for centuries. This somehow became known but was, needless to say, garbled, and it gave rise to the curious notion in some nationalistic writers that Norway had actually lived through a night that had lasted for hundreds of years and it was time somebody did something about it. But that is another matter.

Crabtree left Skien a day or two later and parted on the best of terms with his Norwegian friends and associates. He had cause to be satisfied with his visit, since he had so surely distinguished himself in all the pursuits in which he felt distinction worthwhile. He seems never to have returned to Norway, but he left himself in that country all the same, for long and searching examination of the facts has led me to the conclusion that it cannot be merely fortuitous that 39 weeks and two or three days after Crabtree thus celebrated the anniversary of Waterloo in his own preferred fashion, Fru Ibsen gave birth to a son, a famous son, Henrik Ibsen, poet and dramatist, who came into the world, only a day or two later than expected, on Thursday 20 March 1828.

This discovery of mine opens so vast a field of enquiry that I shall not even begin to erect the signposts. What is most important for us is not that we can now approach Ibsen through Crabtree but that we can approach Crabtree, the more universal genius, through Ibsen; to use Crabtree's own inadvertent line, the child in this case can for us be the father of the man. May I in ending, gentlemen, leave one admonition with you. If you read or

hear the words of any person referring in any respect to Henrik Ibsen as the child of his age, let your reply be measured and resolute: 'No, sir. Henrik Ibsen was the child of Joseph Crabtree's prime'.