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CRABTREE'S MEDICAL MILIEU
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The Crabtree Orator, sir, whilst paying tribute to Crabtree, must at the same time reveal, with impeccable precision, new areas for study which can then be assiduously explored at greater depth by succeeding workers. Rather than dissecting our poet's pathology, I prefer to commemorate him by scrutinizing some of the environmental agencies fabricating his *medical milieu*, how they reperculated upon him and his response to them. In a brief address I shall, understandably, be unable to present all the data I have gleaned, and in any case would not wish to bore you with the minutiae of my researches.

Manifestly, my theme, the external pressures and forces which combine to mould and make, or break, a man and which determine the tone and texture of his conceptions, is of the most vital consequence. It is to this that I shall now direct my attention. There are four influences upon which I shall deliberate: opium eating, mesmerism, phrenology, and temperance, each of which, except the last, had a wide following amongst literary men and women.

It is common knowledge that all the English Romantic poets except Wordsworth partook of opium — Byron, Keats, Lamb, Charles Lloyd, Tom Moore, Walter Scott, Shelley, Southey — each for a different reason, although they were not chronic addicts like De Quincey, Coleridge, Wilkie Collins and Crabbe. I can now reveal that Joseph Crabtree was similarly ensnared. You may marvel that this has not been made known earlier, but let me assure you, gentlemen, that in certain individuals the detection of opium addiction is by no means easy, even during their lifetime.

Concerning Crabtree, it is known that in the first year of life he suffered from the weaning illness of infants and was treated with opium, as proposed in a book published the year before, 1753, by George Young, *A Treatise on Opium, Founded upon Practical Observations*. In later childhood Crabtree, being a boisterous, high-spirited child, was given a tranquillizing medicament, Mother Bailey's Quietening Syrup. Now this, like other pacifying balms, contained a high proportion of opium and it was because of its illiberal use that Joseph, like other children, was led to addiction.

At Oxford he encountered a book which was required reading amongst a certain set of undergraduates. It was by Dr. John Jones, entitled *The Mysteries of Opium Revealed*, and herein are mentioned certain effects Crabtree had already experienced and had made good use of. The author makes some statements, such as: 'Opium increaseth seed in some measure'; 'It causeth a great promptitude to venery, to venereal dreams, venereal fury, nocturnal pollution, and priapism. Like puberty, opium causeth a growth of the *membrum virile*.' I shall not dilate on this theme, except to note that from now on Crabtree's daily consumption of the drug was increased.

His devotion to it accounts in part, I believe, for the youthful escapades of which we have often been informed. But we are also indebted to opium for his precociousness as a poet and for some at least of his adult poetic effusions. It is not for me closely to analyse Crabtree's poems in the light of my discovery. I shall but contend that the strange and sinister beauty of some of them, full as they are of arcane mysteries, and the occult associations engendered, for example, by that exquisite line 'Great unaffected vampires and the moon', revealed to us by Brown, must surely be of opiate origin. The evidence I have uncovered for Crabtree's opium addiction is irrefutable. To begin with there is his *Ode to Opium*, usually ascribed to Coleridge, and brought to our notice by Foote. Like the *Ode to Claret*, it could only have been conceived by a devotee of the commodity eulogized.

Some years ago Professor Wilson discovered a book containing lines incorrectly ascribed to Crabtree and entitled *The Cambridge Tart*, which, surprisingly enough, is an anthology of verse and not of prose. Tonight I wish to acquaint you with its Oxonian counterpart of contemporary vintage. I refer, as I am sure you have surmised, to *The Oxford Sausage; or selected poetical pieces, written by the most celebrated wits of the University of Oxford*. It is odd that both titles refer to comestibles, although perhaps carnal and morphological allusions, respectively, are intended. *The Oxford Sausage* is a curious, anonymous compilation, the contents of which range from excruciating and tortured doggerel to verse of rare lyrical beauty worthy of hyperbolic praise. Circumstances suggest that our poet's work is included amongst the latter. Is it not possible, gentlemen, that he was the author of *A Panegyric on Oxford Ale*, for did not Swift say: 'All panegyrics are mingled with an infusion of poppy'? The iambic style is replete with polished grace, the compound epithets with energetic power, and it opens with those elegant lines which give promise of the *Ode to Claret*, yet to come:

Balm of my cares, sweet solace of my toils,
Hail juice benignant ...

and later:

I quaff the luscious tankard uncontrol'd,
And thoughtless riot in unlicens'd bliss ...

But there is also the following potent passage:

... but if friends
Congenial call me from the toilsome page,
To Pot-house, I repair, the sacred haunt ...

Here must be one of the first, if not the first, references to 'pot', and this is substantiated by the lines:

... as if the leaden rod
Of magic morpheus o'er mine eyes had shed
Its opiate influence ...

A clear reference to personal experience with opium.

Drug taking and alcoholic excesses, as indulged in by the clients of the pot-house, merely hastened Crabtree's inevitable expulsion from Oxford.

But hypothesis and assumption based on circumstantial evidence alone will not satisfy this Foundation's justifiably stringent criteria of scholarship. My final evidence is therefore the most important, for it is documentary. It resides in a treatise on poisons, published in 1832 by Professor Robert Christison (1797-1882), the famous Edinburgh toxicologist. There we encounter the following:

An eminent literary character, now above 70 and in good health, has drunk laudanum to excess since an early age; and his daily allowance has sometimes been a quart of a mixture consisting of 3 parts of laudanum and one of alcohol.

This person's identity, like that of others cited, is not disclosed but Christison's Ms is preserved in the Royal College of Physicians and there in brackets after this entry is written 'J. Crabtree, Esq'. I am indebted to the Librarian for permission to cite this significant discovery.

Apothecaries for Crabtree were unconscious ministers of celestial pleasures, of portable ecstasies, and of cloudless serenity. In Orléans, he therefore soon established friendly relations with them, firstly in order to procure his opium and secondly on account of the therapeutic application of the wine he and his uncle purveyed. He was therefore invited to attend the quinquennial, public preparation of the notorious compound, Theriac, thought to be a universal antidote and panacea, for one of its many ingredients was opium and it was usually washed down with wine. It was at this ceremony in 1784, and at the paralysing banquet which followed it, that he first met Dr. Bertholet, the private physician of the Duke of Orléans, and from him learned of a remarkable man then in Paris. This was the German, Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), discoverer of animal magnetism, later called mesmerism or hypnotism. Crabtree, of whose wide-ranging scientific interests we are well aware, was fascinated, especially when he read the report prepared in 1784 by the King's commissioners, amongst whom were included Benjamin Franklin, Lavoisier, and also Dr. Guillotin, whose incisive comments were exceeded in sharpness only by the instrument of execution named after him. The fact that it denounced mesmerism merely intrigued Crabtree further, as did the following passage:

The man who magnetises has the knees of his female patient, often young and attractive, enclosed between his own: all inferior parts of the body are consequently in contact. The hand is applied to the hypochondric regions, and sometimes over the ovaries. Touch is exercised over a large extent of the surface and in the neighbourhood of the most sensitive parts of the body.

And so it continues. The manual component of the procedure was termed a 'pass', from which no doubt is derived our modern phrase, 'making a pass'.

Let me hasten to state, however, that although this feature of mesmerism aroused Crabtree's opium-flavoured curiosity, as it would that of any man of his temperament and passion, he was equally fascinated by its possible scientific aspects, just as he was in the case of other contemporary issues ranging from homeopathy and balloon-flights to phlogiston and research on electricity. In the last decade of the *ancien régime*, these innovations created a challenge to the imperfect arrangement of the thoughtful man's beliefs, a challenge to the Church, to scientific bodies, and even to the Government. They appealed to the pre-Revolutionary radical mentality, with which our poet sympathised.

Mesmerism became a *cause célèbre* and flourished in provincial French cities even more than in Paris. This was certainly so in Orléans and Crabtree was undoubtedly responsible for some of this popularity. After all, as with Mesmer himself, it was an activity in which he could successfully indulge, despite his limited knowledge of the French language. There is also a link here with Madame de Staël, who was influenced by mesmerism, and whose intimacy with Crabtree has been established beyond doubt by Tancock.

The spread of mesmerism in England was in part due to Crabtree on his return from France and to other non-medical exponents, but unfortunately reports are few and attenuated. It was at first dismissed, however, in *The Quarterly Review* as 'a debasing superstition, a miserable amalgam of faith and fear'. It was not, in fact, until the 1830s that it became widely popular in Britain. Thereafter it intrigued, amongst others, many literary figures, as it had done Crabtree: the Brownings, Coleridge, Dickens, Hallam, and others.

Crabtree's interest in mesmerism was renewed in the winter of 1837 by events which, however, led to his ultimate disillusionment with it. I refer, of course, to the well-documented encounter with Dr. John Elliotson (1789-1868), who in 1831 had been appointed the first Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine in this College. He resembled Crabtree in many ways. He had a strange unnatural appetite for the marvellous, in particular mesmerism, and as his motto was 'Onward', he was much enamoured of Crabtree's drinking song, *We march we know not whither*.

Crabtree attended Elliotson's demonstrations of this so-called science, here in University College Hospital. These were remarkable spectacles, described as 'diverting but degrading scenes', when young hysterical women were hypnotized, and bizarre, and occasionally unethical, events took place. Thus, our poet was present when the hystero-epileptic housemaid, Elizabeth Okey, previously one of Edward Irving's 'unknown tongues', demonstrated her impudent familiarity and iconoclastic, vulgar behaviour when mesmerized. A few passes from Dr. Elliotson and she instantly fell into the lap of Joseph Crabtree. She called upon the devil, thus outraging the ecclesiastical gentlemen present. She tried to tell funny stories of such a nature that Elliotson found it necessary to cut them short.

The College Council, despite its traditional liberalism and toleration, requested Elliotson to cease these unprofessional activities, but he persisted and eventually, in December 1838, had to resign his chair. Meantime, however, Crabtree had dissociated himself and, wishing to demonstrate his concern with the advancement of legitimate science, sought the respectability of the British Association meeting to be held in Newcastle upon Tyne in August 1838. As we know, he had several links with this city, one he held to be the most handsome and friendly of all provincial towns, and where so many persons devoted attention to scientific matters. He therefore joined Harriet Martineau and her party which set off by boat from London. She described the group thus:

A curious company of passengers went to Newcastle by sea. Sound scientific men; a literary humbug or two; a statistical pretender or two; and a few gentlemen, clerical or other.

We are left to speculate into which category our poet was placed. Unfortunately, the weather was exceedingly inclement and he was soon assailed by motion sickness. Seeking for relief, he recalled Mesmer's advice to Lafayette on his voyage to America in 1784. This was to grasp the ship's mast, which would act as a mesmeric pole. Unfortunately, its base was coated with tar and it is recorded that Crabtree spent at least two days removing it from himself and his clothing, a preoccupation which diverted his attention from all thoughts of emesis.

Arriving in Newcastle, Crabtree met Dr. Michael T. Greenhow, the brother-in-law of Miss Martineau and Secretary of Section E (Medical Science) of the forthcoming Association meeting. Despite Crabtree's continuing aversion to medical men, they struck up an immediate friendship, for it transpired that Greenhow was reading a paper to the Association on the use of opium and mercury. He was also keen to have Crabtree's opinions and advice concerning mesmerism, which had not yet become popular in Newcastle, due perhaps to the robust

independence and healthy scepticism of the Geordie. Dr. Greenhow, in addition, was a devotee of phrenology, a subject with which our poet was already well acquainted, mainly through Elliotson. I need hardly remind you that phrenology is a method of assessing character by measuring and palpating the cranium, for each moral faculty is precisely localized on it. It thus had wide application, including the selection of parliamentary representatives, and perhaps a social Utopia could be achieved by the purposeful moulding of children's heads, to suppress evil and foster good.

Crabtree first heard of phrenology from Crabb Robinson, who in 1805 attended lectures given by Gall, its founder, in Jena. Moreover our poet's practice of law had acquainted him with the first instance in which phrenology was brought into a court of justice as evidence. This was a Coroner's inquest on a skeleton found in Lincoln's Inn, and reported on by *The Weekly True Sun* of 30 October 1836 thus: 'The phrenological development of the skull indicates that the person possessed more of the animal than the intellectual desires.'

This, Crabtree discovered, was because of an excessive bulging of the back of the head, due to enlargement of the brain below it, the cerebellum, which for the phrenologist was, and still is, the seat of physical love, or, as they put it more delicately — amativeness. Over-activity in this direction produces bulging, under-activity the reverse. Some may suggest phrenologizing our poet by means of the Sutherland portrait. Unfortunately, we are unable to see the back of his head and in any case he grew his hair long there — as some of us do today — perhaps to conceal this diagnostic sign.

In Newcastle last summer I was granted the privilege of examining the Ms records of the Literary & Philosophical Society. It appears that in 1838 interest in phrenology was at its peak in Newcastle and, when it became known that a distinguished literary gentleman from London and a former acquaintance of Elliotson was in town, the President of the Phrenological Society, founded in 1835, begged Crabtree to address his members. In this he acquiesced, but only if anonymity, upon which we know he always insisted, would be preserved. And so it was, for the Society's records state that the lecturer '... is so disguised in the Committee's report that his own mother would not have known him'. His talk was well received by an attentive and gratified audience, described as 'a very crowded and miscellaneous gathering'. Only one person dissented, an elderly gentleman who contended that cranial bumps '... rise like blisters on a pie-crust, from the heat and bother within'.

There is disagreement amongst Crabtree Scholars concerning his alleged associations, in his declining years, with the temperance movement of the 1830s. Dodgson maintains that he was a founder-member of the Independent Order of Rechabites, mustered at Salford in 1835, but Peake refutes this. It seems that both are in part correct. It was, in fact, the Newcastle Teetotal Society formed in the very same year, 1835.

It is understandable that Crabtree should have been concerned with the curtailment of alcoholic intake. Quite apart from his Methodist upbringing and his remorse for youthful illiberality and the cavalier fashion in which he had scorned the well-intentioned admonitions of his teetotal uncle, his association with phrenology led him to it. The tree of phrenology was, in fact, rooted in social redress. In the early 19th century phrenology, temperance, Graham crackers, dress reform, sex hygiene, and the water cure formed a united front with vibrant overtones. Sobriety, virtue, chastity and self-improvement were the keys to the good life, and Crabtree wished to contribute to this crusade. Not that he renounced alcohol entirely, nor his opium for that matter, but rather he preached moderation and was firmly opposed to the imbibition of ardent spirits, which he termed liquid lunacy, fluid ferocity, and distilled damnation. And he certainly was no water addict, for he often quoted from a book of 1805 by William Lambe, as follows: 'Drinking of the lambent stream, vulgarly called water, is the sole cause of man not arriving at any decent state of longevity'. Our poet was surely living proof of this contention, and Dr. Lambe's further comments concerning water were equally acceptable to him:

... Is this [water] not the very daemon, which, for so many ages, has tortured mankind, and which, usurping the sensorium, has corrupted, under a thousand forms, both mind and body? The evil spirit, which has augmented the wants of mankind, while it has diminished his enjoyments?

Crabtree's Newcastle contacts and his concern with social reform had led him to support the Newcastle Society and it was most appropriate that he should be invited to one of its meetings. The main speaker gave tongue to the following well-known Biblical text, subsequently highly prized by our poet. It was delivered, of course, in that splendid dialect of which there is no equal:

Which on yis got woes? Which on yis got sorras?
Which on yis got wounds with nee carse?
We's got blood-shot eyes?

Them what stay ower lang suppin' booze.
Them what gan lukin' for booze.
Divvn't luk at the booze when it gis its
kulor in the glass; when it slips doon proper champion.
At the last it bites like a serpent and y'buggarma',
it stings like a bloody adder.

Crabtree, although not subscribing wholeheartedly to these sentiments, said a few words in praise of moderation. But concerning whisky and gin, he submitted that all of it in Newcastle should be tipped into the River Tyne, delighting the crowd by adding his benediction to the latter in the local idiom: 'The Tyne, the Tyne, the coaly Tyne, the Queen of all the Rivers'. That the closing hymn turned out to be *Shall we gather at the River* was unfortunate to say the least.

Rather than taking our leave of Joseph Crabtree under these circumstances, I prefer to picture him in the twilight of his days as he bade farewell to the North Country. Standing on the Roman Wall at Borcovicium, observing the August sun going down over the whole breadth of Northumberland, he must have presented a noble and distinguished figure, silhouetted against the evening sky. A venerable, respected and modest gentleman, whose contributions to English letters were yet to be unveiled in all their celestial and mellifluous glory. While the evening breeze tossed his hair in confusion, he was musing on his richly productive and variegated past. He was at peace with himself and with the world. Memories of neglect, adversity, anonymity, and plagiarism, no longer disturbed the tranquillity of his exalted and sublimely philosophic spirit. He was secure in the conviction that one day his worth would be revealed.