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JOSEPH CRABTREE: THE TWILIGHT YEARS  
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Earlier Orators have spoken of the gravity of the task of addressing their fellow Crabtree Scholars. But gravity, gentlemen, is in the province of the applied mathematician, and, as many here tonight will be aware, I am a mathematician known to be absolutely pure.

Initially, I must confess, I was at a loss to know where to begin my Crabtree research. The Crabtree archives now stretch over forty records of previous Orations (lamentably, three Orations have not, it seems, survived). These archives, as Scholars here present will appreciate, are not entirely consistent. In large measure, of course, this is in the nature of Crabtree investigations. So much of Joseph Crabtree's life was conducted in the wainscots of the world, and hence to a great extent concealed from our gaze. Far worse, though, is the continuing conspiracy to obfuscate and even entirely destroy any evidence of Crabtree's career. His poetry has been attributed to others, and his contributions to science have largely gone unrecognized.

The ordinary historian, in the course of his endeavours, will attempt to seduce his muse, Clio, to sweet-talk her into uncovering more than might be prudent. He will try to charm her, to tease information out of her, to persuade her to reveal what she would prefer to remain hidden. He will, however, always behave with courtesy, with decorum. In contrast, though, I fear that the Crabtree researcher is too often placed in the undignified position of trying to peer up Clio's peplum.

It is a tradition that the Crabtree Orator unveil some facet of the Great Man's life which impinges upon his own subject. Thus, ten years ago, Lighthill demonstrated, I am sure to our entire satisfaction, that the whole theory of substitutions originated in Crabtree's fertile mind (I may allude later to Crabtree's equally fertile body). With his typical generosity, Crabtree communicated his seminal emission of group theory to Evariste Galois, thus enabling that callow young man to pass romantically into history as he expired in a duel.

Gentlemen, I shall follow that noble tradition, but only in part. Alas, my interest in the history of mathematics is passing, nay, nigh nugatory. Nevertheless, I do hope to shed a little light on a couple of mathematical developments wherein we can detect the blurred hand of Crabtree. But I am much interested in history in general. However, herein lies another problem. Had Crabtree lived a thousand years ago, I should doubtless be able to tell you more than you would want to know about him. But the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are not my period.

I was thus forced back on what every student loathes — reading the literature. With some trepidation, I began to peruse the archives. My eye was first caught by the intelligence provided by Thomas that, on retiring from his legal practice at the age of 78 in 1832, Crabtree took up residence in Ashburton in Devon. I wondered why.

So far as I knew, Crabtree had had no previous association with Devon. Since I visit the neighbouring county of Dorset several times a year, I determined that Crabtree's sojourn in Devon would provide a suitable starting point for my Crabtree studies, whence, naturally, tonight's title. I would investigate whether it was mere chance (perhaps an anticipation of fly-fishing by the rivers of the wild countryside) which had led Crabtree to settle in Ashburton, or whether he had a weightier matter in hand.

I had somehow to put myself into Crabtree's frame of mind. Though by now at an age when many men would have laid down all their worldly cares, he was still sprightly and frequently tumescent. In a legal miscellany of 1830 (and here I benefit from Thomas's extensive legal researches), he had published anonymously (but we clearly detect the hand of our poet) the following verse:

A lusty old grave and greyheaded sire  
Stole to a wench to quench his lust's desire.  
She asked him what profession might he be:  
I am a civil lawyer, girl, quoth he.

A civil lawyer, sir? You make me muse:  
Your talk is broad for civil men to use.  
If civil lawyers be such bawdy men,  
Oh what, I pray, be other lawyers then?

Thomas remarked that, as he grew older, the girls who tickled Crabtree's fancy grew younger. In London, in the days before the passing of the Offences against the Person Act of 1861, it was possible for him discreetly to satisfy his predilections. But discretion was necessary: his position as a proctor could have been jeopardized by too open a display of his affection for adolescents. At this point, it became clear to me that I must not put myself too much into Crabtree's frame of mind!

When he retired to the country, things were probably rather more straightforward than they had been in London. There, as Thomas reminded us, young maids reared in rustic simplicity were readily persuaded by the elderly gentleman's courteous addresses and seemingly inexhaustible store of sixpences. (In his youth, of course, Crabtree would have saved his sixpences.) There was, however, one unfortunate incident. He was charged at the Devon assizes in Exeter in 1839 (under the not-very-concealing alias of Crabb) with rape. His accuser had entered his garden; he emerged from his house, and the alleged offence then took place. As was the custom of the time, the culprit conducted his own defence through the judge. He cross-examined the girl:

Had you been in my garden before? 'Yes.'  
Did you take my beansticks? 'Yes.'  
Did I tell you what I would do if you came and took my beansticks again? 'Yes.'  
Did you come into my garden again? 'Yes.'  
Did you take some beansticks? 'Yes.'  
Did I do what I said I would do? 'Yes.'  
No more questions, My Lord.

The yeomen on the jury agreed a verdict of 'not guilty', without leaving the dock.

The homily then delivered by the judge is also recorded. 'Prisoner at the bar, the jury has seen fit to acquit you of this grave charge. It is thus my duty to discharge you — and discharge you I shall. But, before doing so, I must solemnly warn you with all the seriousness that I command that, if you persist in uttering threats of this character to young women like the prosecutrix, you will not have a bean-stick left.'

Perhaps, then, there were other attractions to Crabtree in Devon than angling. Since the young maids were surely no more than pleasant diversions to our poet, there must have been some other local interest. But now I was utterly bereft of ideas.

My research instincts immediately asserted themselves. If I could not discover anything new myself, I would adopt a standard fallback. I would ascertain what others had discovered recently, and then plagiarize. I recalled Zachary T. Guggenheim, nephew of Kemper T. Guggenheim, who had proved so fruitful a source of Crabtree lore until his death four years ago. That death cannot have been untimely; Kemper was surely in his late nineties, since he was already in 1923 an Assistant Professor at the University of Western Nevada in Reno.

In the last Oration, Michael Freeman relayed the results of the latest American investigations by Zachary, who was carrying his uncle's torch. Another tradition of the Crabtree Orations is that the Orator deliver an encomium to his predecessor. This I do gladly, with fulsome praise. We shall never look on the Cudgel in the same way again, knowing that it provides the model for the Crabtree skewer, a junior version used to enlarge the nether openings of children to relieve constipation. But if we have to express our gratitude for nothing else, it is that he has again put us into contact with the Guggenheims.

At once, I sent an email message to zac@wac.ac. To my astonishment and dismay, the postmaster told me that the message was undeliverable — no such email address existed. Imagine my consternation! Had the Crabtree Scholars been deliberately misled a year ago? Common sense reasserted itself. There was obviously some trivial mistake. It should not be too hard to sort everything out!

So I fingered Zachary. His current email address, I quickly discovered, was not hard to find; I reached him at

zac@wac.don.com. Since Zachary is, as I am sure you all remember, Professor of History at the University of Texas in Waco, I was surprised that his email address was a commercial one, albeit hinting at academic affiliations. I quizzed him about this. His explanation is a little complicated, and I hope that you will bear with me.

Since he had been given tenure at the University of Texas, Zachary was now more free to follow his own interests, both in research and otherwise. A once popular pursuit for a professor on an American campus, that of undergraduates, is now generally frowned upon. Unfortunately, perhaps, Zach had sublimated such urges in a dubious and distracting direction. He had joined a Waco siege support group, the *Victims of American Government and Inter-National Aggression*, or *VAGINA* for short. I asked him how long he had belonged. He answered that he was one of the very first and longest-standing members in *VAGINA*. However, he said that he didn't get along with the other members particularly well; there was too much jockeying for position within it. He had therefore been in and out of *VAGINA* several times. He now felt that he was coming to the point of discharging himself again shortly, and so would be pulling out.

I hastily brought Zach back to the point. My first question to him — and you would have thought it remiss of me not to have posed it first — concerned the long-lost, and much-regretted, *Ars Salutandi*, of which only a few fragments are extant. The last sighting of the manuscript was its sale by Maggs Brothers in 1903. Did Zach have any further news of it? Alas, no, he had not.

I am here driven to pose a question: why has so little of Crabtree's output survived? For example, *Ars Salutandi* was printed in 1820; does not even the British Library have a copy? We know well that this very College contains circles which have conspired to expunge all evidence of the life and career of Joseph Crabtree, that same Crabtree whose name should stand beside Jeremy Bentham's as one of its founders. Fortunately, years of Crabtree scholarship have undone much of the mischief such circles have caused, but the battle is by no means securely won. Our much-lamented Crabtree colleague, the late Librarian Joe Scott, reversed many of the worst of the College's earlier, more overt attempts at suppression. However, assiduous search by him and other early Orators failed to reveal any Crabtree material in our Library. We know what that means! The Crabtree Foundation had been forestalled, and already all traces of Crabtree had been destroyed. The cover-up even extended to removing all evidence that gaps in the Library's shelves had once existed.

I wish to put forward a theory, if only very tentatively. We may guess that the College's agents had been scouring the globe, trying to buy up Crabtree manuscripts, and remove them from access. The reason is obvious — to the modern world, nothing exists that is not recorded more permanently than in men's memories. But what had happened to these manuscripts? They could have been destroyed on the spot — to my mind much the safest course. But the College has never been flush with funds.

Perhaps, then, these documents had been recycled. If so, how? Here, I conjecture, was the masterstroke! With a heavy sense of irony, knowing full well of Crabtree's unhappy period spent as a bookbinder in the Cambridge University Library, our Library, I suggest, used Crabtree's manuscripts in the bindings of books! But all need not be lost, gentlemen. We should inspect carefully each book we borrow from the Library. If it was bound before the First World War, and particularly in the preceding decade, if we are to have any opportunity of finding *Ars Salutandi*, then we must tear off its cover, and prise the binding apart. There will be some who will frown upon such treatment of books, and even attempt by fines and sanctions to punish it. But we must brave the disapproval of the authorities. In our devotion to knowledge, no sacrifice is too great. Crabtree scholarship — the merest chance of recovering a single lost sentence of Crabtree's writings — dictates our course!

Let us return to Zach. Because of his extra-curricular activities, he had adopted a non-academic email address, because he did not want to be bothered by everyone and his uncle. His uncle was at the core of his problem.

When I probed him further about his latest Crabtree research, he became rather reticent. I pressed him further, sensing that what he had actually found was not his main concern. Indeed, his worry was one of establishing precedence for his discoveries. I felt able to give him my full assurance that what he might tell me would go no further than the present company — whatever I divulged to you tonight would remain, as it were, *in pectore*, until such time as Zachary felt that the general public was ready for the revelation.

Zachary's story, as it gradually emerged, was a curious one and went far to explaining why his Uncle Kemper had

been so keenly interested in the life of the Cham of Chipping Sodbury. Of course, his speciality was American history, and so anything which touched upon it. But Kemper's concern, it gradually emerged, was more personal. Americans, as you may know, are fascinated by their ancestry, although surprisingly many are unhappy about their descent from the apes. In sorting out his uncle's papers, Zachary had found the results of Kemper's investigations into his own genealogy. What Kemper had stumbled across had left him somewhat embarrassed. He did not wish his findings noised abroad; equally, he was too much of a scholar to deny the evidence. Let me lay before you what he had uncovered.

He had talked with his grandmother Martha, shortly before her death, and many years after the death of her husband Phineas T. Guggenheim. She had told him that Kemper's father (and thus Zachary's grandfather), Melchior T. Guggenheim, was of dubious legitimacy. Phineas, she hinted, became extremely inebriated at his wedding, and could never afterwards recall consummating the marriage with his bride. His best man was a certain Walkstraight Pumbry; by all accounts, Walkstraight was even more drunk than Phineas. However, he was better able to retain his potency in adverse circumstances and, when he strayed into the bridal chamber by mistake, Martha, so she implied, then accommodated the upstanding Walkstraight in place of the flaccid Phineas. The young Melchior, it seemed, little resembled his putative father, though neighbours forbore to comment on the fact in the presence of Phineas.

By now, you may surmise, I was becoming a little impatient. What did this have to do with Crabtree? Zachary explained. It had been hard (which Phineas was not) for Kemper to trace Walkstraight's antecedents; Walkstraight Pumbry himself had been drummed out of many a township, and few wished to recall any details of his history. But patient and painstaking investigation was rewarded; Kemper eventually determined that Walkstraight had a clear male-line descent from Feelgood Pumbry, who was born in early 1777. Feelgood was the son of a fifteen-year-old puritan girl, the orphaned Chastity Smallbottom, begotten on the wrong side of the blanket.

The Smallbottoms had nearly as illustrious a history as the Pilgrim Fathers of the *Mayflower* in 1620 — they were with the much less well-known Pilgrim Mothers, who sailed across the herring pond the following year to provide the Pilgrim Fathers with wives. (I cannot resist reminding you here of a remark of Gore Vidal, that the reason the Pilgrim Fathers went to America was not that they were being persecuted in England, but that they were not allowed to persecute others!) However, the father, whom young Chastity recalled as Joseph Pumbry, was not a tragically dead husband, as her uncle and aunt tried to persuade the neighbours, but a scoundrel who had left the charming girl in the lurch.

Herein, at last, lies the connection. Zachary, reading Kemper's documents, was able to discover that Joseph's true surname, or at least the one that he was using, was 'Pummery'. The budding Chastity had slightly misheard or misunderstood the name Joseph had given her. Zachary needed to tell me no more. At once I guessed that Joseph Pummery was Joseph Crabtree; the sturdy genes inherited from Crabtree thus accounted for Kemper's longevity. Zachary confirmed this supposition. He informed me that he would follow up certain further hints and suggestions in his uncle's papers, and communicate with me at a later date.

Now why did I identify Joseph Pummery with Joseph Crabtree? What had sprung to my mind was Tancock's account of Crabtree's sojourn in France between 1791 and 1800. I am sure you are all anticipating my recollection of Crabtree employing the pseudonym *Joseph de la Pommeraye*. Crabtree may possibly not have been the 'half-dressed Englishman (that is, wearing only the top half) sheltering from the cold in the porch of Mme de Staël's town house in the Rue du Bac, having been discovered in an embarrassing position by a jealous husband' (in early 1792), which Tancock suggested originated the term *sans culotte*. However, Crabtree studies often proceed by a less than direct route, and his identity appears to be confirmed by the translation of a French poem by de la Pommeraye, printed in 1848 and signed 'J.C.'. Closely connected here is the reference to *Pomona* in Crabtree's celebrated *Ode to Claret*.

The threads begin to come together. However, I must digress once more. 'Crabtree' first appears in Essex, as a personal name, at the very beginning of the fourteenth century. This is a little unusual; one might expect a corresponding place name to appear earlier. There are in fact many Crabtree toponyms in Essex and the London area; possibly they all stem from this Crabtree's descendants. Now, according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, there is but one place called 'Crabtree' in the British Isles; it is in Devon, near Plymouth on the north shore of the River Plym, by the A374. Was this the *fons et origo* of the Crabtree dynasty? More particularly, was his fondness for onomasty, revealed by Dodgson, a reason for Crabtree's retirement to Ashburton; did he wish to poke into his Devon ancestry as well as Devon maidenheads?

Now we come upon what might be thought to be a strange coincidence. But we Crabtree men have long ago learned that coincidence conceals deeper truths. Not too far from the hamlet Crabtree is Berry Pomeroy. This was the seat of the Pomerai family, which came across from Pommeraye, in the Calvados region of Normandy, with or shortly after the brutal conquest of this country by William the Bastard.

The Pomerais, or at least some of them, seem rapidly to have gone downhill in England. In 1265, Terry de la Pomerai, lodging in Meriet (Merriott, Somerset), was a landless malefactor, in rebellion against Henry III, and in 1285, Robert Pomerai is recorded as a 'villein'. However, in 1355, John Pomerai still held free tenement in Buckerell, Devon, where the Pomerais of Berry Pomeroy were lords of the manor.

Subsequent descendants of the Pomerais were called Pomeroy or Pummery. Probably the Crabtrees were a particularly villainous branch of the Pomerais. They had been obliged to change their name, in circumstances now lost to history, but still retained some vague knowledge of their true origins. This, gentlemen, I suggest, explains why Crabtree used the pseudonyms 'de la Pomeraye' and 'Pummery'.

I was aroused from my musings by another email message from Zachary T. Guggenheim. 'I have touched first base,' he cried, 'and hope to make a home run.' What strange language was he speaking here? My immediate wild thought was that this was an oblique reference to 'Homebase', a chain of emporia selling 'Do It Yourself' material. Casual enquiry among more knowledgeable acquaintances soon put me right. The terms, I now understand, refer to a game called 'baseball'. Further researches tell me that, in England, it is known as 'rounders', and is played by schoolgirls. In the United States, by contrast, it is played by grown men, who can earn a considerable amount of money doing so.

It was clear that Zachary had something of considerable import to relate. Out of politeness, though, I first asked Zachary about his action group. He informed me that he had now withdrawn from VAGINA. A breakaway group had been formed, under the name *Veterans Against Government Interference in National Affairs*; an important consideration in the choice of their new name had been the immense surplus of headed notepaper. For a while, he had been up to his eyebrows in *New VAGINA*. But most recently, he had had a complete change of heart, and was now deep into the diametrically opposite *Citizens United to Neutralize Terrorism*.

I was impatient to learn his news. Zachary had followed up some notions which his Uncle Kemper had clearly preferred not to dwell upon. The first, and most obvious, question was: how, under what circumstances, did Crabtree meet Chastity Smallbottom? The story, gentlemen, is a murky one, of plots within plots. It begins with a mysterious passenger 'J. Peartree' on the sloop *Liberty* in 1768. This is a transparent alias for Crabtree, perhaps too transparent. But wait — this cannot be Joseph! Just at this time, according to Freeman, Joseph and his younger brother George were bumming around the world as flute boys on Captain Cook's ship, assisting Joseph Banks to collect the specimens which afterwards made his reputation. No, in this case, 'J' is not 'Joseph', but 'Jeremiah'.

Jeremiah Crabtree, yet another of Joseph Crabtree's uncles, has hitherto gone unremarked. More familiarly known as Jemmy or Jem, Jeremiah was the youngest brother of Fluellen (more correctly, Llewellyn), Joseph's father, of Oliver, the co-owner of Crabtree and Hillier, under whom Joseph worked in the wine trade in Orléans from 1783 to around the time of the French Revolution, and of Dewi (for David, I suppose), who kept the Crabtree ale-house near what is now Tottenham Court Road, as Mullin told us. I have been unable to trace the birth register, but I have little doubt (and similarities in character seem to bear this out) that Jeremiah was the father of Joseph's cousin George Bernard. Datta describes how the two cousins had voyaged to India in 1801, whence they had shipped opium and trodden hemp back home, and had to flee in 1805 as a result of supplying Cornwallis with rum-tainted brandy.

Later, they had been engaged together in an import business which foundered in 1821, partly due to George's dishonesty. They were accused of attempting to defraud the Duke of Bedford of £25,000. Joseph escaped shouldering any blame. Instead, he considerably volunteered George's services as colonizer; the latter was deported to New South Wales, and was thus the progenitor of the antipodean Crabtrees.

The main sphere of Jemmy's activities was the English colonies of the New World. However, he was also associated with the wine trade, and, though confirming documentation is lacking (as so often, one suspects, destroyed by those who wish to deny all evidence of Crabtree's existence!), he may well have worked for his brother Oliver. Nevertheless, Jemmy was more than a bit of a scapegrace; in this respect, his putative son George would seem to have taken after him. It is likely that, when the events that I am about to recount became known to them, even the rest of the Crabtree family had little time for Jeremiah.

What had Jemmy done that was so dreadful, and how was Joe involved? This sloop *Liberty* was seized by customs officers for discharging, without paying the duties, a shipment of madeira consigned to a certain John Hancock of Boston, Massachusetts. Peartree fell under suspicion as having had something to do with the consignment, but since there was no concrete evidence, he was released without charge.

Who was John Hancock? One of the very earliest pieces of Crabtree research, by Brown, revealed the existence of Captain Agreen Crabtree (1734-1808), who settled at Hancock Point, Maine, in 1764. He was a cousin, a little removed, of Joseph; the affiliation is clear, when we recall that his son Deacon George (1771-1862) was also an enthusiastic angler. But this is surely not the same Hancock. I rushed to the history books. To my surprise, I found that John Hancock, who lived from 1737 to 1793, was actually one of the instigators of the American Rebellion, and the very first signatory of the *Declaration of Independence*. I could thus understand, if not entirely sympathize with, the resentment that Hancock and the cousins John and Samuel Adams felt towards the British government. It had had the effrontery to try to tax them! Few of us, though, when faced with a tax demand, would respond by mounting an insurrection against the government.

By about 1776, John Hancock owed the British some £100,000, and John Adams (another signatory of the *Declaration of Independence*) had a debt of £10,000. It was not inconvenient for both of them that, as part of the settlement after the success of the Rebellion, debts owed to the British government were cancelled. Such amounts of money are not trivial even today.

John Hancock shared with Samuel Adams the leadership of the Massachusetts Whigs in various irregular measures which preceded the Rebellion. Indeed, the expedition led by General Thomas Gage to Lexington and Concord on 18-19 April 1775 had as its objects not just the capture of war material in Concord, but that of Hancock and Adams in Lexington. They were explicitly excluded from Gage's proclamation of pardon on 12 June, their offences being 'of too flagitious a nature to admit of any other consideration than that of condign punishment'.

Now the Hancock and Adams families both originally came from that part of Braintree, Massachusetts (not Essex), which is now known as 'Quincy'. (The wish to deny all connection with Essex is obviously not confined to recent times.) Ostensibly, the new name comes from John Quincy (1698-1767), grandfather of Abigail Smith, wife to John Adams and mother to his son John Quincy Adams (1767-1848). As you will know, father and son were both Presidents of the United States (second and sixth respectively), so far a unique distinction. But Zach conjectures that the younger John Adams acquired his middle name for a different reason — he believes that his true father was Jem Peartree, so that 'Quincy' is an oblique reference by his cuckolded father to his 'bitter fruit', the quince, a 'hard, acid pear-shaped fruit' in the dictionary. An intriguing theory, that Joe Crabtree's cousin became American President!

Once again, my enthusiasm for the minutiae of history has led me to stray a little from my theme. But I have already hinted at a connection between Jem Crabtree and various early leaders of the American rebellion. Was that connection one motive for, according to Gee, the recruitment of the nineteen-year-old Joseph Crabtree as a spy by some British authority — the records leave it tantalizingly vague which — in 1773? Whether or not that was so, certainly Crabtree was able to mix freely with the revolutionary leaders, even being in the position to propose amendments to Thomas Jefferson's first draft of the *Declaration of Independence*.

But how did Joseph Crabtree employ these connections? He may well have reported on the revolutionary preparations, but, if so, the British government seems to have paid little heed. In hindsight, it was woefully ill-prepared for the Rebellion. We must also bear in mind the insinuation that Joseph was in reality a double agent, although what I have to tell you might appear to cast doubt on that.

By the time that Joseph visited the colonies in 1776, his Uncle Jeremiah had set up a nice little business supplying domestic servants. Large colonial families often contained surplus daughters, and the disruption of the Rebellion (which was well under way, by the actual *Declaration of Independence*) left orphaned girls. On his arrival, Joseph agreed to assist his uncle in a freelance capacity. Thus Jem and Joe, often posing as brothers (they were not too different in age), under a variety of aliases such as Cockson, Cockworthy, Peartree, and Pummery (the latter surely Joe's idea), would offer these girls safe, secure jobs in the larger towns.

Many of these waifs and strays — the less well-favoured ones — undoubtedly did find their way into ordinary backstairs service. After all, some at least had to be in place, in case any checks were made. However, Zach had carefully traced a representative sample of the recruits, and found that a large minority of them could not subsequently be accounted for in this way. In big towns, like Boston or New York, they could easily have disappeared without this fact necessarily being suspicious. More significantly, though, it was the younger and prettier lasses who went missing. Zach's further investigations forced him to conclude that, once whisked away from familiar surroundings, these girls would find that the service which awaited them involved, not kitchen or dining-room, but rather bedroom.

One can imagine the ever-ready Joseph being used by Jemmy to test the maidens' suitability for horizontal service. Nobody could doubt his hardihood; he always rose to a challenge, and was always full of spunk. Joe would surely have relished his employment as a limed twig to catch the birds. His charm and attraction for women is well attested. Indeed, I would guess that it was his friend Crabtree (perhaps they had already met by this time) whom William Blake pictured in penning these lines:

I asked a thief to steal me a peach:  
He turned up his eyes.  
I ask'd a lithe lady to lie her down:  
Holy & meek she cries.

As soon as I went an angel came.  
He wink'd at the thief  
And smiled at the dame,  
And without one word spoke  
Had a peach from the tree,  
And 'twixt earnest & joke  
Enjoy'd the Lady.

The allusion to Crabtree — that is, fruit — is indirect, but clear.

Possibly, since they would fetch a higher price, the virgins — if there were any — were left untouched. But it is difficult to picture the young Joe, possessor of a dong whose praises were sung even in his later years, long being able to resist any temptation to wet his lance. Edward Lear's poem on *The Dong*, by the way, written, as Spencer describes, after he encountered Crabtree at the London Zoo in 1829, surely belies Tattersall's story of Crabtree's accidental emasculation and subsequent rebirth as Josephine in 1816.

I have long pondered on how this story of Crabtree's sex change arose. Bromage immediately cast doubt on the tale, talking of Crabtree 'waving his banner' in the West Country. Tattersall's account began with Keats and Crabtree carousing in the 'White Hart' in Borough High Street, continued with a drunken Crabtree seeking an encounter with the pretty fellow poet at Guy's Hospital late at night with the words 'I've come to have it off with Mr. Keats!', and ended with this request being followed too literally by Sir Lancelot Pratt. It occurs in a letter from Lord Byron to Scrope Davies, the executor named in his will of 1811, Byron claiming in turn to have had it off of Shelley.

Tattersall would exculpate Byron of malice in relating this story. However, I am not so sure. It would certainly have caused Crabtree embarrassment, at the very least, were it to be widely believed. Crabtree and Byron had initially been friends — they had exchanged locks of hair in 1812, at a dinner thrown by the publisher John Murray and recorded by Bennett. Later, though, Byron had good reason to loathe Crabtree, whom he knew to have engendered his putative daughter, Augusta Ada, on his wife Annabella on 10 or 11 March 1815 at the

Haycock Inn in Wansford. Byron had even more cause for jealousy. Crabtree had first known Annabella when she was the fifteen-year-old Anna Isabella Milbanke. It does appear that, contrary to Crabtree's frequent habit of discarding women like overused fishskins, he did have a genuine affection for Annabella.

This affection even extended to his daughter — I hasten, though, to deny any hint of impropriety. As the Countess of Lovelace, Ada assisted Charles Babbage with the development of his differential and analytical engines; she had inherited mathematical ability in good measure from both her parents. It is thought that Ada suggested to Babbage the idea of programming his engines by punched cards. This notion came from Jacquard looms, although the cards were devised by Falcon in 1728. (I refrain with difficulty from overwhelming you with the fascinating details.) Where did Ada hear about these cards? Surely through her father Joseph, with his wide knowledge acquired from visits to his Yorkshire relations in Sowerby, who had connections with the weaving trade, and his travels in France.

Let us return to Chastity Smallbottom, whom I appear to have abandoned as thoughtlessly as did Crabtree. She, it seems, was just one of the prospective victims of Joe and Jem who got away; her increasingly obvious (or obviously increasing) condition also made her less suitable for the job in hand. Her parents may have been dead, but she found her way to her aunt and uncle, and through Feelgood became the progenetrix of a dynasty of Pummerys and Guggenheims.

Now why did Joseph Crabtree lend himself to Jeremiah's scheme? There were the obvious pleasures of seduction, of introducing young girls to the delights of the flesh. But Joseph also seized an opportunity to set up an intelligence-gathering network in a time-honoured way — his bawds would lie on their backs for England. Once they had shed their inhibitions with their clothes, puritans and Quakers were among the most adept of courtesans, turning to sex like flowers to sunlight. Their affectation of shyness proved particularly enticing. Unfortunately for Britain, and even more so for the unhappy colonies which the minority of rebels forced from their natural allegiance, the plan proved abortive. Too little information was gathered to be useful.

Those among you who might disbelieve that Crabtree would connive in setting up whore-houses, albeit for the best of motives, must remember that he was no straight-laced moralist; he had long before shrugged off his Methodist upbringing. He did sometimes purchase the favours of women, although until his retirement to Devon, this was, so far as we know, in the cause of duty. We should recall, for instance, Hargrove's Oration, which told of Crabtree's extensive and onerous investigations, in just such a noble cause, and stretching over fifteen years, of the prostitutes of London. Perhaps it was a pleasantry of Crabtree's about his plan for 'penal reformation' which was elaborated by Keats, then Shelley and finally Byron, into the scurrilous tale told to Scrope Davies.

Even so, Zachary further related, the brothels did not account for all the missing girls. A few seemed altogether to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Careful efforts had been made to conceal the evidence, for reasons more obvious than that a Crabtree might have been involved. Sloops like the *Liberty* had to carry cargo in the return direction; this would have been tobacco, furs and the like. But I dare say there was a little room in the holds for the occasional virgin. A surreptitious visit to a North African port, or a discreet *rendezvous* off Madeira (whence they were to collect more wine) with a Barbary pirate out of Algiers, and the extra cargo would find its way into the harems of the East.

In fact, Zach thinks, Joseph broke off relations with Jeremiah some time around 1780, and thus disbanded his spy network. It is not clear why, but it may be that Joseph sailed with one of these ships, saw the prospective *houris* being transferred, and only then appreciated the full details of the dealings in which he had become involved. In any event, Joseph found out about the supernumerary trade. Now Joseph was certainly no innocent — Cadwallader tells how his manhood had first been attested in a crow's nest in Bristol at the age of nine — but perhaps he had been a little naive, and had been used in his turn by Jeremiah. While he might have winked at stocking the brothels of Boston or New York, would he have supported supplying the *seraglios* of the Turk?



It occurs to me that, up to this point, I have largely drawn on the work of others, particularly the Guggenheims. But I must deny that I have been entirely idle during my year of preparation for this Oration, even though my personal motto is indeed 'Procrastinate Now'. A little of the research on Crabtree's life I have carried out myself.

Let me then make my own modest contribution, and present my recent findings on Crabtree and Napoleon Bonaparte. At first, it is surmised, Crabtree greatly admired Napoleon, but later that admiration turned to dislike, perhaps even hatred. There was sufficient reason for this, if only because the Corsican adventurer had turned from romantic revolutionary to strutting tyrant. But something I have discovered sheds a different light on his antipathy to Napoleon. In the archives in Paris, I saw, on a scrap of paper, what looked like a diagram depicting what is called Napoleon's Theorem. I have drawn a simplified version of the diagram for the back of tonight's menu. Briefly, the theorem is this: if an equilateral triangle is erected on each side of a general triangle  $ABC$ , then the three centres  $D$ ,  $E$  and  $F$  of these new triangles are themselves the vertices of another equilateral triangle.

Curious, I inspected the scrap more closely. In one corner, next to a torn edge, was a single initial  $J$ . I turned the paper over. To my surprise, it was a shipping slip for wine, with the name of the firm torn off, but clearly recognizable as the same kind used by Crabtree and Hillier. A curator opined that the initial  $J$  referred to the Empress Josephine. This did not convince me. I can envisage Josephine suggesting all sorts of ideas to Napoleon, but hardly a theorem in geometry. Since I fancied that I could see a trace of a following  $C$ , I speculated that  $J$  was Crabtree. I put forward this notion. At once, the curator became extremely huffy, and refused my request to photograph the fragment.

If this was Crabtree's work, which would thus date from his time in Orléans, how did it fall into Napoleon's hands? There is the suspicion that Crabtree had been in Alexandria as early as 1787, and had mounted a mysterious expedition into the desert with Ali (or Ahmed) the camel boy, Ahmed (or Ali) his camel, Armour was not sure which, and a basketful of melons. Naturally, he would have brought samples of his Uncle Oliver's wine with him. Napoleon visited Egypt with an armada in 1798, perhaps not solely to acquaint himself with the delights of camels and camel boys, and amongst his loot there could well have been some Crabtree and Hillier wine. Indeed, there were many ways in which the slip could have fallen into the Corsican's possession. But the thought that Napoleon had published a mathematical result really due to him would certainly have stoked Crabtree's ire against him.

There is, however, one rumour which I am happy to scotch. As you know, Napoleon died on 5 May, 1821, it is generally accepted of arsenic poisoning; the verdict is still open whether this was accidental or deliberate. I must emphasize that no reputable historian has ever traduced Crabtree by associating him with this particular death. In any event, Crabtree's Butter cannot be implicated; it was a mercury compound, used for treating parasites in the pubic area.

So far, gentlemen, you may feel that I have somewhat misled you in my choice of title. If you interpret 'twilight years' as referring to the latter years of his life, then that is the case, since I have actually said rather little about Crabtree's twilight years. It is, though, reasonable to claim that all Crabtree's years were twilit, through a combination of his own modesty and self-effacement, and the systematic attempts by his enemies to suppress all memory of him. That you not feel totally cheated, however, let me end my Oration with two episodes from the last decade of his life.

The first reflects Crabtree's love of fishing, to which Brown tells us that Wordsworth referred. After much bribery of the locals with ale, I was told a tale handed down in the Devon villages. As he aged, Crabtree (for it could only be he) felt less and less inclined to wrestle with the vigorous fish of the Devon streams. One evening, he was almost apprehended relaxedly plying his pole at a neighbour's *piscine*; he barely escaped with his tackle.

The second is scientific. To set the scene, let me remind you of his remote relation, William Crabtree. He was already brought to your attention by Fisher, but let me tell you just a little more about him. William is the only Crabtree noticed by the thirteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He was a draper, of Broughton near Manchester. He was also a friend of the astronomer and curate Jeremiah Horrocks (1619-1641), and gave him

the crucial advice to exchange the guidance of the pretentious Belgian astronomer Philipp van Lansberg for that of Johannes Kepler. Horrocks observed the first transit of Venus on Sunday 24 November 1639, which was overlooked by Kepler; Horrocks only just managed to finish his service in time to make the observation.

Do we not see here once more the role of coincidence? For was it not to observe the transit of Venus on 3 June 1769, that Cook, with the young Joseph and George Crabtree in tow, had landed in Tahiti? Who can doubt that careful research would unveil there many resulting dusky descendants of Joseph. And not there alone. Malthus once complained about the distortion of the population statistics which Crabtree had occasioned, and so I dare say that the odds are better than even that there is at least one of Crabtree's descendants among the Scholars gathered here this evening.

Horrocks left the few of his papers which were preserved to William Crabtree, and these were published by Hevelius in 1662. His letters to Crabtree were published by the Royal Society under John Wallis (1616-1703) in 1672. But I wish to draw the parallel between William and Joseph Crabtree. Like Joseph, William acted as a dimly noticed figure in the background, dropping significant hints, but only diffidently accepting any credit.

Something similar happened with Joseph in his early nineties. His interests in astronomy had led him to investigate the problem of the irregularities in the orbit of Uranus. Crabtree suspected that these were caused by another, yet more distant planet. As we know, from Jones, he was completely familiar with Newton's theory of gravitation; indeed, he worshipped Newton only little short of idolatry. He therefore started to apply himself to the problem. But his once-keen mathematical mind had begun to lose its edge, and in his usual generous fashion, he decided to communicate his ideas and progress to younger men, in the hope and expectation that his hints would help them towards its solution. Among those he wrote to were John Couch Adams (1819-1892) in Cambridge, and Urbain Jean Joseph Le Verrier (1811-1877) in Paris.

Adams solved the problem first, and in September 1845 sent his answer to Professor Challis, director of the Cambridge Observatory, and on 21 October to Sir George Airy, the Astronomer Royal in Greenwich. But he made the mistake of mentioning Crabtree's contribution. Airy shared the hostility of much of the scientific establishment to Crabtree; he therefore replied with a footling question, and did nothing to follow up the suggestion of Adams about where to search for the new planet.

Meanwhile, on 10 November 1845 and 1 June 1846, Le Verrier presented two memoirs to the French Academy on the motion of Uranus. Challis and Sir John Herschel attended the second meeting, and, struck by the closeness of the prediction to that of Adams, pressed for a search. Ironically, the new planet was observed on 4 and 12 August, but not recognized. On 31 August, Le Verrier presented a third memoir. He also wrote to Dr. Galle of the Berlin Observatory, who duly found the new planet on 23 September. Challis and Herschel pushed for Adams to be given equal credit with Le Verrier. But the letter from Adams to Challis did not survive, and Airy would not confirm receipt of his letter until Adams agreed to deny any credit to Crabtree. Adams agonized over this, especially since he was worried about his publication record for the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise, and got in touch with Crabtree to explain the circumstances. With his customary magnanimity, Crabtree told Adams to go along with Airy, and delete his name from the paper. Perhaps he thought that Le Verrier would confirm his role in the matter; if he did, he was sorely disappointed, for the Frenchman never acknowledged any debt to Crabtree.

But just think, gentlemen, how differently we would regard this outer planet if Crabtree's contribution to its discovery had been properly acknowledged. Rather than bearing the pedestrian name of Neptune, it might well have been called instead, in homage to the Great Man, *Pomona*.

This brings me to my last, and most pleasant duty. No Crabtree Oration would be complete without a recitation of at least part of his sublime *Ode to Claret*, and my second reference to Pomona has reminded me of my responsibility:

No more, Pomona, let thy vot'ries chaunt  
The praise of Cyder; no, nor Ceres bring  
Her grain for beery clowns. Avaunt, avaunt!  
Bacchus is our undoubted Lord and King.

And here I must end. While we have not managed to hoist Clio's skirts to her waist, I hope you feel that we have had more than a glimpse of her shapely thighs.