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1987 Annual Oration
At the Monash University Club
Under the Presidency of Professor W.R. Jackson

Joseph Crabtree – The Metaphysical Dimension

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Mr President!

Encouraged by the numinous presence of the Revered, The Late-Living Memory, and the presence or absence as the case may be of The Living Witness, The Living Burden, The Living Echo, and all who were absent minded enough to elect me orator, I rise to greet and to address this distinguished gathering. However, though this is but the proem to my prolegomenon, I feel a need to fortify myself. Mr. President, I pray you permit all the gentlemen to fortify themselves, for there's not a man-jack of the company knows what he has let himself in for.

Come to think of it though, nobody - nobody who knows anything has ever known what was in store not since the day when precocious Joseph Crabtree delivered to an expectant unsuspecting Mrs Crabtree an almighty kick in the belly. Newton, for all his consultations with the Hebrew prophets, could never have foreseen, what damage a great crab-apple would inflict on his cranium, nor Priestley, for all his sceptical surmises, the galvanic effect Crabtree's brandy-phlogiston bomb would induce in him. Peace to all such. But you will ask why should I wish the blessing of peace upon those to whom all is revealed so that my blessing is futile. As for you, my friends, peace is by no means assured. Indeed peace is an impossible dream, for those to whom revelations come only piecemeal, for those who, denied them, live in perpetual Kierkegaardian anguish .

Take my case. It was the time of Advent when expectations run high, all the same I hardly expected The Living Witness to turn up on my doorstep with a chronology of Crabtree's mortal activities, much less that I should learn from it the fact doubtless as unfamiliar now to most of you as it was then to me. In 1835 our Patron Saint became a founder member of the Society of Rechebites. Was this the Crabtree poet of The Ode to Claret? Think about it. If President Reagan were standing in Joseph Crabtree's shoes, is it the sort of thing he'd want brought to the ears of Congress? 'Are there two Reagans?' they'd be asking. Some would say:

'Never!' others: 'But heaven preserve us!' Now the idea of Crabtree's having a dual personality is as unthinkable as the thought itself is infallibly grounded on the scriptural evidence. For only neophytes have never heard and only heretics deny the lapidary words: 'There be two Crabs in that tree.'

Gentlemen, this is but the prolegomenon to my exordium and already the

dilemma confronts me: Joseph Crabtree was a wine-bibbing teetotaler, or else a teetotal wine connoisseur. I think we should re-fortify ourselves - with your permission, sir.

For as long as I can, and as well as I can, I shall keep to the rules of rhetoric; but so as to make sure orators wouldn't multiply in the Forum like buskers in the Bourke Street Mall, the Roman grammarians made things difficult for them, and much more difficult for me. Lend me your tears, for my lucubrations have been painful and prolonged, not only on account of my little Latin and less Greek, but a singular ineptitude of temperament which has till now rendered me inconspicuous except as one whose prophecies have ever fallen on deaf ears. All the professors of the Trivium declare it to be of the first importance that the orator should at an early stage present as a chap worth listening to; but how can a man without qualities do that? Elders of this collegium will recall what protestations of humility, what rending of garments have in times past signalized the inspired messages delivered here. And doubtless you have marvelled at the gracious rubric which dispenses you from the constraints of the starched shirt tonight. No concession to egalitarian leanings unbefitting the élite is intended. On the contrary, tonight we put on motley as a mark of respect for all who have stood in tatters before us. They sacrificed a dignity not mine to offer. By daring to expose and underline certain contrarities in the canonical scriptures of Crabtree I have surrendered the last shred of dignity so as to appear now naked.

Ah! But it's true. Ever since Joseph fled Potiphar's wife men have saved honour by the expedient of nakedness, and certain rumours unconfirmed yet wholly credible put it beyond a doubt that the multi-coloured garment fell on the shoulders of the polymath, Joseph Crabtree. For all that I am not content with the lustrations grateful as Lethe that Freud and the disciples of nude bathing would pour on me. Alas my nakedness will never prove the point. Franz Kafka, alias Joseph K. (another Joseph, mark you), dismissed the notion in three words: 'No more psychology.' Clearly there is but one way of resolving the contradictions, cause of this angst, and that is to confront the Crabtree problem acknowledging unequivocally its metaphysical dimension.

Having prepared you for the worst, and let you know - as arbiters of the Ciceronian metier require of me - what is the nature of our investigation, what sort of fellow you are dealing with, my exordium is now ended. With your permission Mr. President, I think the company might take three sips, and then I shall proceed to my narration.

Immodest as it may seem for me to say so, the purpose of my discourse is less modest than Dean Swift's anthropophagic *Proposal*. Whereas, at this early stage, he might enliven his argument with some agreeable comments upon the culinary arts of cannibal societies, and the economics of the shambles, no such expedient will serve my disquisition. The Swiftian method is centripetal, mine is centrifugal. He seizes straightway on the semblance of realities

to send all reeling down the plug hole; I alas fumble in darkness, a scholar manqué, questing for the essential Crabtree with the aid of the lantern passed down the line by others, true questing scholars, but, having come upon the precious grain of knowledge, by Jupiter I mean to fling it on the whirlwind.

All that I have said only to extol Joseph Crabtree, in no way to disparage Jonathan Swift to whom so many of my predecessors must have looked for inspiration as they offered the retort courteous to the general who leave untasted on their plates what's caviare to the élite foregathered here. Indeed, I have myself good reason to appreciate the dean's genius. Not waking, but dreaming of waking one night, I found my way down the passage to the bathroom with the aid of a torch. Turning the beam upon the .light switch, I perceived it smoking. Given no time to think twice, I followed Gulliver's example, and used to good effect the measure which served him well that time the king's palace caught fire in Liliput. But the job was not yet done, for I could hear the arsonists moving about in the study next door. So, flinging wide the door, and scrambling over piles of discarded manuscripts, I shouted imprecations as they vanished through the boscage under the window, which carelessly I had left open to the world. Clearly there was no chance of apprehending the culprits, and, as the night air cleared my brain, I realized I must become the Joseph to my own dreaming or else remain in a perpetual puzzlement .

Listen. Take heed. It is no joke having the coat of many colours fall on your shoulders as it has fallen upon mine, and the shoulders of all who have stood in this place before me. Ask them. They'll tell you so. None of them chose to be orators. They were chosen. They were called. In my case the call came by telephone borne by the voice of The Living Witness. 'Would I consent . ? ' What urbane blandishments ensued to make compulsion and persuasion one and the same thing I'll not pause to relate, but eloquence enfeebled all resistance. Nevertheless I shall summarize our conversation for your benefit:

Dear Richard, you know I am just a kibitzer ready with advice nobody wants to listen to.

So much the better, my friend.

But, I was absent from the last meeting.

Yes. Yes. (I could feel his impatience rising) And the time has now come to do penance.

Oh! I don't believe I could stand it. My legs aren't too good.

As you may see, I was by then quite desperate, and looking a bit too pathetic; but little good that did me. The only answer was –

My own aren't all that marvellous either.

The outcome was that I agreed with Caleb Trotter who was heard to say, when Mr Fogo fell in love with Tamsin Dearlove, 'Well, sir, I reckons there be only one way out on't, as the cat said to the sausage machine.'

Don't be deceived. I didn't take in Caleb's wisdom in a day. The day I received by

telephone my summons to appear before this tribunal I felt like Joseph K. He too was called by telephone before the Examining Magistrate, and at the instance of The High Court charged with guilt. As I recalled, under that jurisdiction none were presumed innocent, but all were guilty of guilt. Friend Joseph hadn't the least idea which way to turn, how to appeal to The High Court, where he might find it even; 'he did not entirely reject the idea of going to consult the doctor at the first opportunity'. And neither did I know where I could find that enclave of sagacity that safeguarded and shaped the Cabala of Crabtree, much less induce it to forestall next St.Valentine's Day. Perhaps a doctor wouldn't do much good, I thought. Maybe a psychiatrist? To be sure I was feeling guilty enough.

Fortunately I did not rush off to the psychiatrist. Just think what he'd have made of that dream of mine - the one I had later, the one that I told you - what penile ambitions he would have attributed to me! And those two figures vanishing into darkness! I know he would have said: 'Both Crabtree - the Vintner and the Rechebite.' Only imagine how I might have spent all the long days and nights between then and now in fruitless speculations as to whether Joseph Crabtree met William Wordsworth in the comings and goings between their respective lodgings and Annette Vallon's place, which one was coming which going, whether perhaps Crabtree became so confused that he met himself coming and going, and didn't in the long run know who was the father of that lady's child. Supposing that such thoughts impinged on Joseph Crabtree's consciousness, it would be a fair subordinate hypothesis that on a day when he was Wordsworth not Crabtree surely he joined the Rechebites - but in no other circumstances. A peccadillo here and there (due to some weakness of the flesh of course) that's possible, but that the epitome of reason should go quite out of his mind - the thought, my friends is unthinkable. Mind you, I deny not one jot of the factual evidence Clarke and Peake have supplied, but I'm not having any headshrinker setting to work on Crabtree.

My own escape from the psychiatrist was providential, though mighty inconvenient. They were no lies I told The Living Witness. I told him my legs weren't too good. They weren't. The right gave way and put me into hospital. No sooner had I got a hi-tech hip replacement fitted and working than my left leg was seized with envy. However, in the time it takes for two natural hips to degenerate utterly and two titanium universal joints to get going, one does find leisure for some serious thinking. Then straightway Joseph K. came back to plague me. On; leaving The Interrogation Chamber, he set off in all directions, seeking to establish his innocence. What good did it do him? The harder he tried, the plainer his guilt appeared, until one day it dawned on him -he was not innocent of Art; he was certainly guilty of Art. 'Why lose any sleep over that?' you say. Look now! He got a telephone call - so did I. The Judge of the High Court he'd never seen summoned him - Cabalists behind closed doors summoned me. Both of us looked for excuses. He went from the Court to his Uncle, to the Attorney, to the Painter, to the Priest - I from The Living Witness to the G.P., to the Radiologist, to the Surgeon, hopping first on one leg then the other. The parallel was quite discomfoting. We ended up under the knife - both of us; but he came to know he was guilty of art, whilst I couldn't prove myself guilty of anything, because I could not prove myself not innocent.

At that stage I began thinking maybe the psychiatrist would be best after all, but

changed my mind in a hurry on hearing that studied voice:

So you've taken up with that Crabtree bunch - a sort of H. R. Nicholls lot with a gnostic turn of mind -and they get together on St. Valentine's day. By the way, you do know there isn't a St. Valentine - only a priest who carelessly got himself martyred on the Flaminian Way under Claudius, and a certain Bishop of Terni who did much the same. A two-in-one Valentine. A Crabtree with a dual personality! Two shadowy figures in your dream! No wonder.

I told you what it would be like and now you know; but on he goes -

Meaning to distract attention from the fertility rites of the Lupercalia, and at the same time encourage their young to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, the early Christians put it about that February the fourteenth was a good day for matchmaking. They reckoned that by the time the Lupercal came round next day lovers would have assuaged their appetites for fertility rituals.

Don't underestimate the man. He goes on quite remorselessly -

No this is not irrelevant. You've shown me documents. One, Coogan, tells you he went to a Conference of the Faraday Society, but ends up on a pilgrimage to Chipping Sodbury, and - what does he say? 'Had several ciders there and was so affected by the ineffable sense of Universal Understanding that descended on me that my life has never been the same since.' Here I detect the vestiges of an ancient ritual called scrumpy bottling whose purpose was to render all but the most robust adult males incompetent in their beds. Crabtree, you say, cultivated the acquaintance of Malthus and Darwin. No wonder. For Malthus believed, in natural methods, Darwin the survival of the fittest, and the Chipping Sodbury cider bottling festival stones all the birds, leaving none but the fittest cocks. Nothing could be more natural.

Gentlemen, when you see what a lot of bilge that psychiatrist would have pumped into me had I been crazy enough to visit him, I'm sure you'll understand my reason for not going. Your sharp minds will not miss the insult to this Foundation, namely that it promotes fertility rituals such as frustrate propagation.

Naturally I could not forbear confronting the fellow with the calumny at our second interview, and he'd reply:

Really, you're too naive, old man. It's in the documents; but you don't like to face the fact that a Crabtree, disillusioned with apple cider as a means to ensuring the survival of the fittest, went off in a huff to join the Rechebites. Well, there may be something in that, but

I can hear myself crying out loud: ‘But me no buts.’ (I am beside myself.) ‘And what’s that got to do with the guilt complex I’m paying for?’ The voice goes on the same.

It’s got everything to do with your guilt complex. But first you must realize we’re concerned more with myth and ritual than with reason. You’ve heard of The Leopards in the Temple, how they break in and drink of the sacrificial pitchers, and it happens over and over till the violation is assimilated to the liturgy. Take your St. Valentine’s Day. Originally the Lupercalia was a blood sacrifice. Later the Luperci were raised to public office. Clearly it must have assuaged the secret masochism of Caesar’s wife (who was of course above suspicion), her certain knowledge that when Antonius touched her it symbolized a lashing with thongs of hide stripped from the sacrificial victims, dog and goat. The Christians chose two martyrs. They had to be two, because there had been two Luperci; they had to be martyrs, because the original Luperci were sacrifices, and the martyrs are the seed of the Church anyway. Nevertheless, seeing that Tertullian had such a hard time trying to convince pagans that Christians didn’t eat children, it was reckoned expedient to relegate to the unconscious the allusion to human sacrifice by inventing St. Valentine, and letting him stand for both Luperci and martyrs.

So things continue up to the time of Dr Coogan’s religious experience at the Chipping Sodbury cider bottling festival. I note his curious failure to observe a mutation in the ritual. No. I do not mean the yokels had taken to using plastic-line & cardboard casks, but that the ethical basis of the celebrations had in the course of time completely changed. The original fertility rites had been assimilated to a more popular Bacchanalian orgy —this in the mistaken belief that Bacchus would serve Cupid’s purposes, so women would be fruitful and men multiply. (The time had not yet come for turning things the other way about.)

Now that was the first phase in the post-classical evolution of this ceremony. To be perfectly candid it was one so well suited to the life style of Merry England and the Falstaffian temperament that it looked like being fossilized there

At this stage I should certainly have broken in on him, for I should have been wanting to hear more about Falstaff. I should have said: ‘But tell me more.’ He would have been so flattered as to tell me he was busy at the time writing up a missing chapter of *Civilization and its Discontents*, and I’d better come back tomorrow.

Do you think I would have gone back? Not I. Not knowing how the consultation would have gone -

Ah! yes. Fossilized rituals. Label them as you will; But so long as they remain essentially unchanged I reckon them fossilized. Those rural festivities Dr. C. speaks of were adapted to town life but continued to encourage

propagation till long after Malthus arrived upon the scene with his startling pronouncement that honest Englishmen had better put the snaffle on fertility. Clearly your Joseph Crabtree joined the Rechebites convinced that strength of will and self-denial rather than strong drink would stem the population tide -persuaded by Thomas Malthus.

Now for your guilt complex. Your super-ego, being divided against itself, is quite incompetent to arbitrate conflicting claims of id and ego. Your dream suggests priapic virtuosity would be most gratifying to the id, as Gulliver discovered. Ego insists, upon the other hand, you might as well put a bullet through your head as yield an inch to the irrational, and reason baulks the proposition that Vintner Crabtree joined the Reche— bites so as to curb fertility. Think again, old boy. The essence of the submission is not that fermentation is inimical to masculine competence, but that stoical measures are required to put the brakes on propagation. All Crabtree men need do is go and get vasectomized, then celebrate to their heart's content on St. Valentine's day .

Look here, man! You're not guilty, only mistaken. You have permitted psyche to conspire with soma, .your legs became hysterical, so you ended up on the operating table.

That is the last time I thought of going to the psychiatrist. From what he would have said I knew him to be a mountebank, and from what he would not have said I was able to deduce what he ought to have said. I trust you will agree with me, 'we can make shift to do without him', especially in view of his recommendation for the future of The Crabtree Foundation. For a good cause and a sufficient reason these men here, Mr President, would sacrifice even their noblest parts, but not at the expense of the survival of the fittest. Then look how he treated my case. I've told you his interpretation of my dream. A lot of good that did me. The fellow could discover symbolic meanings in anything and everything as long as it didn't matter, and the only thing that really mattered he ignored - the light switch. I was looking for light on Crabtree, afraid that a lead might have been sabotaged. That quacksalver was all along shivering in his shoes at the thought of my becoming an enlightened man; but the thought of my discovering the Joseph connection paralysed him. Would I not then be saying: 'No more psychology'?

According to the rules of rhetoric, the speechifier, having closed his narrative, ought to digress a while, presumably so as to liven things up and keep his audience from nodding, but maybe out of consideration for orators too who, granted no permission, might dispense themselves. Personally I feel that, after resisting with at least as much fortitude as my predecessors the temptation to lead you down byeways, I should now be entitled to digress in any and every direction, had I the inclination that I have not. But inspiration does not work that way. I was having breakfast in my dressing gown. Yes, it is indeed a glorious robe of imitation velvet, ruby red and edged with orient nylon deeper red, gold speckled. My wife - who knows better than any woman on earth how to safeguard thrift against parsimony bought it for me in a supermarket to let me cut a figure in the hospital. It was a presage, I assure you, for just as I had downed my last

mouthful of coffee and turned my thoughts to the last paragraph of my narration, the doorbell rang. No. It was not the Person from Porlock but none other than The Living Witness come hotfoot with the latest publication of the London Chapter, a most impressive composition by Bartolomeu dos Santos, entitled:

Joseph Crabtree and the Caliph of Fonthill, (Crabtree Foundation Papers XXXII) . I must bring you up to date on this.

Dos Santos has a colourful story to tell. Acting as an under-cover agent on behalf of Sir William Hamilton, our Crabtree travels to Lisbon on a very delicate mission. His brief requires him to circumvent an amorous intrigue of the notorious William Beckford, known as The Caliph of Fonthill. The appellation befitted the man whose wealth and exotic tastes were legendary; but his enterprises were unbecoming an Englishman - especially one who happened to be cousin to Sir William Hamilton, and indeed this particular adventure seemed likely to jeopardize diplomatic relations with England's oldest ally, and blemish the reputation of the establishment. However, to cut the matter short, by masquerading as an English padre Crabtree managed to divert the attention of Dona Francesca from the amorous Caliph and get her safely into a convent. There is a strange twist to this story. No sooner is Dona Francesca got out of the way than The Caliph of Fontill and Joseph Crabtree join forces in a new enterprise - the English translation of *Volksmärchen den Deutschen*. Yet even more strange, I would say, is the opinion Bartolomeu dos Santos formed: Crabtree committed a volte face.

You'll not find in the operatic repertoire a story with a more remarkable plot than the tale of *Joseph Crabtree and the Caliph of Fonthill*. I wish I could give you some idea of the way Don Santos embellishes it. A precis is, alas, a precis. All the same stay with me. I have a bone to pick with that biographer, and you may snatch a morsel while I'm worrying it.

Had the narrative been as edifying as it is entertaining, my admiration for the dos Santos work would have been unqualified but as things stand I'm bound to tell you straight a chronographer, not a philosopher, wrote it. The more I brood upon his theme, the more fearful I am for him. Is he a positivist in disguise? He does with every care deploy the facts, but never so as to have you thinking there might be a metaphysical dimension to Joseph Crabtree's design. What is it Ernest Barker says in *Political Thought from Spencer to Today*?

If we must banish theological and metaphysical presuppositions, and if we must take things as they are, it follows that we must banish natural rights and that we must take history as we find it.

I do hope the poor man doesn't end up in 'an obscure university somewhere in the provinces' like that 'respected scholar of the Borges school of thought' who tried to prove Crabtree was a fraud.

A noted orator has said: 'I have too long digressed.' I rather think all noted orators have said it. Another sort of guilt disturbs my mind. I've cut out all the tit bits from The Caliph's lush romance and got to talking political science and metaphysics, so it is

obvious I've not digressed enough; but I'll put up with no more digression all the same. I mean to get on with my proof, and as for the pranks of the Caliph, they must fit in with Crabtree's Great Design.

Please let me first have my say about proofs generally.

I never knew how it got round that Latin wasn't a very useful subject of study. There was a man I came across who argued so, and made it his mission in life to prove to any fellow with a button on his coat that certain triangles were right angled. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when they made him an inspector of schools. But that is a fate I would not wish on any man. It makes you very unpopular and you're not allowed to teach ever again. I wish I had been that man's confessor. I'd have made him repeat every day of his life:

Credo quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditur.

There's nothing sadistic about that. You'll get a long way further much faster if you go round quietly among firm believers in right angled triangles till you come upon a fellow who's got all his triangles mixed, and picked up by mistake one that's all horribly scalened and skewed, or set up a pentagon instead of a square on an hypotenuse, or (not having studied under Gordon Taylor) believes that *ex nihilo nihil fit*, and consequently puts no construction whatsoever on hypotenuses. Only make sure the fellow has an hypotenuse to square, square it, and you'll have a proof in no time.

So let us put dos Santos to the test. He tells of some fun and games in Lisbon, and quotes from Beckford's diary which tells how a rocket shot up under his nose, then all of a sudden 'Berti' (that is to say Crabtree) entered 'with a crucifix on a silver salver and a mighty kind message from the nuns at the convent.' This is great stuff - Eros consorting with Sacerdos. Mills and Boon could not have done better. But do remember this - the Caliph did have the advantage of writing his own diary, and none of the disadvantages of honest Crabtree's good Methodist upbringing. The chronographer rectifies history alright, but the construction he puts on the facts is in doubt.

Facts are tricky things. We had better talk about them. To pedagogues like me rarely in a lifetime does a student of true genius present himself, and yet to me it happened twice at least. I take it as a proof of my prophetic destiny, and am of course grateful. So should the author of the Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit oration be grateful to the aspiring matriculant who ventured the observation: 'It is a true fact', and for that other who surpassed him saying: 'It is a future fact'. Gentlemen I assure you I learned more from my students than ever they learned from me. Alas we lived too late. The Stagirite would have offered either of those gentlemen a post at the Lyceum, then I might have sat at his feet. Instead I've had to trust in Aristotle who distinguished between inartificial and artificial facts, the latter being emotional, ethical and logical. With scant consideration for Professor Skinner's sensibilities certain later philosophers have spoken of brute facts. But there is nothing to choose between these and Aristotle's inartificial or natural facts. In neither case does any isolated one of them subtend an inference you may call true or false except its mere existence. The only facts you'd ordinarily care to say

are true or false are those apparent in a given universe of discourse. So back to the Beckford diary.

Follow me closely. Think of that rocket fired under Beckford's nose. A blind man could have seen that 'Berti' - that's to say Crabtree - fired it, and senior fellows will know what words he muttered: 'Phlox vobiscum'. Why! the very same expression of contempt directed against Priestley, the antiphlogistonist, in that memorable year 1791, he now directs in 1808 against the Whore of Babylon and that caitiff (Caliph, if you will) who for the sake of Dona Francesca (known as the Slut of Lisbon) would have colluded with a priestly tribe to the embarrassment of the English establishment.

Our object is, of course, not merely to explain how Crabtree frustrated a liaison. Dos Santos has already done as much, but not so as to demonstrate the inner purpose of the Crabtree manoeuvres, and how they promoted his Great Design. With this in mind I must return briefly to his fearful invocation, 'Phlox vobiscum!', whose complex etymologies suggest that James Joyce had access to some Crabtree manuscripts or else had a ghost writer. The Latin 'phlox' translates to 'fire'. Then, seeing that 'fire' alludes to both 'light' and 'heat', the message to Priestley had a double meaning: 'Become enlightened or be damned', and this provides us with a fine example of a future fact, because the same injunction applies with equal force to Priestley and the Caliph. Since Crabtree was no weathercock, the first event was certainly predictive of the second, though in the course of time the connotations of the phrase itself were enriched beyond measure. For as one might have expected, Crabtree's sharp mind seized on the fact that 'phlox' phonetically embodies 'flux' and 'pox', so that his 'Phlox vobiscum!' came to mean also: 'A pox on you, Beckford'. This is no trifling matter, Beckford's failure to observe that the fact present to him in 1808 was a future fact to Crabtree in 1791.

Within any given universe of discourse even the most brutal facts acquire the character of artificial facts which yield whatever meanings are reasonable in the circumstances. Aristotle meant something like that, I guess, when he classed artificial facts as emotional, ethical and logical; but one day when I get to meet the man, I'll tell him about those artificial facts that I have called 'the facts of fiction', a sub-class better taken separately. Dos Santos seems to fall into error by failing to do just that.

Tell me now. How do you take the news that Joseph Crabtree employed the Caitiff of Fonthill to translate *Volksmärchen den Deutschen*, because he himself knew no German? Are we to believe that the polymath Crabtree encountered the polymath Goethe first in Rome (1786), then in Naples (1787), and all their conversation was in English? Are we to believe that the author of *La Troupe Sort* spoke no French? Shall I tell you the truth of the matter. *The Caliph of Fonthill* put round the calumny that Crabtree spoke no language but his own so as to pass as sole translator of the *Volksmärchen*. If the first nibble revolted you, would you eat the whole cheese to see if no part were tasty? . I fancy not. Neither would I read another line of The Caitiff of Fonthill's diary, seeing the way he treats the facts of history, as if they were 'facts of fiction' and self-verifying.. Yet something does come of this nonsense after all. Ex Nihilo Nihil Non Fit, because we now may see the true purpose of Crabtree's Lisbon

manoeuvres, not merely their ostensible object, and an outcome more agreeable to Aristotle and to me, likewise to you and to Mrs Whitehead than that which dos Santos reveals.

We've dwelt too long among the Latins. Remember the tight little island, the trend of thought and the trend of events between the explosion of the brandy phlogiston bomb of 1791 and the Lisbon rocket of 1808. Admittedly the Church and King mob went too far, burning down Priestley's house and chapel, so Crabtree, being no Nihilist, showed an explosion on a small scale would have done to bring the extremist to his senses. But this was no isolated incident. Always a man for the via media, he saw that the time had come to put the brakes on libitarians and guided Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey back to the mainstream Wesley had never abandoned, retaining nonetheless a healthy interest in the evangelical passion for missionary and muscular Christianity. In Lisbon was a young Englishman in peril of pox and depravity -some said beyond redemption. If only he could interest The Caliph of Fonthill in German folk and fairy tales! That's the true story.

Call that coincidence if you will, but see what follows and you'll call it Providence. Chipping Sunbury (J.C.'s birthplace) could scarcely be more than ten miles from Bristol, and there the advocates of Pantisocracy held meetings, planning to found on the banks of the Susquehanna a colony of the elite dedicated to equality - not to mention liberty and fraternity. Fraternity must have been the best part of those Bristol gatherings, for Coleridge, Southey and Lovel were all there, and undoubtedly Joseph Crabtree. Relations must have been cordial. There stands today on the banks of the Susquehanna, as if to testify, a town called Sunbury whose name alludes to Crabtree's birthplace, and obliquely to Agreen Crabtree of Hancock Point, Maine, a pioneer migrant to the New World. But let's not forget. At the time when young bloods were dreaming of -

Sailing up the Chesapeake ...
Sailing up the Chesapeake ...
Sailing up the Chesapeake Bay

Joseph Crabtree was - on average - twenty years older than the rest so one and all they looked to him for counsel. Do you imagine that, with the events of 1791 still fresh in his mind (it was only two or three years later - four at most), and with the smell of Priestley's chapel and house burning still in his nostrils, he'd not do his best to wean the youngest of the group, Southey, from the naive political idealism that had proved so inflammatory. He did. Southey abandoned the fraternity, which subsequently broke up; he joined the Anglican cause; he travelled; - he published his Letters Written in Spain and Portugal, a work that moved our Crabtree most profoundly.

How far Coleridge was ideologically committed to Pant isocracy is a matter of conjecture. My own opinion is some go to church for reasons other than to hear the sermon, and Coleridge was one of them, another was Joseph Crabtree. However the dissolution of the group came at an unfortunate time. Estranged alike from Sara Fricker and the practice of Unitarian preaching, but not the habit of opium, he was now completely at a loss and fell into that melancholy he was prone to - at least till Joseph

Crabtree came to visit him. Despite the frailties of S.T.C., there was affinity between the two. Crabtree had been sent down from Oxford; Coleridge, having decided that Cambridge had little to offer him, joined the Dragoons under the pseudonym, Silas Tomkyn Comberbache in order to escape his creditors. Tell me now. If you had been put in The Fleet for debts contracted under the alias 'M'Greggor', wouldn't you say that one who adopted the alias 'Silas Tomkyn Comberbache' and escaped the fate was meant to lead the higher life? Crabtree did, anyway. He commended to Coleridge the consolations of philosophy - idealist, German, naturally. Together like ducks to water the two took to Schelling and Schlegel. I have been able to piece together for you (from quite impeccable sources) a snatch of their conversation.

Jogging had not yet been invented, but walking was enough to set S.T.C. musing:

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze.

Now J.C. knew already what de Quincey later found out: opium impairs the technical memory, but it leaves the logical memory unimpaired, so, leaving out *The Prelude*, he went straight to the point:

Yes. In all nature, and therefore in human society there is a transcendental and divine life form.

To this S.T.C. appropriately responded:

*Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion*

J.C. would not let him finish:

Indeed there is a universal evolution in the ideal world which embraces biological and social evolution.

To which, his mind still dwelling with *The Prelude*, S.T.C. replied:

*Against all systems built on abstract thought
Keen ridicule ...
For he on honey dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise.*

In no way disconcerted by the imaginative anacoluthon, J.C. perspicuously responded:

Evolution is an individuation process in the course of which various elements are first differentiated then co-ordinated.

Ernest Barker in his *Political Thought from Spencer to Today* mistakenly attributes to Coleridge Crabtree's insight, but little that matters to us. The two men agreed; and Joseph Crabtree's Grand Design is transcendently explicable, if you listen attentively to them.

Joining the Rechebites didn't mean to Crabtree quite what they thought it meant. I happen to know. In my last primary school year I was entered for a competitive examination devised by The Society of Rechebites. For twenty-five minutes before the school bell rang at a quarter past nine Mr Dammery heard us recite all that was in their leaflet, and at the examination I did him proud. How is it then I've forgotten all the tables of alcoholic content I learned, and care not a fig what chemical information the labels on bottles convey? I tell you this. There is one thing I do remember from my Rechebite novitiate:

Nerissa: How like you the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew?

Portia: Very vilely in the morning when he is sober, and most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk.

.It wasn't the drink that went to my head, nor was it the Rechebite doctrine, but SHAKESPEARE intoxicated me; and, chosen to play Richard to Molly Mortimer's Anne in the funeral scene of Richard 3, I drank the Amreeth cup of beatitude. How I pronounced the line -

I'll have her; but I will not keep her long.

But for the Rechebites, gentlemen, I wouldn't be here tonight. I owe my vocation to the Rechebites. That is beyond dispute. The puzzle is to know how Shakespeare got into that pamphlet. But surely it was Crabtree's work.

Naturally it came as a shock to Crabtree, his being invited to address the Rechebites and so it would to any vintner. His first thought was:

*They take me for Doctor Bowdler, I suppose;
But we are spirits of another kind.*

I tell you candidly, but in strict confidence there was little love lost between the two. Neither could quite forgive the other for being born in 1754, since, both were convinced that in any one year two legends made one too many. However it occurred to Orabtree in a flash that Thomas Bowdler had some years ago gone to his last reward, which altered things. At such times he reverted to his old Methodist habit of ejaculatory prayer. He bowed his head -

The Lord taketh away; the Lord giveth. Blessed be the name of the Lord. I'll go myself.

What else could he say? Hadn't Bowdler done the best he could for Shakespeare? Perhaps even at this late hour something might be done for him and the Rechebites at one and the same time. It has come to my ears that for a day and a half Joseph Crabtree thought of going over to The Oxford Movement, and having a Mass said for dear .Bowdler's happy repose, before realizing that Schelling and Schlegel .and transcendentalism had been more than enough to convert the Unitarian Coleridge to a Trinitarian and our greatest Shakespeare critic. I have not been able to dig up the text of his inaugural lecture, but his concluding lines have been preserved:

*The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
For he on honey dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of paradise.*

Rechebites aren't very good at blank verse, therefore no one but Crabtree himself noticed the irregular prosody. He was of course forced to it. He couldn't risk the Rechebites' supposing it was the drink made the poet imagine -a bush as a bear, and neither could he let slip the opportunity of turning to advantage Coleridge's inspired distraction - that precious image of transcendency whose esoteric meaning is: It doesn't matter a damn what liquor you
drink, provided you sip on the Amreeta cup of beatitude.

The classical form of the oration requires that the orator should anticipate and answer objections, but, seeing that there can be no objections, the injunction is in this case null and void. As for the peroration Quintillian calls for ... maybe there are some questions? Only remember: Now that I've proved myself not innocent of prophesy which is to say guilty of prophesy - you'll have to expect what you don't want to hear

....oOo....

