

15  
JOSEPH CRABTREE AND THE NORTH  
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It is a reasonable inference that Crabtree in his early years at Chipping Sodbury became acquainted with the world of Northern letters, simply because this was a subject much discussed in the periodical literature of the time. His interest would certainly have been aroused, for example, by reading an old number of *The Monthly Review* (1758), in which a writer pointed out that it was 'mere calumny to accuse the Icelanders of addiction to brandy'. Later on it must have amused him hugely to see his own ornate and ceremonious version of a popular low ballad unceremoniously lifted by Mathias in his *Runic Odes*, published in 1781. Mathias printed, in what purported to be a translation from Icelandic, these lines:

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

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

In the *Monthly Review* (1758) the author of *The Runic Odes* (1781) speaks of the support the study of antiquities receives in Denmark while, as he says, 'in Great Britain the best and most curious manuscripts are allowed to rot in silence'. Beside these words in the British Museum copy there is pencilled in, in a hand suspiciously like Crabtree's, the following lines: sec.ega96 Tf 1 6areeh Mu16.3(ee)-1.7(s)3.4(u)-5.9(s)3.4(p)-b-252.0(th)6.9o



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, Crabtree's hostess, Fru Marichen Ibsen, was not a light woman, far from it, but with Crabtree in his prime and, as his Latin showed, in such potent, creative mood, she really had very little say in the matter; and perhaps, who knows, she had some prophetic stirrings within her, longings that might well be termed immortal, some dim apprehension that, coupled with Crabtree now, her name would also be coupled with his forever. Crabtree seems to have thought well of the experience himself, because it was in his fervour on this occasion that he let fall words that expressed the wish that the Norwegian night he was enjoying so much might last for centuries.

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