

The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter)
Tenth Anniversary Oration
Knowing Crabtree – Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit?

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February 1985

Crabtree Orators are customarily humble. It is with extraordinary humility that an Orator on the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Australian Chapter should approach his task; for this is not an ordinary occasion. The years of Crabtree scholarship under the Southern Cross have given his admirers a rich and various insight into Joseph Crabtree's contribution to the life and letters of his times. This year I wish to pause. My purpose will be not so much to give you further evidence in favour of a proposition that no person of discernment and sufficient acquaintance with Crabtree disputes: namely, that Joseph Crabtree is less well known than his great accomplishments deserve. Rather, in the perennial absence of the Living Burden, which is to say in the presence of the Living Absence, my own burden will be to look backwards and forwards, and sometimes sidelong, at the nature of Crabtree scholarship. I wish to ask how we come to know Crabtree as we do, and what we say to ourselves when, not to put too straight an edge on it, we lie in our beds having devoted an evening to siring the scion of Chipping Sodbury.

The climate of scholarship in 1985 is very different from that in which the Australian Chapter was planted and in which it flourished. If the drought did for just a few years bake the earth of Boorookpi, it has intensified for the kind of scholarly devotion to which, by our membership of this Foundation, we are committed. Our particular grove in academe would resemble rather a scorched earth were we to allow the armies of the right and the left about turn to pass our way. Were the tender plant of Crabtree scholarship to depend for its succour on the climate of these times, how shriveled it would be. Whence comes the nourishment to bring this flower to life? Not, we must say, from the self-proclaimed apostles of "relevance to a post-industrial society". Shakespeare, in the full bloom of the English Renaissance, could write in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with optimism of the poet's special place in the creation of knowledge. We, in our time, must take a more calculated view of the popular conception of our studies, adapting Shakespeare's words thus:

*The scholar, the researcher and the thinker
Are in popular imagination all compact:
One sees more facts than all vast volumes hold,
That is, the scholar; the researcher all as frantic
Sees hypotheses in a sow's ear (but fails the purse);
The thinker's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from this to that, from that to this
And, as all theorizing bodies forth
The prestidigitation of facts unknown, the thinker's pen
Turns them to books, and he receives for all his work
A local reputation as a pain.*

Those of subfusc sensibility will view our St. Valentine's celebration as indeed a high summer night's dream for lovers, lunatics and poets. They will see the Crabtree vision as a baseless fabric from which no academic gown could properly be made. They will quote Parmenides: *ex nihilo nihil fit*. They will quote King Lear: 'Nothing will come of nothing'. It is my duty this summer night (Mr. President) to examine these melancholy notions. It is a duty we owe to Crabtree and to ourselves.

Joseph Crabtree certainly did not make it easy for us. There can be no doubt that he took great delight in arranging his legacy of mask and masquerade to posterity. No American president he, Crabtree entertained no wish to erect libraries of documentation and monuments of attributable achievement that would give his name a running title in the literary and intellectual histories of his time. In part this was born of a certain modesty, the clearest evidence for which is his well-attested refusal to put his name to many of the works he published. More important than this modesty, however, was his desire to entertain. What more subtle game could he play with the present and the future than to leave both scratching their heads over who he was and who he wasn't, about what he wrote and what he didn't write, and about what he did and what he didn't do. The contradictions in Crabtree are among his most stimulating characteristics.

Professor Bradley has shown, for example, how Crabtree would disagree with his own credo very passionately, and how this "robust" stylist nevertheless preferred feminine endings. Our late Living Memory referred to Crabtree's adeptness - "for very good reasons" - at disguising his name. This he often did by punning on it, concocting obscure anagrams, and hiding in the forests of English and foreign arboreal vocabularies. For by confusing the words Crabtree well knew he could confuse ordinary men's heads. He played these games even with his own friends. To the great bewilderment and frustration of his many traveling companions on those journeys to the Lake District, Scotland, the Continent and elsewhere, Crabtree traveling north could encounter Crabtree traveling south, stop for a vigorous disputation or a quiet chat, and then set off in any direction at all with not a sign of embarrassment or a hint of inconsistency. Indeed, lost in admiration for what looked like his own back retreating into the distance, and dropping into the broad West Country dialect of his youth, he would say with heavy emphasis: "There be two CRABS in this TREE"; or even more inscrutably, "That BE CREAT'R I sh'd like to know mor' on". The journey resumed, even his friends were uncertain which of the two Crabs now accompanied them. Distinguishing the real Crabtree was then, and remains now, infernally difficult.

On certain matters, it is quite true, he never wavered in the vigour of his opinion or his desire to be identified with it. Two of them are instructive. Like many perspicacious minds of his time, Crabtree loathed Napoleon. If Napoleon had been a vacuum, Crabtree's nature would have abhorred it, and according to the teaching of the time, rushed in and filled it up with matter more to his liking. This is why, as Dr. Coogan has shown us, he put so much energy into masterminding the French defeat by Wellesley in the Peninsular War. Though he could take no overt part in the politics of this operation, Crabtree had nevertheless to make his views on the French upstart very plain.

For into the London literary circles of which he was so luminous a member would ripely drop from time to time a woman of ancient Nottinghamshire stock whose morals and whose views on practically everything Crabtree could not abide. Nor did she have other redeeming

qualities: on hearing of her death Charles Lamb muttered “What an ugly ghost she will make”. Now this person was, the biographies tell us, a writer of macaronic verse. In this verse - like the Italian dish - the etymological roots and endings become so entangled it is impossible to separate a Continental from an English or a feminine from a neutered. It was awful. Crabtree had to say so as loudly as he could because, hoist on his own petard of anonymity, certain gossips attributed some of the verse to him. Not only that, but this woman so worshipped Napoleon that in 1810, when there was some talk of the likelihood of a French invasion, she declared she would welcome Napoleon to her bosom as the saviour of England.

I imagine Crabtree thought this to be the best ending for both of them, but he was not to be allowed to indulge such purely private fantasies. Crabtree was in trouble. With some irony, the fount of this trouble was a name - this woman’s name. It was Anne Plumptre. With all this flour and egg the gutter wits of the Macaroni Club in St. James’s could easily, so to speak, make bricks, and this they did. The song that survives takes us straight to the heart of the Crabtree enigma. I have been unable to discover the tune to which it was sung, so I shall sing it for you to the 1826 setting by Schubert that is nowadays best known:

Who is Crabtree? What is he?
His roots are in his endings - blendings;
Where is Crabtree? He’s under the Plumptre,
A-gasping in pentameters - an amateur
Rhymester he, hiding in Miss Plumptre
A-waiting for the climax - in iambics (or trochaics) - in a real fix
-as this line pants endlessly along ... ah.

Nothing could make Crabtree so angry as these scurrilous (not to say distasteful) attempts to entangle him with Anne Plumptre. Unless, of course, it was an attack on his deeply held conviction that the phlogiston theory of combustion was wholly defensible. This fire-lock in Crabtree’s intellectual musket was first revealed by the distinguished physicist Professor R. V. Jones. He and subsequent Orators have seen in it evidence only of Crabtree’s “robust” view of science as an excuse for “verbal disputation ... perhaps supported by physical violence”. This conclusion is certainly justified, as we shall see; but the phlogiston affray has a deeper significance for those who would try to know Crabtree. Phlogiston was as important to him as his reputation (the Plumptre connection excepted) was not.

When engaged in these fierce disputations about phlogiston, the more astute scientists and philosophers of his acquaintance would ask Crabtree a question which should set all Crabtree scholars thinking very deeply. The question was this: ‘To what do you refer when you speak so feelingly of phlogiston?’. Now Crabtree knew, as most of us do, how Dr. Johnson tried to refute Bishop Berkeley’s doubts about the material existence of things. Johnson’s answer, his carefully fostered reputation as a verbal pundit quite thrust aside by the difficulty of the question, was a very physical one. He simply kicked that stone, the best known physical object in metaphysics. Everybody knows this story because it appeals to the base imagination in us all. How much more complete and accurate a view of how we know was Crabtree’s riposte to Joseph Priestley himself, when, at a dinner in 1779, Priestley taxed him with that dreadful question: ‘To what do you refer, Mr. Crabtree, when you speak of phlogiston?’ Quickly warming some brandy in a pewter dish over the candles on the dinner table, Crabtree set it alight and threw it over his

tormentor, uttering what was to be a prophetic and fearful cry:

“Does fire-light travel in straight lines? PHLOX VOBISCUM!”

This Latinate quip, when freely rendered into English, has the character both of a blood-curdling curse and the most icily detached and verifiable of phenomenal observations: ‘The flame of Phlog be upon you!’ Nobody in the company could deny it - least of all Priestley, who also felt it very deeply. Thus began that train of events, described by Professor Jones, which led to Crabtree inciting the mob to burn down Priestley’s house in 1791.

No doubt under the circumstances neither Priestley nor anyone else pondered the significance of that reference to fire-light: “Does fire-light travel in straight lines?” If they had, they would have written it off as a Crabtree eccentricity - words, mere words. Knowing Crabtree’s reverence for Newton as we do, these words should not be interpreted as questioning the belief that light travels in straight lines. Crabtree was not suggesting that light rays bend when they pass close to the massy intellect of a Priestley. Rather, he was drawing attention to the fact that those who sneered at his own faith in phlogiston themselves trusted implicitly in that apparently universal truth about light. At bottom, Crabtree was suggesting, there was no difference between the accuser and the accused.

Anybody who knows Crabtree well knows that when he got warmed up there could be no brandy without fire. The modern firebrand of the philosophy of science, Paul Feyerabend, is in this respect the intellectual descendent of Crabtree. I doubt that Feyerabend supports the phlogiston theory of combustion, but he does believe that alchemy and astrology are not so much burnt-out theories as “interrupted research programmes” which may, in time, rise like the Phoenix. Fire, in the Crabtree cosmology, as in the Australian bush, is the agent of regeneration.

Crabtree’s point, I say, is an important one. Is it not so that many scholars who believe that Shakespeare’s plays were written not by Bacon but by Shakespeare are the same scholars who unquestioningly accept that all Wordsworth’s verse was written by Wordsworth? All our knowledge, gentlemen, is leavened with a good dollop of faith and a fair measure of quite unjustified certainty.

I have spoken of the confusions over Crabtree’s self and his name, and of the contusions over phlogiston. Here are two instances of the problem of knowledge with which Crabtree was intimately concerned, and which similarly concern us. As that scurrilous song at once so pertinently and impertinently asked: ‘Who is Crabtree? What is he?’ What of that shadowy Crab who so constantly crosses Joseph’s path and with whom he often walked and talked to the perplexity of his friends? How do we cope with Crabtree’s strenuous efforts to subvert both himself and any enquiry into him? How could we even be sure that we had the real Crabtree were we to travel back in time and confront his real presence?

In his sublime 1980 Oration, Professor David Bradley spoke of the great care previous Orators had devoted, as he said, to “embroidering their hypotheses with circumstantial detail into every appearance of fact”. Circumstantial evidence, no matter how detailed, can easily deceive. With this judgement we must concur - as we shall see. But then Professor Bradley went on to suggest that there is a way of finding the real Crabtree. Quoting Goethe (who was well

known to Crabtree) he said the object of literary scholarship is “to perceive the thing in itself as it really is”. But I wonder whether we can ever expect to know Crabtree in himself as he really is. The paradox of such perfect knowledge is that there should no longer be any occasion for further study. The knowledge of Crabtree as he really is would be the death of Crabtree as he really was.

Dr. Johnson, whose much vaunted powers of discrimination and close scholarship did not prevent him from being plain wrong about many things, was unequal to the task that Professor Bradley sets us. When he stubbed his toe on the youthful Crabtree’s verse, Johnson thought it was Churchill’s. Our late Living Memory, in describing this incident, judged the Doctor to have been the victim of what he felicitously called “a confusion of layers of reference”. The prehensile mind that can grasp the reality of a stone, we conclude, is unequal to a Crabtree.

“A confusion of layers of reference”. Sir Ifor Evans has acknowledged being distracted in his own investigations by the poet George Crabbe, born in the same year, 1754, as Joseph Crabtree. But the facts of George Crabbe’s life are for the most part very different from those of Crabtree’s. We can quite safely now set Crabbe aside. But what other layers of referential confusion there are! Mr. President, Gentlemen, I have now to place before the Australian Chapter of the Crabtree Foundation a list of facts. You will no doubt recognise many of them. As I recount them, you should ponder deeply on how we came to know these things.

Our subject was an intimate of Wordsworth, Coleridge and the others of that circle, accompanying Wordsworth on many tours to Scotland (where they often visited Sir Walter Scott), and to the Continent. Both in England and on the Continent he was widely known in intellectual circles as a great proselytiser of Wordsworth’s poetry and Newton’s science. Modest about his own attainments, he published few of his many works under his own name, preferring to remain anonymous and to allow such distinguished persons as Mine. de Stael and Sir Humphrey Davy to draw upon his literary, scientific and philosophical talents. His religious views were strongly non-conformist and he gave much energy to certain Dissenting causes. He had a distinguished career at the Bar, and used to say that two of the wisest acts he had ever performed were going to the Bar and quitting the Bar. He was a journalist of such outstanding capability that he instituted certain journalistic procedures that are with us to this day. He followed public affairs keenly and witnessed many stirring events of his time at first hand. He was, for example, present at Corunna in the Peninsular War against Napoleon. He was even hunted as a spy by governments under the Napoleonic heel. Ever unorthodox in some of his opinions, he dabbled for a time in mesmerism and phrenology: he knew Harriet Martineau well. He was a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, and of the British Association. He frequently attended the Royal Society, and was deeply interested in Faraday’s work, which he praised highly. He was a Founder Member of the Athenaeum. His contribution to education was extremely important: marrying his dissenting views to his passion for freedom of thought, he was one of the founders of University College, London. Gentlemen, upon Wordsworth’s death he stepped in and took the keenest interest in the welfare of Annette Vallon’s child.

Why, you ask, do I rehearse this long list of well-known facts culled from the Orations of the past? Now, were Joseph Priestley or Bertrand Russell with us tonight under a misapprehension, they would say that not one of these statements truly refers. Russell would say that they are all ‘Pickwickian’, like Mr. Pickwick himself or the unicorn or Harry Flashman,

whose exploits after his expulsion from Rugby have been so carefully and brilliantly chronicled by Mr. George McDonald Fraser. Is there not a member of the Crabtree Foundation in this room this evening who does not secretly in his innermost soul think that Bertrand Russell is right? These, you say, are the bold conjectures and what Professor Bradley described as part of our “rich legacy of imaginative reconstruction” so carefully embroidered with circumstantial detail. These facts are not real facts. How is it, then, that Orators of the past have discovered them?

Mr. President, Gentlemen, it is for me to tell you that not one of these facts has been taken from the pages of a previous Crabtree Oration. All of them will be found to be well attested in diaries and in works of scholarship freely available in our libraries. Moreover, all of them refer to just one man -who is not Joseph Crabtree. That man we have already met this evening coming south - or north. The man we saw in such close consultation with Joseph Crabtree, the second crab in that tree, was Henry Crabb Robinson - Henry Crabb Robinson, whose life spanned ninety-two years from 1775 to 1867, whose likeness will be found on the wall in Dr. Williams’s Library within the precincts of University College, London, and who was affectionately known to his friends as Crabb.

Lest you should think that it has fallen to this Orator to reveal the real Crabtree in himself as he is (or was), let me immediately deny any such intention. In noticing the remarkable similarity in the careers, accomplishments and interests of Crabb Robinson and Joseph Crabtree, one must nevertheless expect that these two men, who were so often in one another’s company, should have both been present at many of the occasions Crabtree scholars have so amazingly reconstructed. This task of historical reconstruction, as Crabtree intended, is made to that degree more difficult. If Crabb Robinson were wont to hide his light under a bushel, Crabtree made signal use of a silo. One should not therefore be too distracted by Crabb Robinson. At the same time, the life of Crabb Robinson and the scholarship that has been devoted to rescuing this illustrious gentleman from the obscurity into which he has slipped serves as a reminder to Crabtree scholars that the imagination, while absolutely central to fine scholarship, must be subjected to the most scrupulous of critical faculties if Crabtree and Crabb Robinson are not to become utterly confused.

A matter of even more ghastly complexity lurks behind a panel of this room in which we annually feast Joseph Crabtree. I have already raised at this feast the spectre of Lord Russell. Russell would say of Crabtree (to adopt the harsh language of modern philosophy) that Crabfacts are not like ordinary facts and Crab-statements are quite different from ordinary statements. Crab-statements are intended in some Pickwickian sense or Crab-sense. The late Professor Gilbert Ryle of that home of lost causes, Oxford, would say that statements about Joseph Crabtree are examples of what he called “systematically misleading expressions”. That great Professor tells us that a statement about Mr. Pickwick does not “really record, as it appears to record, a fact of the same sort” as a statement about Mr. Stanley Baldwin. Crabtree, of course, did systematically mislead us. But that must not be confused with the tenor of our own statements about Crabtree - or Pickwick. Mr. President, let me solemnly aver that nothing that I have to say is intended to be systematically misleading to anyone. I can find no fundamental distinction between the mood of statements I might make about Crabb Robinson or Stanley Baldwin, and those I might make about Joseph Crabtree or Mr. Pickwick.

What do I say to myself when a sceptic questions my statements about Crabtree - when he

says, 'To whom do you refer when you speak of Crabtree?' Having no brandy at hand nor any ripe apples drop about my head to use in the vigorous Crabtree style of disputation, and not wishing to sidle into the nearest crevice, there to glare and claw, I must call on other resources, resources which Crabtree himself often chose not to use.

Let us imagine that some latter day Buonapartist did invade us, and, discovering happily that all Crabb Robinson archives' and references to him had foolishly been committed to computer tape or floppy disk, wiped this other enemy of Napoleon's from the megabytes of history at the touch of a DELETE or KILL function key. By what test, I ask, could a Buonapartist thought-policeman or a Gilbert Ryle distinguish the subsequent statements of Crabb Robinson scholars from those now made by students of Joseph Crabtree? I believe there is none - just so long as these statements do not claim the absolute certainty of knowing Crabb Robinson in himself as he really is. We need only demand: 'How do you make sense of this or that *without* Crabb? I 'cannot refute my imaginative conjecture; it is for you to try'. So it is with Joseph Crabtree.

If we abandon our obsession with the thing in itself, if we accept that all our knowledge is Pickwickian in some degree, Crabtree studies will then stand out as a model for all, enquiry. As my learned friend Professor Donald Hirsch of the University of Virginia has so cogently argued in his F.W. Bateson Memorial Lecture at Oxford University, all our attempts to refer have an allegorical dimension. If the scientist's or scholar's statements lacked any allegory, if they were wholly literal, then the scientist and the scholar would be hats. "All ongoing science", concludes Professor Hirsch, "is provisional, which is to say, Pickwickian and allegorical".

Indeed, it was at that famous meeting of the Pickwick Club on May 12th, 1827, when the Pickwickian sense of 'humbug' was born, that the Crabtree Foundation truly began. Dickens tells us it was a Mr. Blotton of Aldgate who so successfully deflated the orotund pomposities of the rotund Mr. Pickwick. It will be remembered that Pickwick was describing the dreadful dangers of traveling in England in the pursuit of knowledge when a voice cried 'No'. In the ensuing melee of the Chair, Pickwick challenged that dissenter to admit to jealousy over the great Pickwick's discovery of the source of the mighty Hampstead Ponds and over his Theory of Tittlebats. Little did Pickwick know he was engaging with a man whose contribution to our understanding of knowledge was to be as significant as was Pickwick's own personification of useless knowledge. If I am not much mistaken, he had engaged the man who, as Dr. Coogan has shown, had gone so much further than the Hampstead Ponds - had, indeed, traced to their fecund source the Norfolk broads. Pickwick had to compromise with good grace when, by the declaration that 'humbug' was intended in its Pickwickian sense, he was given an epistemological let-out as significant to scholarship as his eponymous immortality must have become gratifying to his transcendental ego. That arbo-real alder man from Aldgate was surely Crabtree under yet another dendriform sobriquet. This much I conjecture. Let he who would refute it do so. Should this refutation take place, Mr. President, I solemnly undertake on a Wednesday nearest St. Valentine, and before this company assembled, to eat my two crabs.

'Humbug'. What better word could we find for summing up Crabtree's mood as he considered much of what passed for scholarship at the Pickwick Club and elsewhere. The spirit of Crabtree was a contrary spirit. As he obscured and subverted his own identity, he took it upon himself to be a foil to much of the conventional scholarship of his day. In this he was at one

with Crabb

Robinson, whose diary records his dissatisfaction with much of what he heard at the Society of Antiquaries and also in the forum of the Royal Society. Crabb Robinson writes:

Two very insignificant little papers were read, from neither of which did I collect a thought ... No attempt to draw an inference, historical or otherwise, from any one article. After one dull half hour was elapsed, another still duller succeeded, for then Amyot took me as a guest to the Royal Society ... Some chemical substance was the subject of admeasurement, and there was something about some millionth parts of an inch.

Both Crabs knew that neither arcane facts alone nor imaginative hypotheses alone enable one to “collect a thought” or “draw an inference”. Something needs to be disputed, debated or discussed. Without Crabtree the battle for oxygen would not have been won so quickly as it was. The Crabtree foil was a falx in the defense of calx.

It was, you will now agree, this contrary, subversive spirit of Crabtree that Created a great deal out of the ashes of the phlogiston dispute. If, indeed, phlogiston is nothing, if it does not exist, how could Crabtree make so much of moment from it? It was not from phlogiston itself as it really isn't that anything came, but from the dispute about it. As Niels Bohr remarked, “It is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how Nature is. Physics concerns what we can say about nature”. In trying to say - to capture sense in words - we create our candidates for knowledge and open them up to disputation and discussion. It was not in a laboratory but in discussion with a colleague that Murray Gell-Mann in 1963 began the creation of those highly coloured and richly flavoured allegories - the quarks that scud from top to bottom

It is not Bottom, or Crab masquerading as Quince, or even Quince masquerading as Prologue who shows us the way of these things. It is Theseus, in those lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I so cruelly mutilated earlier this evening, who gives us the secret. Becher the progenitor and Stahl the creator of the phlogiston theory must wisely have followed Shakespeare rather than Parmenides' dictum ex nihilo nihil fit. The concluding lines of Theseus' speech are these:

*The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.*

Parmenides said “We cannot speak of what is not”. In these lines Theseus gives him the retort courteous; Becher, Stahl, Newton, Lavoisier, Priestley himself, Einstein and countless others give him the lie direct. To Joseph Crabtree fell the no less important honour of providing the countercheck quarrelsome, and perhaps also the lie with circumstance - since Crabtree was commonly to be found in recumbent circumstances. The members of the Crabtree Foundation, you will agree, must supply the quip modest and the reproof valiant should the sceptics of whom

I have spoken come to quarrel by the Parmenidean book.

It was because Crabtree thought that words and playing with words are so important to knowledge that he refused to cash his counterchecks quarrelsome in the learning exchanges of the world. His position, because it was so far ahead of his time, was and widely remains to this day unpopular and even threatening to those members of the academic community who will grasp at any straw rather than admit it is in language that our best scholarship and science begins the imaginative construction of something out of nothing. We must all lean heavily on this equivocal, contrary Crabcounter when we pay our intellectual debts. I shall conclude by giving you just a few examples of the operation of this Crabtree spirit in scholarship.

My first example emphasises how the failure to take the forms and circumstances of words sufficiently into account can lead to the most appalling errors of scholarly judgement. Crabtree had died before the great eruptions on the origins of man rocked nineteenth century Europe. In 1876 Ernst Haeckel coined the name *Pithecanthropus* for a hypothetical missing link between the apes and man. The debates over *Pithecanthropus* were, of course, taken up almost everywhere, not least in that area of western Victoria around Lake Charliegrark where Crabtree had sojourned for some time. (In passing, I should mention that this was the only time Crabtree doubted his intuition about the sheer wrong-headedness of Parmenides' epigram. Travelling through the settlement of Nhill the dreadful but, as it turned out, inaccurate tautology struck him - Nothing can come of Nhill.) The west and north-west of Victoria are important to the debates about the origins of man because this region contains sites of some interest. There palaeontologists have been unearthing what some think to be clear evidence of an early hominid previously . unknown.

Some years ago in a notorious broadcast, the A.B.C. Science Show concluded that these claims of a new hominid were justified. Here lived no *Pithecanthropus*, it was argued, because the remains of what turned out to be small metal cans were excavated. In deference to the evidence of these cans a new hominid was added to the evolutionary record: *Homo micturans*, which is to say Urinating Man. Now we know the drinking customs of journalists and pamphleteers, so I can only conclude that this, combined with the overweened desire to add something new to knowledge and the scientist's obsession with Latinisms, completely deafened Mr. Robyn Williams to the evidence of his own or others' lips. This hominid was not new at all, but the same *Pithecanthropus* in a common but hitherto unrecognised state. Somebody using Crabtree principles stumbled to the error. I found written on the wall of an old bush hut near Nhill this verse, which makes it all quite clear:

We know the bibulous pamphleteer
Boasts a scholarly veneer;
Still, you do feel for a man who unnerstans
Piscanth'pus to be Homo-er-m icturans.

'Homo micturans' is no more than *Pithecanthropus* in his cans.

My second example of the Crabtree principle at work focuses on that contrary spirit of Crabtree of which I have spoken. I hesitate to claim it as a universal principle of knowledge and form, as the unintelligible Hegel did for his version of it in the dialectic of thesis and antithesis.

It is nevertheless widely to be found. As students of such diverse subjects as Rugby football and the music of J. S. Bach well know, for every punt there must, betimes, be a contrapunt.

It is in the discipline of biochemistry that we find a truly serendipitous manifestation of this principle. Even a member of the Crabtree Foundation must acknowledge that much of the pioneering work in this discipline was performed by a Frenchman. I refer to Louis Pasteur. Among his contributions to the understanding of carbohydrate metabolism is one generally known as the Pasteur Effect. This is a process in which fermentation is severely inhibited by the action of oxygen. In 1929 the pages of *The Biochemical Journal* revealed what all readers of Crabtree's 'Ode on Claret' must regard as a more sobering process. This one reverses the Pasteur Effect, showing that under certain conditions fermentation inhibits the consumption of oxygen in animal tissue. It will come as no surprise to you that this latter effect was discovered by an Englishman. For this reason it became known in France as the 'contre-effet Pasteur'. Nor will you be surprised to learn that the 'contre-effet Pasteur' is known to English-speaking biochemists as the Crabtree Effect.

I do not know whether its author, Herbert Grace Crabtree, was a descendent of Joseph's. Indeed I do not see that it particularly matters. What matters is that the general principle of the counter-effect, what all of us should henceforth be proud to call the Crabtree Effect, has been firmly established in nature by one of the modern disciplines of knowledge. My only regret, Mr. President, is that Herbert Grace Crabtree did not sufficiently defer to the spirit of his namesake to call the oxygen inhibition he noticed the 'contre-effet phlogiston'.

This evening's journey in quest of Crabtree ends, as it should, with a poetical debt William Wordsworth owes him. The market town of Chipping Sodbury in which Crabtree was raised was no stranger to the kind of hard, disputatious bargaining that Crabtree was to make his own trademark in literary and scientific circles. The name 'Chipping', in fact, comes from the Old English verb 'ceap', which means 'to bargain'. But Crabtree, like Wordsworth, was also to learn the value of the virgin woods, in which he used to roam as a boy careless of the contretemps of town and city life.

Eventually, however, there developed a conflict. Crabtree knew he could earn a little pocket money and a great deal of compliance from the younger beauties of the town if he were to bring back from his rambles a goodly supply of hazel and other nuts. Thus was born the conflict between his wish not to ravish the woods and his desire to be ravished by the blushes of those damsels. The conflict was resolved years later in a poem of 1799, usually attributed to Wordsworth. In the poem he tells how he set out with a nutting-crook to gather the nuts. The imagery of this escapade is unmistakable: pulling down the boughs, he ravished, deformed, sullied and mutilated those trees. The poem concludes,

*Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch - for there is a spirit in the woods.*

I do not really doubt that Crabtree kept his nuts despite the heart-felt plea of the closing lines. But Crabtree had much more than nuts - he had in these words created for himself a new understanding of nature, a new allegory, new knowledge. And for us, the readers, he has lain Parmenides to rest. For has he not shown in these lines an important and an enduring truth - the truth that Something can come of 'Nutting'.

When the condition of English life and institutions in 1802 so angered Wordsworth, that poet wrote a stirring invocation:

*Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee.*

Now, in these troubled times for academe, we could so easily be persuaded to forfeit our ancient dower. But the members of the Crabtree Foundation are singularly fortunate. For we are vouchsafed a clearer vision of what might happen around us. We can see what J.M. Synge, the author of *Playboy of the Western World*, saw when, as seems probable, he suggested to W.B. Yeats: the rest lack all conviction, just watch the centre fold. In that revelation of intellectual nakedness only Crabtree men shall be able to assert their passionate ardour for dispassionate knowledge with vigour and confidence:

Crabtree! thou art living at this hour.

We are able to say this with ringing conviction because we know, Mr. President,

Crabtree, thou art ...