The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter)
1999 Annual Oration

First Light In Nuristan: Crabtree's Contributions To The Development Of The Society And Religion Of The Kafirs Of The Hindu Kush.

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Mr President, *Elders,* Scholars --

It is with trepidation that an obscure Scholar such as you see before you rises to address so august a gathering. I am deeply honoured to have been entrusted with the task of delivering this year's Oration and with the duty of throwing new light on the life and career of Joseph Crabtree in whose honour we are gathered here this evening. As it happens, when this honour was thrust upon me at this time last year, I was neither present not consulted. It would have been a little difficult to do so because I was at that time journeying by camel across the Rajasthan desert, out of reach of modern means of communication. But I had not forgotten Crabtree. I have long been interested in his career in the Orient and particularly in India and the adjacent countries and I was relishing the chance of doing a little Crabtonian field work in those regions. This evening I hope to reveal to you the results of those researches.

I thought we might begin with a passage from Kipling:

They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning it's the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two-and-thirty heathen idols there, and we'll be the thirty-third and fourth. It's a mountainous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful. (Kipling 1895:212.)

Kipling was born eleven years after Crabtree's death and did not publish the passage I have quoted until 1890. Why then, quote him? That, among other things, I shall reveal this evening.

Kipling did not know much about Kafiristan. Even in his time few did. He knew correctly that it was in north-east Afghanistan, mountainous, heathen, and that its women had a reputation for beauty. Only one European succeeded in spending any length of time in Kafiristan, and leaving a reliable account of the place. He was Sir George Scott Roberston, who spent a year there in 1890-1, and whose wonderfully readable book, *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, published in 1896, remains to this day by far the most important source of information on the pre-Islamic culture of the area. For in the very year that Robertson's book was published, Kafiristan was invaded by the Amir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rehman Khan. The Kafirs were forcibly converted to Islam and their idols and way of life destroyed for ever. Abdur Rebman renamed the country Nuristan, the Land of Light, by which name it is known today.

But Robertson was not the only European to have visited Kafiristan, nor was his visit of any long-term importance to the culture of the country, so soon to be obliterated. I can now reveal that Joseph Crabtree spent many months there as a young man in 1779. His visit to Kafiristan and its effects are my subject this evening.

Before Robertson almost all the information on Kafiristan available to Westerners came from Kafirs who had ventured out of their mountains into Afghan territory or from Afghans or Hindus who, at risk of their lives, had ventured into Kafiristan in war parties or to trade.

It was known from these accounts, and from the painful experience of contact with them, that the Kafirs were a violent people given to murderous forays into the neighbouring countries, that they had not seen the light of Islam but had many gods and worshipped idols, that they made intoxicating wines, that they were remarkably fair-skinned, and that their women were both beautiful — and notoriously unchaste.

Most of these characteristics, it will be noted, would appeal to a man like Crabtree. It is easy to see why he might have wished to go to Kafiristan to explore these possibilities for himself. But how did it come about that Crabtree found himself in that part of the world at all?

Thanks to McGrath's 1992 revelations we know that Crabtree spent time working for, or at least in, the Honourable East India Company, whose service he entered in 1781 (McGrath 1992:2). What McGrath did not reveal was that young Joseph had had close contact with the company's servants when he went to Calcutta three years prevously intending to make his fortune there as an independent trader. He was at that time twenty-four (incidentally the same age as I was when I first went to work in that city 186 years later) . It was his Calcutta experience that convinced Crabtree that it was only by joining the Company's service that a fortune could quickly be made in the East.

We may join young Crabtree in hot and steamy Calcutta in the days when the Company servants, if they survived their first two monsoons (and it was a very big if), could reasonably hope to return home as rich nabobs with a fortune made by 'shaking the pagoda tree'. Clive had conquered Bengal only 20 years before. In 1778, when Crabtree arrived, Warren Hastings, the first British Governor-General, had held his office for some four years and was succeeding only with difficulty in bringing order to the unseemly and ruthless scramble for wealth which had succeeded the Honourable Company's conquest of what had been the richest province of the Mughal Empire. A respectable Calcutta society was just beginning to establish itself. The veneer was thin. While fortunes were quickly made, they were quickly lost. The unhealthy climate, fever, gambling, whoring and duelling took their toll.

Crabtree was not long there. He immediately became friends with some of the wildest of the young bloods, including William Hickey, whose Memoirs give us such a vivid picture of those times. And it is to Hickey that we owe one of the few indisputable written references to Crabtree to have survived. Writing of a dinner party given early in 1779 by Daniel Barwell, one of the leaders or *burra sahibs* of Calcutta society, Hickey notes:

In this party I first saw the barbarous custom of pelleting each other with little balls of bread made like pills, across the table, which was even practised by the fair sex. *Some people could discharge them with such force as to cause considerable pain when struck in the face. Mr. Daniel Barwell was such a proficient that he could at the distance of three or four yards snuff a candle, and that several time successively.*

This strange trick, fitter for savages than polished society, produced many quarrels, and at last entirely ceased for the following occurrence: A Captain Morrison had repeatedly expressed

his abhorrence of pelleting, and said that if any person struck him with one he should consider it intended as an insult and resent it acccordingly. In a few minutes after he had so said he received a smart blow in the face from one which, although discharged from a hand below the table, he could trace by the motion of the arm from whence it came, and saw that the pelleter was a very recent acquaintance, a Mr Crabtree. He therefore, without the least hesitation, took up a dish that stood before him and contained a leg of mutton, which he discharged with all his strength at the offender, and with such well-directed aim that it took place upon the head, knocking him off his chair and giving him a severe cut upon the temple. This produced a duel, in which the unfortunate pelleter was shot through the body, lay up on his bed for many months, and never perfectly recovered. This put a complete stop to the absurd practice.
(Hickey, vol II, p.137.)

Hickey's account is not quite accurate. What in fact happened was that Crabtree, who, as you all know, was no mean actor and an adept at creating theatrical effects, fell *as if* shot through the body and was immediately taken from the field by his numerous and well-rewarded if not exactly faithful retainers. He then left Calcutta for the best part of a year until the scandal had died down, pretending all the while that he was confined to bed and too ill to receive visitors. Captain Morrison, instead of attending to Crabtree, had also immediately made himself scarce because Warren Hastings, though himself not above fighting a duel the very next year with his principal lieutenant, Philip Francis, severely discouraged the practice of duelling in others.

It was during this year that Crabtree went to Kafiristan. How did he get there? Following Crabtree's progress across northern India to the mountains beyond the Indus has not proved easy. I have managed to track him only with difficulty, and the picture is not entirely clear. The written record is almost silent. I have had to rely on other methods. One is by following the DNA trail, which delicacy forbids me to describe in detail. Another method is philological.

Those of you who have lived in India will know that it is common to use the word for some animal or living creature as a term of abuse for someone who has offended or annoyed you, the equivalent in purpose of terms like 'fucking loser' or 'fuckwit' which our Australian leaders so elegantly use to describe those with whom they are in disagreement. So *gadha* (donkey), *ullu* (owl), or, in extreme cases, *suer ka bachcha* (son of a pig) are common insults. But not the only ones. In particular districts the word *kékra* (crab) is used to describe someone who is shifty, unreliable, and a particularly unsuitable person to have any acquaintance with your daughter.

Now the remarkable thing is the this term insult *kékra* or crab is found in a narrow band of country, leading first up the Ganges (the principal avenue of communication with the interior of India before the coming of the railways) and then into desert country far from water and where no crabs have ever been found. Why is this and how do we know it? We know it thanks to the work of Professor Shyamsundardas, whose monumental *Hindi Shabd-sagar* (Shyamsundardas 1965-75) analyses the vocabulary of Hindi in terms of the frequency of usage of particular words by geographical area, giving dates for the first recorded usage of each word. There is no evidence that the word *kékra* was used as an insult before 1779.

And the reason, of course, is that *kékra* is *a* translation of the first part of Crabtree's name. The pattern of the word's usage as an insult reveals the route taken by Crabtree through upper India, and eventually to Kafiristan. This is incontrovertably proved by the fact that the

mysterious word term *kreb,* said in *Shabd-sagar* to be of uncertain origin, is in some places substitutued for *kékra,* and very occasionally we find the term *kékra-pèr* which is apparently meaningless but literally translates ‘crabtree’ .

But we must hurry Crabtree on or we shall never reach Kafiristan. Following the trail of insults, we know that Crabtree stopped in Benares (where he acquired a very large number of the silk sarees for which that city is famous) and then proceeded into Hindustan proper, then an anarchic heart of India beyond the Company’s territories, where Marathas, Jats and Afghans fought over the remnants of the Mughal Empire, aided often by European mercenaries some of whom prospered mightily in the general chaos.

One of these adventurers was called Walter Reinhardt, an unpleasant thug of Austrian origin who had deserted the service of the King of France. He is known to history as Sombre or Sumroo, a nickname he had acquired perhaps from his disagreeable personality and grim visage. His career included the killing in cold blood of more than 200 of the Company’s unarmed European servants at Patna in 1763, including 150 personally butchered by himself. He had acquired a private army of mixed European and Indian adventurers and a very large fortune. He died in 1778, less than a year before Crabtree visited Agra, where Sumroo had died, leaving a mad widow of Muslim origin, and a favourite slave girl, who became known as the Begum Sumroo.

The Begum, though but twenty-five, was a powerful personality, so much so, that when her grim partner died, the unruly troops in his force, both European and Indian, unanimously called upon her to command them, which she did with great success. She was then a young and healthy woman, who knew what men were for and provided herself with several ‘husbands’ to provide it. Among them was Crabtree. But once again his stay was brief.

Crabtree, at that time was in the flower of virile youth, and, because it was before the unfortunate loss of one testicle in the Horn of Africa revealed to us by Williams in 1993, still capable of ‘firing with both barrels’, more than satisfied the Begum’s requirements. But, as I have indicated, it was ‘more than’. This had unfortunate repercussions and led to Crabtree’s precipitate flight from the Begum’s palace. Crabtree and another of the Begum’s so-called husbands became involved, I regret to have to reveal, in liaisons with two of the Begum’s female servants.

The Begum Sumroo was not amused. She caught the girls, had them brought into her tent, flogged insensible and then buried alive. She then had her bed placed immediately over the grave and occupied it until the morning to make sure that no attempt to rescue them was made. The result of this, and one or two similar incidents, was that, as the *Gazetteer of the North-Western Provinces* drily observed, ‘she was never afterwards troubled with domestic dissensions.’ (Sleeman 1915:601n.)

Such a lady was not to be fooled around with and Crabtree and his friend fled. But before we leave the Begum, you may be interested to learn that she lived almost as long as Crabtree. She died in 1836 at the age of about 85, greatly rrespected by her numerous European visitors and in high favour with the Church of Rome to which she left the bulk of her estate. This high favour was well-deserved. Her estate proved to be worth £700,000, or about $72 million at today’s values (Sleeman 1915:611n.).

Like Humayun, after his defeat by Sher Shah more than 200 years before, Crabtree and his shadowy companion retreated as quickly as they could across the desert to Sind. At Umarkot in a remote corner of Sind, Humayun's refugee queen gave birth to Akbar, who was to become Akbar the Great, the real founder of the Mughal empire. There too Crabtree discovered some of the secrets of nation-building. Or at least methods of persuading reluctant women to drop their trousers. Rome may have begun its rise to Empire with the rape of the Sabine women; Crabtree's role as a Founding Father began with a Sindhi love charm.

Sind is famous for its aphrodisiac charms and potions. Richard Burton, who was in Sind in the 1840s immediately after its conquest by Sir Charles Napier *(peccavi* Napier that is) was as ever fascinated with such things, and records an example in his *Sindh and the Races which Inhabit the Valley of the Indus.*

Salt is pressed into the service of Cupid in the following manner. On the first Sunday of the month the lover recites these lines seven times over a handfull of salt:

"O salt! O thou salt one! Thou essence of seven seas!
O certain person-- (naming the woman)--eat my salt, and kiss my feet."

The reciter then dissolves the salt in water and drinks it; the consequence of which is that the other party falls violently in love with him .

Should the lady resist these measures, the disappointed lover becomes desperate, and proceeds to extremes. From the harmless specimen subjoined, it will be evident that passion frequently get the better of delicacy. Agath[u] *chinnan*[u] *or "breaking the trowser string", is done by reciting a charm over seven or nine threads of raw cotton, spun by a girl not yet betrothed. The bits are then rolled up and knotted seven times; after which the lady is duly warned of the punishment of disdain. Should she persevere in cruelty, one of the knots is opened, and by a curious coincidence, the string which confines the fair one's trowsers, breaks of itself and leaves that garment unsupported. This operation is repeated till she yields; an event which, says the book that details the plan, may soon be expected*. (Burton 1851:178-9.)

Interested parties may find the description of this charm by consulting the index to the cited edition of Burton's work under 'Trowser strings, breaking of'.

Armed with charms like this, love potions, and his large collection of silk Benares sarees, which he also thought might be useful when it came to ingratiating himself with the fair sex, Crabtree and his companion then took boats and travelled up the Indus as far as the rocky narrows at Attock. There they disembarked under the walls of the looming Mughal fort and travelled by overland to Peshawar, then the winter capital of the Afghan kingdom, and eventually over the dangerous passes to Chitral, that most northerly petty kingdom which lies in the shadow of the great mountain Tirich Mir and the other mountains of the Hindu Kush. Those mountains concealed the inaccessible country of the Kafirs.

Why did Crabtree go to Chitral? No doubt he felt that in so remote a spot he had a chance of evading the vengeful myrmidons employed by the Begum to hunt him down. But it is also possible that, like the conspirators in Kipling's story I quoted at the beginning of this talk, he

had heard tell of Kafiristan, and thought, like them, that he might fill his wildest ambitions there.

The Kafirs, or at any rate hill tribes with similar characteristics , are mentioned in Arrian's accounts of Alexander the Great's advance through the mountains and down into India. Alexander took them to be devotees of Dionysius and sacrificed accordingly. The Kafirs are mentioned by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims journeying to India in the sixth century. Timur Leng (Tamburlaine) invaded their territory in 1398. Humayun's father Babur, the conqueror of Hindustan and first of the Mughal emperors of India, writes in his memoirs of the Kafirs (the name means unbelievers) showing a particular interest in their wines. The Portuguese Jesuit, Benedict de Goès passed by Kafiristan on his way to China in 1602. He liked the Kafir wines, whereas Babur thought them second-rate. But after that there are no records for almost 200 years. (Newby 1958:87).

No records for 200 years, none till the very end of the eighteenth century. Think about that. Kafiristan, a well-watered territory of some 5000 square miles, with a climate mild enough for wine-making, but inhabited by infidel and homicidal raiding tribes, is just north the main road to India from Kabul, Babur's favourite city. Kabul was the ancestral 'home' to the early Mughals and remained an important part of the Mughal empire when that empire was at its height in the seventeenth century. In the middle of the next century the Afghan kingdom, under Abmed Shah Durrani, was all-powerful. Abmed Shah repeatedly invaded India and in 1761 destroyed the Maratha hosts at Panipat near Delhi, slaughtering (according to the *Oxford History of India*) some 200,000 Hindus, so that 'Every tent had heads piled up before the door of it' (Spear 1958:440) . And yet neither the Mughals after Akbar, nor Ahmed Shah, were so much concerned with the Kafirs as to bother to have them mentioned in their records or memoirs, let alone invade their territory. Why not? It can only have been that the Kafirs had declined into insignificance. But then, suddenly at the end of the eighteenth century, with Rennel's 1794 *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan,* Kafiristan begins to be noticed once again and a steady stream of reports on the Kafirs and their customs begins to appear (Elphinstone 1839:373).

Clearly something had happened to revive the Kafir tribes and make them noteworthy. That something was Crabtree's visit.

And when those reports do begin to appear, what do they say? They say that the Kafirs had a remarkable physical resemblance to Europeans: they were fair-skinned, sometimes blue-eyed and occasionally blond-haired. The women were beautiful (much prized as slaves by their Muslim neighbours), and of easy virtue. Unlike all their Asiatic neighbours, the Kafirs found it uncomfortable to sit cross-legged on the ground and instead used chairs and tables. They drank wine, ate beef and enjoyed dancing, and they worshipped many gods to whom they sacrificed animals in the manner of the Ancient Greeks. It was said they claimed descent from the soldiers of Alexander's army. And, as in the Ancient world, men could be deified and have their images worshipped along with those of the major gods.

The Kafir tribes were in a constant state of small-scale war, both with the surrounding Muslims whom they crept up upon to ambush and terrorise, and with neighbouring Kafir tribes, but it was the killing of Muslims (men, women or children) which brought the most prestige and was marked by privileges and special articles of dress (Elphinstone 1839:377,

etc.). Special articles of Kafir dress included an unusual horned head-dress to which I shall later again draw your attention.

All this was true. What the nineteenth-century accounts do not make so clear is that so many of these characteristics were revived by Crabtree, who injected into them a new vitality. The result of Crabtree's visit was a sudden population explosion, a rapid increase in wine consumption and a new laxness in the sexual morals of the womenfolk. In fact it was he who brought to that half forgotten people the benefits of Western Civilisation.

But before Crabtree could bring Western Civilisation to the tribes he had somehow to get into Kafiristan. No one dared take him there. The more fertile parts of the Kafir country were surrounded by high mountains the passes through which were approached by steep, very narrow and heavily wooded valleys, easily defensible by warriors on foot armed with bows and arrows. Outside the passes the Kafir raids had created a *cordon sanitaire* of terror. And, to make matters even worse, there had just been a war on a larger scale between the Kafirs and the Mehtar or ruler of Chitral (Jettmar 1986: 14-15) .

Crabtree was not deterred. He determined on new methods. He and his companion entered Kafiristan by balloon. Yes, by balloon. In 1779, this was remarkable .

Conventional history credits the Montgolfier Brothers with the invention of the balloon. They did not demonstrate their first balloon until 1783, when they flew *a* balloon below which was suspended a basket containing a sheep, a cock, and a duck, in the presence of Louis XVI, after which interest in ballooning ballooned. But precede the Montgolfiers Crabtree did.

The Montgolfier's balloons were large and made of silk, an expensive material in short supply, but the only known material light and strong enough for the purpose. However, the discovery that hydrogen was lighter than air had been made by Henry Cavendish seventeen years earlier, in 1766. Only the shortage of silk delayed the application of that principle to manned flight. Young Crabtree loved new technologies, and in 1779 had the necessary quantity of silk — all those Benares sarees to which I have previously alluded.

Exactly how Crabtree filled his balloon with gas is not recorded. But it is not likely that there was any difficulty. The exploits of Crabtree have always been accompanied by large quantities of hot air. More interesting is the means Crabtree used to propel his balloon in the desired direction. This problem was not overcome in Europe. There they tried moveable wings, . rotating fans, sails, giant paddles, even, and I joke not, highly trained birds, to propel or pull their balloons, but no solution proved satisfactory (Chambers's Encyclopaedia 1950: 103). But Crabtree had, as it were, a secret weapon, revealed to us by McGrath and Sebo: pasta, or at least the astounding effects of it when consumed in quantity, and a family predisposition to flatulence inherited from his father (McGrath, 1992: 4, Sebo 1997: 3). Not only was Crabtree more than capable of amusing his friends by farting the tunes of 'God Save The King' and the Hallelujah Chorus, but, when needs must and the air pressure was sufficiently thin, he could produce sufficient wind to propel a large balloon in whatever direction he desired.

To achieve the low air pressure his method of propulsion required Crabtree had his newly stitched balloon taken up Tirich Mir, the great mountain which looms up over the valleyof Chitral. Perhaps some of you have never seen it. Tirich Mir is only a little less high than

Everest, 25,300 feet compared with Everest's 29,000, but, unlike Everest which is surrounded by other giants, Tirich Mir stands alone. There are other mountains in its neighbourhood, but they are minnows of a mere 10, or 15,000 feet. From the Chitral valley you see a ring of snow-clad mountains, topped with cloud. Then through the thinner air above the clouds which hide the lower mountain tops, you become aware of Tirich Mir, rising majestically, impossibly great, a vision of the heavens.

Though Tirich Mir is not in Kafiristan, the Kafirs could see the mountain and believed it to be an abode of the gods. Wouldn't you? And from that abode of the gods, Crabtree floated farting in. He was, from the start, not just a king, but a god!

But which god? Alas, time does not permit me thoroughly to describe the Kafir pantheon. Kipling, in the passage quoted, mentioned two-and-thirty idols, not too far out if by idols he meant gods. Every village in Kafiristan had many idols. Robertson, in his *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, describes sixteen principal gods and goddesses. Scholarly Jettmar gives seventeen 'Gods of North Kafiristan' (Robertson 1896: 376-411, Jettmar 1986: 47-78). Besides the principal gods there were many godlings, spirits, and fairies.

Some of the gods have agreeable names, Nong, for instance, or Disni (Dizane) . One of the godlings was called Bazza. Could there have been an Australian in Kafiristan?

The gods had different roles. Imra was the creator, Gish, the god of war, Bagisht presided over rivers and helped men grow rich: Disni, a goddess, protected the crops, Nirmali was the goddess who took care of women and children and protected women in childbirth, and so on.

More than a century after Crabtree Kafir religious 'myths' included references to the gods residing in or coming from Tirich Mir mountain. The fertility goddess Krumai, for example, came from there in the shape of a goat (Robertson 1896: 384-5). But Crabtree, though certainly a goat and well-fitted to be associated with fertility, was hardly a goddess. Robertson, however, was for a long time in doubt as to Krumai's sex, at least until (I quote) 'after seeing her effigy in one of the dancing-houses in Presungul, no doubt could remain concerning her sex' (Robertson 1896: 411). Could Crabtree's habit of cross-dressing confused things? Krumai remains a possibility.

Another possibility is Gish, god of war. At first glance Crabtree, not usually credited with valour on the battlefield, seems an unlikely god of war. But we must remember that the Kafir method of warfare was one of craft and ambush. They crept up on enemies and stabbed them when sleeping or working in the fields, taking as much credit for the homicide of unarmed women and children as for the killing of more formidable foes. Robertson gives an example of a Kafir 'who used to twist his moustaches as only famous warriors may do without being jeered at (who) based his claim to renown on the fact that he had murdered nine women and one man' (Roberston 1896: 574). Is there not something of the Crabtree style here?

Clearly we cannot turn Crabtree into Gish on the evidence of this alone. There are more decisive reasons. In Robertson's time Gish was by far the most popular of the gods. He was 'the Kafir type of a true man' . He 'had killed Hazrat Ali; he killed Hasan and Husain; in short he killed nearly every famous Musalman the Kafirs ever heard of. After killing Hazrat Ali, he

struck the head about with a polo stick, just as (Robertson reports) the Chitrali princes play polo at the present day' (Robertson 1896: 401). But it was not always so. Gish had replaced Imra (the creator) in popular respect in comparatively recent times, that is, since Crabtree's visit (Robertson 1896: 389).

Still not enough, I can sense you thinking. Then how about this, again from Robertson, indisputably the best authority? After cutting off Hazrat Ali's head, Robertson reports, and I quote him verbatim, 'the god went to London, while his servants settled in Kafiristan' (Robertson 1896: 308).

And how did Gish arrive in Kafiristan? He came in 'a house of giants, which hangs from the heaven by a rope or metal threads' (Jettmar 1986: 58-9 and 132). This was of course Crabtree's balloon.

So we have Crabtree in Kafiristan, taken to be a god, and surrounded by adoring warriors and beautiful and randy women. He had his Sindhi charm for undoing their trowser strings. He need not have bothered. The male gods in the Kafir pantheon, like their Greek brethren, were continually out, often in disguise, seducing or raping mortal women. And the female gods were equally direct. The goddess Disni, for example, when she felt in the mood, simply took off her trousers and said, 'Look at my thighs!' And because (I quote again) 'she had very white and firm thighs' there was no resisting her advances (Jettmar 1986: 59).

With the goddesses so keen, what was there to hold back mortal women? Crabtree went to work with a will. Like Robertson after him he was offered wives a plenty, the usual bride price waived. (According to Robertson the bride price for a woman from an undistinguished family was eight cows (Robertson 1895: 535). He does not give an upper limit. Perhaps the Kafirs held the same opinion as Jomo Kenyatta who once memorably said, 'no woman is worth twenty cows'. Anyway, Crabtree sowed the seeds which resulted in the population explosion which returned the Kafirs to the notice of the outside world.

In the next century the Kafirs themselves made no attempt to conceal their largely British descent. Robertson was repeatedly reminded or it. (e.g. Robertson 1896: 160) . But he was not alone. For example, fifty years before Robertson, Alexander Burnes reported in his book *Cabool* that the Kafirs sent the British 'a congratulatory message at the arrival of so many Kaffir brethren as ourselves' . That was during Lord Auckland's invasion of Afghanistan which resulted in the annihilation of the entire British army, Dr Brydon only escaping to the garrison at Jellalabad, the worst British military disaster until the fall of Singapore one hundred years later. And our authority, cocky young Alexander Burnes was, it will be remembered, murdered by the Kabul mob before his book was published in 1842. (Burnes
1961: 157n.).

Alas, time does not allow me to go into the fascinating details of Kafir life or to explain how so many Kafir beliefs and customs can be traced to Crabtree's influence. We can easily surmise that there he was acclaimed a king as well as being treated as the incarnation of a god. Even the much less impressive Robertson, who came humbly in on foot, was, in a moment of crisis, told by the

Kafirs that they would accept ‘no other king’ but him (Robertson 1896: 348) .

It was of course too good to last. Something went wrong and Crabtree had to go on his travels again. What happened to his companion I have not been able to discover, but he seems to have perished. I believe Crabtree escaped from the village where he had been forcibly detained by digging a tunnel and then letting it be known that any Kafir who attempted to follow him down the tunnel would instantly die as the tunnel led to Zozuk or hell. Such a cursed tunnel certainly existed in Robertson’s time (Robertson 1896: 493) . Be that as it may, Crabtree, after the many months spent ‘recuperating’ from the wound received in his duel, made his way back to Calcutta, where of course kept quiet about what he had been up to, not wanting to incense the wrathful Captain Morrison again. .

But not entirely quiet. Rumours of his adventure began to circulate, so that when, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the extraordinary but unreliable Alexander Gardner came to write his memoirs (which included the claim that he had twice travelled extensively in Kafiristan), he recorded that ‘two Europeans had lived in (the Kafirs’) country about the year 1770’ where he thought they had been murdered (Jones 1966: 39).

These same rumours reached the ears of Rudyard Kipling and were the germ of the idea for his story ‘The Man who would be King’ from which I quoted at the beginning of this talk. The original of the ‘hero’ of Kipling’s story, later made into a popular film starring Michael Caine, the man who went to Kafiristan to make himself a king, was none other than our own Joseph Crabtree. Crabtree traveller, adventurer, king, god - and Hollywood star.

That almost brings me to the end. But not quite. On various visits to Chitral and to Afghanistan I have sought out relics of the Kafirs, hoping perhaps to find in some out-of-the-way corner of a dusty museum an object which would conclusively prove that Joseph Crabtree had been to Kafiristan. Nothing. And now even those Kafir carvings which survived Abdur Rehman’s *jehad,* collected and conscientiously deposited in the Kabul Museum by twentieth-century anthropologists like Klimburg, Snoy and Edelberg, have, along with the museum, been destroyed in the civil wars since the Russian invasion, by shells, bombs or the fanaticism of the Taliban. There seemed no hope.

There was no hope. That is until I went two years ago to the little Cotswold village of Chipping Sodbury, Crabtree’s birthplace and the home of his family until recent times. There, in a dark corner of a curio shop, I came across what I had in vain searched for in Central Asia. It was a box, marked in faded antique writing “Kafir scepter. J.C. ‘79’. And in the box was an extraordinary object which could have come from nowhere else but Kafiristan - an iron rod, chased with oriental patterns and surmounted by a grinning head from which rise the two horns which were the mark of high status among the Kafirs. It could only have been Joseph Crabtree’s. And here …… it is.

I would like to offer this ‘sceptre’ to the Foundation, to be some sort of symbol of

authority for us, just as it was when Crabtree held it, seated in all his majesty, in a smoke-filled Kafir dancing-house, and presided over the bloody scrifices and wild dances there, as king and god, 220 years ago.

Thank you.

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