

JOSEPH CRABTREE AND THE POLISH CONNECTION

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Possible knowledge and interest by Joseph Crabtree in Eastern Europe, and Poland in particular, may have been aroused in his late teenage years. We know from Rowe that it was in 1773, at the age of nineteen, that Crabtree came to live in London with Joseph 'Bramah' Postlethwaite. They resided in Denmark Street, St. Giles. As Crabtree strolled around Soho, he must have walked down Poland Street, off Oxford Street, not a stone's throw from the workshop, and wondered about its name. In fact he discovered the street was named to honour the exploits of King Jan Sobieski, who hurled back the Turks from the gates of Vienna in 1683. This street, then in a very exclusive part of London, was first mentioned as Poland Street in 1689.

We know from Tancock that Crabtree was present at the wedding of Fanny Burney to the émigré Général D'Arblay at Juniper Hall, in Dorking, in 1793. She would have been forty-one at that time and Crabtree thirty-nine. He well remembered her when she was twenty-one and he nineteen; they lived so near to each other, he in Denmark Street and she in Poland Street. She was Crabtree's secret love at that time. Mr. Postlethwaite must have wondered why Joseph spent so much time scribbling anonymous love letters addressed to her at No. 50 Poland Street. This was Crabtree's first usage of and romantic connection with the name 'Poland'.

Moreover, this unrequited love might explain why Crabtree preferred to be disguised as Mme. de Staël's butler Joe at Fanny's wedding in 1793.

Two other personalities were to sharpen Crabtree's image of Poland in his early years – Joseph Banks and Jeremy Bentham. We are all aware that Banks, well-known naturalist, went on Cook's first voyage in 1768, and took with him two flute boys – Joseph Crabtree and his younger brother George. In March 1777 Banks bought the 'Elegant and Spacious Leasehold House' known as 32 Soho Square. It seems quite natural that, when in London, Crabtree would visit not only his old haunts in Soho, but also his old friend Banks.

In the Anglo-Russian 'rapprochement' of 1793, Catherine II sought a collection of garden plants from George III of England, but the war with Revolutionary France delayed any action until 1795, when the King commanded Banks to select plants from the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. Crabtree could easily have eavesdropped on discussions concerning this transaction; Banks' correspondence from this period refers to Charles Whitworth, 1st Earl Whitworth, envoy-extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at Warsaw from 1785-1793, and later in St. Petersburg. Crabtree would have learnt through Banks of Britain's attitude to Polish affairs, which on the whole was insensitive and aloof to Catherine's successive interventions in that luckless country.

Letters arriving at Banks' house from the botanist Anton Hove in St. Petersburg in the autumn of 1795, when plants from Kew were settling in to their new hot-houses, would have told Crabtree of the disruption to Hove's work in Poland, due to the partition of that country, and the destruction of his collections. Crabtree would also have met Edward Forster Jr. in 1795 at Banks' house, a future President of the Linnaean Society, for Banks consulted him on the ways and means of transport to St. Petersburg; his father's business specialized in the Russia trade, with headquarters in Threadneedle Street.

The other source for Crabtree's early awareness of Poland came through Jeremy Bentham and his brother Samuel. Samuel Bentham left England in 1779, first to work in Siberia and after that in 1784 to live on Prince G.A. Potyomkin's estate at Krichev in White Russia. Jeremy himself decided early in 1786 on a prolonged visit to Krichev, and his impressions are to be found in Jeremy's correspondence. The information, gained in conversations with the Benthams after their return to England in the early 1790s, was of value in enlightening Crabtree of the Polish lands.

The region in which Krichev was located was steeped in Polish tradition, and had been under the Polish flag for the previous four centuries. Besides evidence on this area from the Bentham brothers, Crabtree may also have read the travel journal of Sir Richard Worsley. This English traveller paid a visit to Krichev in the summer of 1786 and was moved to describe the town as 'a considerable place'. According to one of Samuel Bentham's English associates, it was a thoroughly polyglot community of immigrants, where Polish, German, Yiddish and the Ukrainian dialects were as much in evidence as the Russian language itself. For Crabtree, the foundations of knowledge were being laid for an important episode in his life that occurred during the first decade of the nineteenth century.

A key figure in what I have called Crabtree's 'Vilna' episode was a man who in later life was to be intimately connected with the foundation of University College London – namely, Thomas Campbell. The early 1790s were exciting years to be in Scotland, for one could meet all the distinguished Scots in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Walter Scott studied law at Edinburgh University, Lord Henry Brougham was there and two future prime ministers, Palmerston and Russell, along with the son, Adam Jerzy, of a Polish Prince, A.K. Czartoryski. He was sent to Edinburgh in 1789 to study Politics and Constitution and to observe the structure of British industry. In 1793 he met the promising young poet Thomas Campbell. Scottish interest in Poland was aroused in 1794 by the Kosciuszko insurrection, its failure, and final partition of the country between Prussia, Russia and Austria the following year. Thomas Campbell was deeply moved by the Poles' heroic struggle and in his first book of poetry published in 1799, *Pleasures of Hope*, echoes of the Polish insurrection in Cracow flowed from his pen:

Hope for a season bade the world farewell,
And Freedom shrieked – as Kosciuszko fell.

It was well received in Poland, especially by the Czartoryski family. Whilst at Edinburgh, Campbell met the first Lord Minto, who, in 1801, took him to London as his occasional secretary. We know from Jones that Crabtree inspired Brougham to attack Young's lecture on light in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1803, and it was through Brougham in that year Crabtree first met Campbell. They immediately found a common bond – Poland, Crabtree through his romantic attachments to the name, and Campbell through his links with the Czartoryski family and sympathy for the country's political situation. The following year (1804, when Crabtree was 50 and Campbell 27) was to have Slavonic connotations for both of them.

In January 1804, Campbell was offered the Regent's Chair at the University of Vilna. This was an attractive proposition, providing him with a permanent income rather than the irregular financial gains from his literary talents in England. Prince Czartoryski Jr. strongly supported Campbell's candidacy. The Scottish poet was certainly attracted to the idea, but in the end decided against taking the post. Campbell remained in London and was regularly employed on the *Star* newspaper, for which he translated foreign news. He regularly met Crabtree and mentioned that the post in Vilna was again vacant. Crabtree needed little encouragement to apply; he was successful, and for the first time since Oxford days was to enter once more the portals of academia. He arrived in Vilna, early in 1808, and was determined to learn Polish. This improved on trips away from Vilna, to those areas nearby, like Krichev, first described to him by the Bentham brothers. He found Prince Czartoryski most helpful. Crabtree was keen to visit central Poland, especially the old Polish capital of Cracow; Czartoryski organized contacts for him at the Jagiellonian University there, as well as a stay *en route* at his family seat in Puławy. Much to Crabtree's sorrow, this trip was never made, for he heard that he had been appointed Reader in Criminology at Queen's College, Oxford, starting in the Michaelmas Term of 1809.

Meanwhile Crabtree's active interest in Poland was to recede for a while, until the third decade of the nineteenth century, except for one small incident in 1816. From Tattersall we learn that Crabtree met Keats in Hampstead in 1816. In that year, Keats was just beginning to gain acceptance in the literary world and some of his early work was published in *The Examiner*. Closer perusal of this source reveals that a poem *To Kosciuszko*, written by Keats in December 1816, was published in *The Examiner* on the 16th February 1817. As you may know, Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817) was a Polish patriot admired by English liberals, who led his countrymen in their rising against Russia between 1791 and 1794. Of course, gentlemen, this poem resulted from conversations Keats had with Crabtree, who, with his knowledge of Poland, was able to give Keats the necessary background material which inspired him to pen the immortal lines: 'Good Kosciuszko, thy great name alone/Is a full harvest whence to reap high feeling'.

During the early 1820s Crabtree's connections with Poland were to be rekindled once more, this time centred on the Poles in Edinburgh.

In 1820 Prince Adam Czartoryski jr. decided to send his sixteen-year-old nephew, Konstanty, for further education in Edinburgh along with his tutor Krystyn Lach-Szyrma. The chief librarian of the family archives, Karol Sienkiewicz, was also in Edinburgh. While *en route* for Edinburgh, Lach-Szyrma and Konstanty met Crabtree in London during late August. The meeting was arranged by Thomas Campbell, who had recently returned from a stay in Paris, to accept the editorship of the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. Crabtree was able to obtain the latest news on events in Poland and information on the situation at Vilno University.

Edinburgh at this time had a high European reputation for teaching the sciences and philosophy and attracted

many foreign students. The main reason why young Polish aristocrats were sent there was Czartoryski's belief in the value of studying the works of Adam Smith (*Wealth of Nations*), and David Ricardo's Corn Law theories, for future Polish statesmen. The most able lecturer on these subjects was the economist and statistician John Ramsay McCulloch, who was later to accept the Professorship of Political Economy at University College London in 1828.

Crabtree's knowledge of Poland and things Polish prompted Lach-Szyrma to invite him to Edinburgh for a prolonged stay in 1821. Crabtree soon felt at home with the small band of Polish students, but he was also in demand elsewhere in the city. We know that he met Walter Scott there in 1822; in that same year Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake* appeared in Polish (*Pani Jeziora*). Although officially translated by Karol Sienkiewicz, it was Crabtree who helped translate the various nuances and subtleties of the work; similarly, McCulloch's *Discourse on the Rise, Progress, Peculiar Objects and Importance of Political Economy* (London 1824) had a Polish version, translated officially by Sienkiewicz, published in Warsaw in 1828, but again with the unmistakable signs of Crabtree's hand.

Perhaps Crabtree's greatest achievement during this Edinburgh episode was his previously unproven connection with *Blackwood's Magazine*. The majority of articles in this magazine were published anonymously, most probably because of various literary and political battles between the Whigs and Tories. The authorship, therefore, of many articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* has been, and continues to be, one of the most exciting problems for scholars interested in this particular subject.

In the National Library of Scotland the *Blackwood's Contributors Book* contains some 5,300 articles published in the magazine for the later period 1826-1870, of which a mere one hundred authors remain to be deciphered. The earlier period 1817-1825 is much more difficult. Professor Strout has published a bibliography for this earlier period, in which 2,025 articles are ascribed to authors; the authorship of four hundred articles remains unidentified. Tonight, gentlemen, I believe this number can definitely be reduced. Certainly some of them belong to Lach-Szyrma, Crabtree's Polish friend in Edinburgh. I wish, however, to draw your attention to one article in particular.

This article appeared in June 1822 and lacks any signature. It is a review of Wincenty Krasiński's book *Guide du Voyageur en Pologne et dans la République de Cracovie*, published in Warsaw in 1820. It is a lengthy contribution, eight pages of small print, detailed information and long quotations from the original text. Professor Strout ascribes this article to John Cay (spelt with a 'C' not a 'K'), a frequent contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*. Cay was noted for his occasional poetry and satire, but never a review. It is known that Lach-Szyrma referred to Crabtree as 'J.C.' and Strout has obviously mistaken these initials to mean John Cay. Further evidence to support Crabtree's authorship is not difficult to find, although we know of his desire for modesty and anonymity. Krasiński's book was in French, a language Crabtree knew well. It also covered a part of Poland – the Cracow region – where my earlier evidence from 1809 has shown he never managed to visit, and still regretted. Here was a chance to partially redeem that omission and obtain more knowledge about Poland's former capital. There is perhaps another reason why the article lacks Crabtree's signature. Obviously, Crabtree wished to disguise his associations with such a Tory monthly as the *Blackwood's Magazine*. The *coup de grace* in Crabtree's favour comes from the beginning of the review itself which states, 'Poland, however, interesting as that ill-fated kingdom is, has never been sufficiently described in works of a superior class; . . . On stating my grievance to a Polish friend, he was kind enough to send me this Traveller's Guide, with some valuable information of his own, of which I shall avail myself in the course of my remarks'.

Crabtree never forgot Lach-Szyrma's help concerning this review, and was able to repay his kindness in several ways. When Lach-Szyrma completed his book *Letters Literary and Political on Poland*, it was Crabtree, through his contacts, who persuaded Archibald Constable, Walter Scott's famous publisher, to print it in 1823. Furthermore, Crabtree sent a copy of the book to Campbell in London, who favourably reviewed it in the April 1823 edition of his new monthly magazine. At the same time, Crabtree knew of John Bowring's interest in Slavonic literature, especially Polish. Crabtree had previously met Bowring through Jeremy Bentham. He thought *Letters Literary and Political on Poland* would be of interest to Bowring. Indeed, gentlemen, this resulted in Bowring's anthology of Polish poetry, published in 1827, the first of its kind in the English language.

Not until our poet heard of the luckless November Uprising of 1830 in Warsaw against Russian occupation did his now ageing mind turn once more to thoughts of helping the less fortunate survivors of that event. The hub of this activity was to be centred in London, after 1830, when Crabtree helped in a positive way those who had fled from Poland, and who looked to Paris and London as possible havens of refuge.

In 1830 Crabtree was already seventy-six years old, but still mentally active and aware of contemporary problems. After the collapse of the November insurrection, the Polish political, ideological and cultural centre moved abroad. The emigration represented an elite of the nation and counted among its members some of the greatest names in Polish literature, history, music and political thought. Certainly Polish romanticism rose to its full stature in the emigration. Paris, where many of the émigrés settled, became a veritable headquarters of Polish national life, in which Prince Czartoryski Jr. was declared the 'unofficial' King of Poland.

Joseph Crabtree naturally expressed concern for Poland; his exchange of letters with Prince Czartoryski Jr. led in the summer of 1831 to the visit of the Polish poet Niemcewicz to England to enlist sympathy for the Polish struggle. Crabtree arranged, through Campbell, an interview with the Prime Minister, Palmerston. Niemcewicz found little encouragement from the British leader and noted, 'Palmerston found me too hot, and I found him colder than ice'. Crabtree advised Niemcewicz to ask leave to present a letter from Prince Czartoryski Jr. to William IV, but again Palmerston advised the King to refuse its acceptance. Crabtree and Campbell then put pressure on another contact from those early student days, Lord John Russell, but he too adopted a negative, if milder, attitude than Palmerston. Czartoryski, Campbell and Crabtree were disgusted with Palmerston, and the Polish supporters in Britain were even more angry.

In December 1831, at the personal invitation of Crabtree and Campbell, Czartoryski visited London, but in spite of several meetings with Palmerston, made no further progress. It was clear Palmerston would not go to war with Russia to help Poland. He told Czartoryski, 'We are a simple and practical nation, a commercial nation; we do not go in for chivalrous enterprises or fight for others as the French do'. Czartoryski, disillusioned, left for Paris, although he often visited London later, and thanks to the efforts of people like Crabtree and Campbell, met and was very popular in London society.

One outcome of Czartoryski's visit to London was the increased interest in Polish affairs. The influence and efforts of Crabtree and Campbell led to the foundation of The Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, established in 1832; the group consisted entirely of British members, and had its headquarters in Duke Street, St. James's. Crabtree was offered the Presidency of this new association, but modestly declined, suggesting his old friend Campbell as the obvious choice, which was agreed. Crabtree, however, remained active in editing its magazine, *Polonia or Monthly Reports of Polish Affairs*. Campbell's resignation from the Presidency may explain why Crabtree's interest in Polish affairs waned after 1833. His lively mind and endless curiosity turned to other things. His friendship with Lach-Szyrma however, continued; whilst on a visit to Crabtree's Devonshire home in 1839, Lach-Szyrma met Sarah Somerville, daughter of a Royal Navy Captain. They married and set up home in 1841 at Devonport, near Plymouth, in order to be near his parents and to Crabtree himself.

Crabtree's last involvement in things Polish occurred in 1848, when he was already ninety-four years old. In that year, Crabtree was party to arrangements for Chopin's visit to England and Scotland. The opening refrains of revolution echoed through Paris in March 1848; at the suggestion of his pupil, Miss Jane Stirling, Chopin decided to leave for London the following month. He arrived to be met by Crabtree, and various dignitaries from Polish émigré and musical circles. Although Crabtree's greatest achievements were in literature, appreciation of music came from early choir-boy days, and his acquaintance with Schubert in 1819. Miss Stirling's obvious love for the Polish composer was plainly evident; Crabtree suggested she should take Chopin on a tour of her native Scottish countryside, and they left for Edinburgh in early August. An appreciative letter from Chopin was received by Crabtree in mid-August, thanking him for suggesting the trip and the names of contacts in Edinburgh. Along the margin, however, Chopin wrote, 'The people here are ugly, but, it would seem good. As compensation there are charming, apparently mischievous, cattle, perfect milk, butter and eggs'. Here may I also mention the curious monogram on Chopin's letter seal: three C's in the form of horns intertwined – perhaps symbolic for the names Czartoryski, Chopin and Crabtree?

The circumstances of Crabtree's sad, but not unexpected, death in 1854 have been described to us by Tattersall. I should like to add, however, a rather touching postscript to that memorable event. Members of the Polish émigré associations in Britain, on reading his obituary in *The Times*, decided to honour this great friend of Poland in their own particular way. In 1855, a plaque was placed near the south door of Haworth Church in Yorkshire, not many yards from where our beloved poet lies buried. It states simply:

Joseph Crabtree
Czy ty jesteś synem Anglii –
Nie tyś dzieckiem świata!
Geniusz twój poza metę
Plemieną wylata.

(Are you a son of England —
No you are a child of the world!
Your genius
It knows no bounds)

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