

It was in 1984 that I was first invited to the Annual Dinner of the Crabtree Foundation, a black-tie occasion without ladies, at University College, Gower Street, London. Since then I have attended regularly, on every third Tuesday in February until my retirement in 1996. I joined not for any culinary reason, as the menu was always the same, soured herring followed by leg of lamb and cheese, but because of the after-dinner speeches, the 'Orations', always praising Crabtree. To me, they represented the highest level of scholarship in the English literature which I could hope to enjoy.

Joseph Crabtree, born 1754 at Chipping Sodbury died in 1854 at Hayworth, Yorkshire. The first meeting of the Foundation, 25 members present, Professor Hugh Smith as the first President in the chair, took place in February 1954. He stated the aims of the Foundation to be "by any methods at our disposal to restore Crabtree to the high station that he deservedly holds in the History of English Literature". By 1997 when *The Crabtree Orations 1954-1994* were published by the Foundation, the membership had risen to over 400 world wide, with a Chapter in Australia, founded in 1975 and a Sezione Italiana since 1994.

Crabtree was more than a literary giant, as was pointed out in Oration after Oration, each discovering a new aspect in the life of this polymath. Poet and intellectual, naturalist and inventor, the circle of his friends included all luminaries of the period from Goethe to Captain Cook and from Coleridge to Linnaeus. There is no end to the achievements in Crabtree's long life, as the scholarly researches of the Orators discovered; at the age of 17 he revolutionised actuarial practice, at 18 invented soda water and at 19 the beer pump.

In 1789, at the age of 35, he proposed the international system of metrication and decimalisation, and in 1846, aged 92 deliberately frightened Wheatstone away from giving a Friday Evening Discourse at the Royal Institution. As a result Michael Faraday had to give an impromptu Discourse, and ever since lecturers at the Royal Institution are locked in a small anteroom before starting their Friday Discourse. I myself discovered this custom when honoured with giving a Discourse on 10 February 1984 on "The Medals of Science". [See Title 332]

Among the great scientific Orators were R.V Jones, physicist, Sir Ronald Nyholm, chemist, and Sir James Lighthill, mathematician, all Fellows of the Royal Society; but the majority were scholars of literature and of the humanities.

Crabtree never existed. It is the greatest and most successful academic spoof ever conceived.