

THREE EARLY AMERICAN ADMIRERS OF JOHN CLARE¹

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AMERICAN interest in John Clare has never been strong. Perhaps he has seemed too English, his portrayal of the Northamptonshire countryside too particular and idiosyncratic. Perhaps the pathos of his madness has been embarrassing rather than moving. Whatever the reason, Americans have paid less attention to Clare than to any other nineteenth-century English poet of comparable stature.²

From the first, concern with Clare has been sporadic. The earliest reference to him that I have been able to find in an American periodical is in the January 1820 number of the *Belles-Lettres Repository, and Monthly Magazine*,³ but after the flurry of notice occasioned by the publication of his first two volumes he

¹ It is with regret that we record the death of Professor Green while this article was in the press.

We are indebted to his colleague Professor Edwin B. Silverman and to Miss Edith A. Wright of Wellesley College Library, Massachusetts, for assistance in checking the proofs.

² There are indications that this neglect is coming to an end: see, e.g. Hyder E. Rollins, "A Poem by John Clare", *Harvard Library Bulletin*, iii (Winter 1950), 147-8; Eleanor L. Nicholes, "The Shadowed Mind: A Study of the Change in Style of the Poetry of John Clare Resulting from the Effects of Schizophrenic Process", unpubl. diss. (New York University, 1950); Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), pp. 434-5; G. Thomas Tanselle, "Two Words in John Clare's 'Winter'", *Word Study*, xl (October 1964), 5-6. American students of Clare have, of course, published articles in English periodicals, e.g. Samuel Loveman, "From Clare to Taylor", *TLS* (13 April 1951), p. 229; David Bonnell Green, "John Clare, John Savage, and *The Scientific Receptacle*", *Review of English Literature*, vii (April 1966), 87-98—and English in American, e.g. A. J. V. Chapple, "Some Unpublished Poetical Manuscripts of John Clare", *Yale University Library Gazette*, xxxi (July 1956), 34-48. One might also mention Thomas P. Harrison, *Birds in the Poetry of John Clare*, Peterborough Museum Society, Occasional Papers, no. 1 (1957), and C. Day Lewis's Norton Lectures, published as *The Lyric Impulse* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1965), pp. 111-20.

³ ii. 232. Under "Literary Intelligence" is included "Poems, Songs, and Sonnets. By John Clare, a Northamptonshire peasant."

virtually disappeared from American ken till the eighteen-forties.¹ His poems were now and then reprinted in the annuals,² but it was not till the late eighteen-thirties that he again began to attract attention.³ Early in 1838 the *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* reprinted Samuel Carter Hall's letter to the editor of the *Court Journal* and the biographical sketch of Clare from *The Book of Gems* with which Hall had accompanied his letter.⁴ Some two years later William Cox devoted a paragraph to Clare in his "Letter from London" to the *New York Mirror*, contradicting the report of his death in *The Times*,⁵ and in 1844

¹ In an Appendix I have listed the references and reprintings discovered in a fairly extensive examination of American periodicals. There appears to be no mention of Clare by any of the major or more important minor poets of the period—with the exception of Emerson. I have, for example, been unable to find any reference to him by Freneau, Bryant, Poe, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, Cranch, or Perceval; nor by any prose writer such as Irving, Paulding, Hawthorne, Halleck, Simms, or Prescott. Emerson (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, Boston, 1909-14, vi. 168) quoted without comment a dozen lines from Clare's "Address to Plenty"—the lines were among Clare's best known: see J. L. Cherry, *Life and Remains of John Clare* (London, 1873), p. 28. This journal dates from the years 1841-4, and Emerson alluded several times to Clare in his notebooks after 1840 (see Kenneth Walter Cameron, *An Emerson Index, or Names, Exempla, Sententiae, Symbols, Words and Motifs in Selected Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Hartford, 1958). But he nowhere mentioned him in print during Clare's lifetime or his own.

² See Bradford A. Booth, "Taste in the Annuals", *American Literature*, xiv (1942), 299-302. Clare was reprinted nine times in American annuals. The *Museum of Foreign Literature and Science* reprinted (1828) a poem from *The Amulet*: see Appendix.

³ Although a letter from an American bookseller came in 1835 (John and Anne Tibble, *John Clare, A Life* (London, 1932), p. 365) "proposing an arrangement for selling" *The Rural Muse* in America, I have not been able to discover any mention of the book in American periodicals nor any reprints of the English reviews.

⁴ See Appendix.

⁵ See Appendix and the Tibbles, *John Clare, A Life*, p. 385. Cox wrote: "Did you ever hear of John Clare, the 'Northamptonshire poet?' He was a common ploughman, but a better poet than Robert Bloomfield, the well-known author of 'The Farmer's Boy?' Blackwood, who generally takes the lead in generous matters where indigent and obscure merit is concerned, drew attention to him, by a spirited and handsome review of his 'rustic lays'. A subscription was afterwards entered into, and he was placed beyond the reach of want. A far heavier affliction than poverty, however, befell him. He lost his reason; but the report of his death, which has been going the rounds of the papers, is incorrect. Poor Clare! he was a true poet, with a deep and unaffected love of nature in her more gentle forms and manifestations."

Littell's Living Age reprinted J. N.'s account of his visit to Clare at the Northampton Lunatic Asylum.¹ In 1846 the "London Correspondent" of the *New-York Mirror* again mentioned Clare.² And Americans could, of course, learn something of the poet from the reviews and references in English periodicals and from such works as Chamber's *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, which was reprinted in Boston in 1847.

¹ See Appendix.

² The column, dated "London, Sept. 11, 1846", is unsigned, but the "London" columns during this period were frequently signed "F. M. Pinto", the pseudonym used by Charles Frederick Briggs, who often contributed to the *Mirror* (I am indebted to Professor Lewis C. Goffe for this information). And this column is similar in content and format. Briggs—for presumably it is he—writes (*New-York Mirror: A Reflex of News, Literature, Arts, and Elegancies of Our Time*, v (10 Oct. 1846), 12; this very rare weekly publication is apparently distinct from the *New-York Mirror*):

"But I spoke of nature's true bard, such an one was Clare, and he it is I have had in my mind's eye while I have been writing this paper. Poor Clare (now either dead or insane,) is not so well known as he ought to be. It is some ten or twelve years since I first met with the 'Peasant Poet'. It was at the mansion (at Milton) of that true specimen of the English nobility, Earl Fitzwilliam, that the meeting took place. I remember Professor Wilson, the present editor of Blackwood, was present on the occasion to which I allude. And in that brilliant drawing room was poor Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant, with a beard of a week's growth and neglected apparel. Poor fellow! he afterwards told me he felt sadly out of his element; at the same time he highly extolled the Earl, who was indeed a great friend to the poet—allowing him, I think, a pension of some fifty pounds or more per annum, besides the use of his house and library. I escaped with Clare from the drawing-room for a short period, and walked in the delightful grounds at Milton. The poet conversed with me freely; but there was a peculiarity in his manner, and an incoherence in his speech, which involuntarily made me say to myself, 'Thank God I am not a poet,' but this was the man, the poet, who emphatically gave to 'airy nothing a local habitation and a name.'"

Briggs had been in England during the late summer and early autumn of 1832 (see his *Working a Passage: or, Life in a Liner* (New York, 1844), pp. 10-11), and could possibly have seen Clare as he states. It is barely possible, however, that this particular letter was by Nathaniel Parker Willis, although one doubts that Willis would have denied, even anonymously, that he was a poet. He had left England in the spring of 1846, but the *Mirror* was not above falsifying data. John Plummer ("John Clare", *St. James's Magazine*, x (July 1864), 444) says that "N. P. Willis, and other literary characters, have also described their visits" to Clare. Extensive search has failed, however, to discover Willis's account. I do not believe that the account in the *New-York Mirror* is by Willis, whether or not it can convincingly be attributed to Briggs.

I

Although Clare's isolation and loneliness at High Beech and Northampton have rightly been emphasized, he nevertheless received a fairly steady stream of sympathetic or curious visitors. And these visitors were not solely English. Whether stimulated by the accounts reaching America or in some other manner, among the first Americans to visit Clare was Dean Dudley, who arrived at Liverpool in October 1849. Dudley, a genealogist and miscellaneous writer, exhibits in the reports he sent home to Boston¹ an odd but typically American mixture of admiration and hostile criticism of England and the English. He tends to romanticize the past but gives emphasis in the present to the brutal treatment of the poor by the rich. As a temperance man he is appalled by the prevalence of public houses and drunkenness, but his sympathies are consistently with the underdog. Arriving in Manchester before 19 October, he made his way via Birmingham, Kenilworth, Coventry, Stratford, and other places to London, which he had reached by 1 February. He remained in London till April, but during March he made an excursion of several weeks to Northampton and vicinity. It is difficult, as I have indicated, to determine if Dudley knew of Clare before he arrived. He remarks that on 10 March he "called on the principle antiquary, Mr. Baker, author of a splendid history of the county", and it may be that Baker, who had long known Clare, suggested that he visit the poet. In any case, Dudley went to see him, and his account of the interview, which has remained unknown to students of Clare, is of such intrinsic interest that I reproduce it here in full.

John Clare, the Peasant Poet

I have called at the lunatic asylum to see John Clare, the peasant poet. He is a short, stout man, of light complexion and blue eyes. The expression of his countenance is very child-like. His head is uncommonly large, long and deep, resembling that of Horace Greeley. His hair is grey, but his beard red. A person would suppose his age to be about 35, but he says he is 56. He has been

¹ Promptly collected in *Pictures of Life in England and America; Prose and Poetry* (Boston, 1851).

in the asylum ten years. His insanity consists in believing his fancyings to be realities, and what he reads to be his own experience.

I told him I lived in America ; but I had read his poems and admired them.

He said he had been in America, at a place called Albania, on the Hudson river, and saw Irving and Bryant there. He also saw Corduroy, and was delighted with him. "Corduroy," said he, "dwelt in a beautiful cottage—a poet's cottage, encircled by trees and flower-gardens. Hundreds of gentlemen and ladies, in their splendid carriages, came to see the poet's cottage."

"I saw Whittier and Dana," said he. "Dana was formerly a clerk in some office, but he became a poet."

I referred to the British and Scotch poets. He spoke of Burns as of a brother, assuring me he had been in Scotland and seen his grave at Dumfries church.

He said the monument, he saw, was about as high as the table before us, but now a higher one has been raised. These stories are all fiction : for he never went further from home than London.

When I mentioned Byron, he drew a volume from his pocket, saying he had borrowed it of some one to read. It was half of Byron's poems.

I asked him about his farm at home. "Oh ! dear," said he, "I don't know how things go on there now. I want to go home and be free." "Why," said I, "this seems to be a pleasant place." "O yes, but its a *mad-house*, and nothing less. They won't let me go ; I'm a *prisoner* here. Oh ! I want to be a free man again, and go where I please. I am sick of this place, where I have no companions but mad-men."

His Early Life, etc.

I inquired about his early life. He said he learned to read and write at the free school of his native village. The only grammar he ever studied was Cobbet's. He only followed common sense in writing. "I never made much progress in figures," said he. "I used to write songs to be sung in the streets at fairs and sell them for a ha'penny each. Nobody knew who made them, for I was ashamed of them, and didn't sign my name. I never tho't they would be printed ; but the book-seller got hold of some of my verses, and then I began to write in earnest."

He said he had forgotten all his poems, and wrote none now. He could not repeat a single line to me.

Finally, at my request, he gave me his autograph, writing in my memorandum book, in a large, clear hand, the following words:

" John Clare
Northborough
Northamptonshire.
Born
at Helpstone,
in the same county.

Thanking him for the pleasure he had afforded me by his presence and conversation, and wishing him health, freedom and happiness, I bade the unfortunate son of Apollo farewell.

Cause of Clare's Insanity

The nobility were astonished at such manifestations of genius in an uneducated peasant. They invited him to their houses, flattered and caressed him beyond decency. In fact, he was for a while the lion of London. But at length, their curiosity having become satiated, the poor poet was neglected, as unworthy of their equal friendship. He went to live on his little farm, gradually lost his natural buoyancy of spirits, and finally reason herself.

Probably the premature whiteness of his hair was produced by a diseased brain.

What seems almost incredible is the fact that he still occasionally composes sweet verses. I remember only one line of all that was shown me :

“ For where flowers are, God is, and I am free.”

The unfortunate bard has sent me the following letter since my return to London :

April 3rd, 1850.

Dear Sir,

I am glad to hear of you and am sorry you are going to leave us and our country so soon without my having the pleasure of seeing you again. But I believe your country, America, is more pleasant than ours, and that you will be happier in it. “ Home, sweet home,” is a melody for many other ears than mine.

On your return to New England, please give my very best thanks to Mr. Lowell and Mr. Whittier for the delight their respective works have afforded me.

Enclosed I send a song written to-day, just before your letter came. Please accept it as a poor memento from

Yours sincerely,

John Clare.

SONG

I' the sunshine o' the season, i' the spring-time o' the year,
 When blithe birds find their songs agen, and wilding flowers appear,
 When Phoebus i' the blue sky drove up his mounting team,
 I met a lovely maiden down by a lonely stream ;
 The shepherd's purse and groundsell too were breaking into bloom,
 And humble-bees about the flower's beginning were to hum ;
 I met my lovely Jessie a-coming down the glen,
 The envy o' the lassies and favorite o' men.

I met my lovely Jessie in her handsome gown o' green,
 Her cheeks burnt like the rose-bush, as fair as any queen ;
 All round our winding foot-path, the daisy's silver stars,
 And buttercups were glowing wi' sheen that nothing mars ;
 I courted lovely Jessie as chaffinch 'gan to sing,
 Like him I wooed my charmer at the starting o' the spring ;
 To be each other's leman true, we tenderly agree,
 While earth retains her constant gree, and bloom bursts on the tree.”¹

¹ Dudley, pp. 114, 117-20.

From the first Clare was prettified and bowdlerized, and Dudley is hardly to be blamed for following what was almost universal practice, but fortunately the original of Clare's letter to him has been preserved. A comparison with Dudley's versions is instructive, but the differences are so clear that they need hardly be underlined.

April 3rd 1850

Dear Sir

I am glad to hear of you & am sorry you are going to leave us & our Country so soon without having the opportunity of seeing you agen

But I believe your Country America is more pleasant than ours is here & that you will be happier in it—Love of country is very strong in most people—& "Home sweet Home"¹ is a Melody for many other Ears than mine

Where Flowers are God is & I am free—² I remember giving Mr Baker³ a Copy of Verses on May day but have forgot what they where [sic] but I think they where [sic] somthing [sic] about the May & he said when I gave him them he would alow [sic] none to copy them.

On your return to New England give my very best respects to Mr Dana & Mr Whittier⁴ for the pleasure their respective Works have afforded me—I here send you a Song written to day just before I got your Letter—"Dinah a Ballad" I am yours sincerely

John Clare

Song

I' the sunshine o' the Season i' the spring time o' the year
 When small birds find their songs agen & wilding flowers appear
 When sunshine i' the blue sky was shineing all abroad
 I met a lovely fair maid a going down the road
 The Shepherds purse & groundsell too were breaking into bloom
 & bumble Bees about the flowers beginning where [sic] to hum
 I met my lovely Dinah a coming down the Glen
 The envy o' the lasses & the favourite o' the men

I met my lovely Dinah in her handsome gown o' Green
 When her cheeks burnt like the rose bush as handsome as a queen
 & all about the footpath the daiseys silver stars
 & pileworts golden studs whose burnish nothing mars

¹ Introduced in Sir Henry Bishop's opera *Clari*, first produced at Covent Gardens on 8 May 1823.

² The last line, varied, of "Poets love nature": see *The Poems of John Clare*, ed. J. W. Tibble (London, 1935), ii. 516. There is a superior version of the poem in *Poems of John Clare's Madness*, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London, 1949), p. 125.

³ George Baker (1781-1851), topographer and local historian. See *DNB*.

⁴ Presumably Richard Henry Dana, Jr.—although possibly his father—and John Greenleaf Whittier.

Where [sic] littered bye the pathside & all about the grass
 & there I went with Dinah a beautifull young Lass
 Accross [sic] the old enclosure where the birds began to sing
 I courted lovely Dinah at the starting o' the spring

I courted lovely Dinah & thus to her did say
 My beautifull young creature is sweeter than rose o' May
 If you'll be mine love I'll be yours We'll tenderly agree
 While the grass upon the ground is green & bloom burst on the tree
 To fondle in each others arms from rising sun till night
 & mix untill we loose ourselves in ravishing delight
 Where whitethorn shows its tender green & chaffinch builds its nest
 O how I love to lean awhile on Dinah's happy breast

To Dean Dudley
 No 80 Theobald's Road
 Red Lion Square
 London¹

II

In a letter dated 11 April 1851 to William Knight, Clare writes of "his two American visitors, Dean Dudley and Dr. Elton."² Fortunately, as we have seen, the former left an account of his visit. The reaction of Dr. Elton remains, however, a matter of conjecture. Indeed, his very identity can be established only by circumstantial evidence, but that is so strong it seems impossible he can be any other than the Reverend Romeo Elton, D.D., for many years Professor of Classics at Brown University.

Elton was born in 1790 at Burlington, Connecticut, and graduated from Brown in 1813.³ After some years of teaching

¹ I wish to thank Miss Hannah D. French and the Wellesley College Library for their permission to publish the letter. There are several cancelled words in the poem: stanza 1, line 5, "flower" (replaced by "bloom"), stanza 2, line 7, "& thus to her did" originally followed "Dinah."

² I. M. F. Hooker and N. Dermott Hunt, "John Clare: Some Unpublished Documents of the Asylum Period", *Northamptonshire Past & Present*, iii (1964), 198. The dating of the letter presents some difficulties. If it refers to a visit of Dudley's which had just taken place it should be dated 1850, for Dudley had returned to America in the summer of that year. But there are grounds for thinking 1851 is correct: see below the discussion of the date of Elton's visit.

³ The account of Elton is based principally on the obituary notice in the *Providence Journal* of 29 June 1870—clipping preserved in the Brown University Archives; *Historical Catalogue of Brown University 1764-1904* (Providence, 1905), p. 112; Benjamin C. Clough, "College Professor, Old Style", *Books at Brown*, xiv (December 1951), 3-8; and the notice in *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*.

and of studying theology he was ordained in 1817 and became minister of the Second Baptist Church at Newport, Rhode Island. He continued in the ministry until 1825, when he was appointed Professor of Greek and Latin Languages at Brown, a position he held till 1843. In 1845 he went to England, and a letter to a niece of 17 August 1846 suggests his interest in literary figures, for he speaks of his intention of visiting Wordsworth, to whom he had a letter of introduction, and John Wilson.¹

Elton settled in Exeter where in 1847 he married, as his second wife, Prothesia Goss, an Englishwoman, but he travelled extensively in the British Isles, lecturing, preaching, and otherwise participating actively in Baptist affairs. He cultivated the acquaintance of Sir Charles Abraham Elton and of Joseph Cottle, and among the numerous friends he made was the Reverend Jonathan Edwards Ryland, who in 1835 had returned to Northampton, his birthplace, where he remained the rest of his life.² Ryland, doubtless through Elton's good offices, received the degree of M.A. in 1852 from Brown University, and Elton, doubtless through Ryland, became a contributor to the *Eclectic Review*, of which Ryland was for a time the editor.³ In a letter to Elton from Northampton on 4 April 1851, Ryland expresses the hope that he will "have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Elton & yourself again in this neighbourhood. I have not seen Mr. & Miss Baker but I believe that they are as well as usual."⁴ He

¹ Letter to Miss Harriet E. Elton in the Brown University Archives. A letter to Elton of 8 June 1846 from his nephew Professor Stephen E. Brownell speaks with enthusiasm of his uncle's literary interests and urges him to make Carlyle's acquaintance.

² For Ryland (1798-1866), Baptist clergyman, editor of the *Eclectic Review*, and miscellaneous writer, see *DNB*.

³ According to the obituary in the *Boston Post*—clipping in the Brown University Archives—Elton "had, at one time, by request of the learned editor, Jonathan Edwards Ryland, the entire department of American literature in the London *Eclectic Review*".

⁴ In his article on Northamptonshire in the 8th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ryland writes: "It would be unpardonable to omit the name of the late George Baker, whose *History and Antiquities* of the county form a monument of the indefatigable researches and minute accuracy of the author; and which his sister, Miss Baker, his faithful companion and fellow-labourer, by her ample *Glossary of Northamptonshire* (London, 1854) has made a lasting contribution to the history of our language."

then concludes with “very kind regards to Mrs. Elton & yourself”.¹

The inference that Elton, who is constantly referred to as “Dr. Elton”, visited Northampton in March 1851, or earlier, that through Ryland he met the Bakers, and that through them he met Clare seems reasonably safe. Elton may, as suggested, have visited Northampton previously, and it is possible that he had heard of Clare before he came to England. But he is the most likely person in any case to be the “Dr. Elton” whom the poet mentions.

For a number of years Elton contributed a “Letter from England” column to the *Christian Watchman and Reflector*, a Baptist weekly published at Boston, Massachusetts. These “Letters”—the heading is not always used—began in 1847 and continued at irregular intervals till 1859. He devoted most of his space to religious and ecclesiastical matters—especially those of interest to Baptists—and also pays some attention to politics. Now and then he touches upon literary matters, mostly necrological in character,² but once in a great while mentions new publications or places of literary interest. Unfortunately, he does not, so far as I have been able to ascertain, allude to Clare.

Elton remained in England till 1869, best known perhaps for his life of Roger Williams, which he published in 1852, and it may be that he wrote the article “John Clare” that appeared in the *Eclectic Review* for August 1865.³ “Few of our readers will know much of John Clare,” says the writer of the essay, “with us he has long been a favourite. . . .”⁴ The writer speaks of and quotes from an earlier criticism that he had written of Clare,⁵ reiterates the idea that Clare has been neglected and forgotten, and says that it was sixteen years ago in the study of the Rev. Mr.

¹ Letter in the Brown University Archives. I wish to express my thanks to Mrs. Cristine D. Hathaway and Miss Ruth T. Talmage and to the Brown University Library for their kind permission to quote from this letter.

² For example, “Letter from England”, *Christian Watchman & Remembrancer*, xxxiv (14 July, 1853), 109, includes obituaries of Sir C. A. Elton and Joseph Cottle.

³ cxxii. 101-38.

⁴ p. 123.

⁵ Sixteen years before the *Eclectic* article. I do not know whether this was published.

Mossop, "the excellent, amiable, and admirable vicar of Helpston", that he "received a number of the first painful particulars of Clare's life . . .".¹ There is not sufficient evidence, however, definitely to attribute the article to Elton; I can only suggest the possibility of his authorship. Elton returned to America in 1869 and after a last reunion at the Brown commencement of that year died in Boston on 5 February 1870. I must confess to a degree of license in classifying Elton as an "admirer" of Clare, but he at least took the trouble to visit him, something few Americans did, and the epithet is at least hypothetically defensible.

III

Benjamin P. Avery, the third American admirer, never paid a visit to Clare, but his admiration is indisputable. Clare's death appears to have aroused little reaction in the United States, but the biographies by Frederick Martin and J. L. Cherry—particularly the latter, which was published in New York as well as London—engendered a greater response. Avery's interest in Clare was, however, of longer standing, for he was familiar with and probably possessed the poet's first, second and fourth volumes.

Avery, the son of Samuel Putnam and Hannah (Parke) Avery, was born in New York City on 11 November 1828.² Although the death in 1832 of his father, who left a widow with six children, deprived him of the opportunity for formal schooling, he "early developed a taste for literature and the plastic arts. . . . He learned the trade of bank-note engraving",³ but when the news came of the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, he determined to go to California, arriving in San Francisco in July 1849. Various employed in his early years in the West, he nevertheless "pursued his studies in literature".⁴ In 1856 he started a weekly newspaper, eventually becoming editor of the *San Francisco Bulletin*, a post he retained for ten years. In 1874 he accepted the editorship of the *Overland Monthly*, to which he had been a

¹ Pp. 137, 138.

² This account is closely based on that by W. J. Ghent in the *DAB*.

³ *DAB*.

⁴ Jane G. (Avery) Carter and Susie P. Holmes, comps., *Genealogical Record of the Dedham Branch of the Avery Family in America* (Plymouth, Mass., 1893), p. 187.

frequent contributor, and shortly thereafter was appointed minister to China. He died at Peking on 8 November 1875.

A handsome, sensitive, cultivated man, Avery was a verse writer and essayist as well as journalist and was also instrumental in organizing and establishing the San Francisco Art Association. No clue exists as to the origin of his special interest in Clare. From the article, "Relics of John Clare", that he published in the February 1873 number of the *Overland Monthly*,¹ it seems clear that he had developed his own knowledge of the poet. Although the article is not based on Cherry's *Life*,² he may have seen an announcement of its forthcoming or actual publication.³ Perhaps his friend J. B. Wandesforde, who had met Clare, was also stirred by news of Cherry's book and reminded or first told him of his Clare manuscripts. Perhaps they had earlier shared an interest in Clare which the new biography brought to a head. Whatever the circumstances, Avery wrote the article and thereby preserved poems and a letter of Clare that would otherwise have been lost.

J. B. Wandesforde, landscapist and portrait painter, is an interesting figure in his own right. His acquaintance with Clare has not previously been noted by students of the poet, and even as an artist he is little known today.⁴ He was born in England on 24 June 1817, and as a youth studied under John Varley and also John Le Capelain.⁵ During the late eighteen-forties he was employed as Drawing Master at the Glasgow Collegiate

¹ x. 134-41.

² Avery thought Clare had published only three volumes and appears to be entirely ignorant of *The Shepherd's Calendar*.

³ Early, probably January 1873. The preface is dated December 1872.

⁴ He is not noticed in the *DAB* or in Thieme-Becker, and although various authorities mention him their information is meagre and inaccurate: see e.g. George Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564-1860* (New Haven, 1957), s.v. "Wandesforde"; Sinclair Hamilton, *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers 1670-1870 . . .* (Princeton, 1958), p. 216; [Bartlett Cowdrey, comp.], *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record 1826-1860* (New York, 1943), ii. 181-2.

⁵ I am deeply indebted to J. B. Wandesforde, III, and to Hardy G. Wandesforde, great-grandsons of the artist, for generously providing me with information and material concerning him. My account is primarily drawn from an article "The Late Juan B. Wandesforde", *Mark Hopkins Institute Review of Art*, i (December 1902), 32, 34, and from a typewritten draft upon which the article seems to be based.

and Commercial Academy, from which he resigned on 1 May 1850, for reasons of ill health.¹ Shortly after he must have emigrated to America, for he exhibited his first pictures at the National Academy of Design in New York in 1852.² He subsequently exhibited in 1854, 1855, 1858, and 1860, his address being variously given as New York City and Long Island.³ According to the typewritten draft "he at once took a leading place among the painters of the day".⁴ During this period he became the friend of Bayard Taylor, N. P. Willis, G. W. Curtis, Chief Justice Daly, Samuel F. B. Morse, Charles O'Connor, Charles T. Brady, John Frederick Kensett, and others in the literary, artistic, and political world. He painted historical pictures, as well as portraits and landscapes, and worked also as an illustrator.⁵ "Wandesforde came to California in March 1862 expecting to return to the field of his successes in New York later, but finding the climate congenial and a splendid opportunity for the exercise of his beloved art, made California his home. He became the teacher of many of our well-known artists of the present day and exerted a decided influence on art in San Francisco. This influence was productive of marked results in the foundation of the San Francisco Art Association, for it was Mr. Wandesforde who gathered together at his residence the artists and lovers of art from which sprang the present society, Mr. Wandesforde being elected the first President."⁶ It was probably through their joint work in establishing the Association that Avery and Wandesforde became acquainted. Wandesforde painted many California landscapes,⁷ and his work hung in the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art,⁸ but many of his paintings were

¹ Photostat of a letter of 3 May 1850 from James Browning of the Academy to J. B. Wandesforde, accepting his resignation with regret. The original is in the possession of Mr. Hardy G. Wandesforde.

² Cowdrey, ii. 181. They were "Portrait of a Gentleman", "Vespers", and "Pass of Glencoe, Scotland". ³ Ibid. ii. 182.

⁴ Photostat of the typewritten draft, from the original in the possession of Mr. Hardy G. Wandesforde.

⁵ I quote from the typewritten draft, which is fuller than the printed version.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See *Catalogue of the San Francisco Art Association Mark Hopkins Institute of Art* (San Francisco, 1904), pp. 39, 66. The pictures listed were presented by Avery. The *Catalogue* contains a very brief account of Wandesforde.

destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire.¹ He died on 18 November 1902.²

Apparently Wandesforde had been greatly impressed by Clare, for he carried the manuscripts the poet had given him to California, and it was only when he met someone who could sympathize with and understand these treasured possessions that he allowed them to be printed.³ The article begins with a friendly and discerning account of Clare and his work. Avery tends to idealize Clare the man, but he gives a perceptive estimate of his poetry and of his place among English poets. He then continues :

Some of the pencilled scraps which he produced during the time of his long eclipse, have found their way to California, in the hands of J. B. Wandesforde, the artist, who has kindly placed them at our disposal. Mr. Wandesforde was sketching, many years ago, among the hills and dales of Epping Forest, the scene of Clare's confinement, often met him on his rambles, and formed such an intimacy with him, that Clare would often hand him bits of his pencilings. Some of these are now partly illegible, and some are quite fragmentary ; but two or three are perfect, and, our readers will admit, quite beautiful, despite apparent defects, which the revision we do not feel at liberty to make would remove. The following is very crude, but pathetically suggestive of his malady and separation from his family

THE PANSY

It does me good, thou flower of spring,
 Thy blossoms to behold ;
 Thou bloom'st when birds begin to sing,
 In purple and in gold.

Along the garden-beds so neat
 Thy flowers their blooms display
 When sparrows chirp and lambkins bleat
 And hopes look up for May.

Then Emma thinks the heart's-ease blooms
 When she the pansy sees ;
 But I see sleep among the tombs,
 With heart that's ill at ease,

¹ Mr. Hardy G. Wandesforde, however, still possesses a large collection of his great-grandfather's paintings.

² There is a brief obituary notice in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, 19 November 1902, p. 2.

³ The manuscripts seem to have perished in a fire which destroyed the Wandesforde family home in Hayward, California.

That asks for what it's lost and loved—
 A quiet home and friends,
 Where nature's feelings were approved
 And peace made life amends ;

Where love was all I had to sing,
 And there these pansy flowers
 Came shining in the dews of spring
 To cheer the sunny hours.

But years may pass, as they have passed,
 And I may hope in vain,
 With hopes that linger to the last,
 To see them bloom again.

The fairest flower that ever bloomed,
 Or garden ever blest,
 Looks cold to care, and ne'er was doomed
 To ease the heart's unrest.

The heart's-ease in her happy hour
 Might Emma's fancy please,
 But life will often pluck the flower
 And feel but ill at ease.

Curiously enough, the same slip of paper on which this unhappy plaint was scrawled, contained the subjoined lightsome

SONG ON TOBACCO

Some sing about love in their season of roses,
 But love has in sorrow no blossoms to wear ;
 So I'll sing tobacco, that cheers and composes,
 And lulls us asleep in our trouble and care.
 So here's to tobacco, the Indian weed,
 The peaceful companion through trouble and strife ;
 May it prove every smoker's best friend in his need,
 And be to his heart a restorer through life.

There's the husbandman hourly tormented with care,
 By his daily companion, a troublesome wife ;
 But a pipe of tobacco will soothe his despair,
 And bring him sunshine in the shadows of life.
 Then here's to tobacco, the Indian weed,
 May it bless honest smokers with peace to the end,
 For such a companion is friendship indeed,
 Since it proves in the midst of all troubles a friend.

The statesman, the lawyer, the parson will find,
 When business oppresses and sorrow grows ripe,
 To steer clear of follies and strengthen the mind,
 There's nothing like leisure and smoking a pipe.
 So here's to that cheering tobacco once more ;
 May each honest smoker prove blest with the weed,
 May it mend broken hopes and lost pleasures restore,
 And always prove dear as a friend in his need.

The following stanza was evidently the beginning of a ballad :

Beautiful woman, visions dwell
 Of heaven's joy about thee,
 And every step I take is hell
 That walks thro' life without thee.

And these fragmentary verses are sadly retrospective :

When with our little ones we spent
 Each Sunday after tea,
 And up the wood's dark side we went
 Or pasture's rushy lea,
 To look among the woodland boughs
 To find the bird's retreat,
 Or crop the cowslip for the cows ;

Then sat to rest the little feet
 In many a pleasant place,
 And see the lambs, who tried to bleat
 Come first in every race,
 Then laugh'd the children's joys to view,
 Who ran across the lea
 At birds that from the rushes flew,
 And many a wandering bee.

Here is a pretty pastoral idyl, imperfect as it is ; and the disconnected stanza that follows it is a perfect gem :

COLIN

You promised me, a year ago,
 When autumn bleach'd the mistletoe,
 That you and I should be as one ;
 But now another autumn's gone—
 Its solemn knell is in the blast,
 And love's bright sun is overcast ;
 Yet flowers will bloom and birds will sing
 And e'en the winter claim the spring.

LUCY

The hedges will be green again,
 And flowers will come on hill and plain ;
 And though we meet a rainy day,
 The hawthorn will be white with May.
 If love and nature still agree,
 Green leaves will clothe the trysting-tree ;
 And when these pleasing days you view,
 Think Lucy's heart yet be true.

Sweeter than roses was the face
 For whom I pluck's the flower ;
 Sweeter than heaven was the place
 In that delightful hour.

There is more of Clare's true quality in these

LINES ON AUTUMN

'Tis autumn now, and harvest's reign
 Browns swelling hills and hollow vales ;
 The sudden shower sweeps o'er the plain,
 And health breathes in the shivering gales.
 The coveys rise—the sportman joys—
 And in the stubble bleeding fall ;
 The hunter's face glows in the chase—
 He loves to hear the bugle call,
 That loud through wood and dingle rings,
 As o'er the fence the courser springs.

The songs of home on every field
 From merry harvesters are heard ;
 The hare, as yet, from harm will shield
 Where barley waves its tawny beard.
 Some sing and blink o'er kebs of drink,
 And love the drunkard's brawls to own ;
 I love to dream by valley's stream,
 And live with quiet peace alone :
 The brook and wood, the vale and tree,
 Are the green homes of joy to me.

Some love to drink adieu to care :
 I love the solitude of rest.
 Some meet with woman false and fair,
 And think it joy to be distressed.
 The hazel nook, the mossy brook,
 I love from feelings of a boy ;

The broad-topped oak, the raven's croak,
 And all of nature brings me joy.
 There solitude of sun and shade
 A paradise on earth hath made.

And yet, the love of woman still
 Hath been my sunshine all along ;
 Her voice along the upland hill
 Was music in my early song ;
 Her love confessed is still the best
 To comfort every care and thrall ;
 In poetry's page, her heritage
 Reigns still the empress over all.
 There's not a land where life hath been
 But looks on woman as its queen.

Poor Clare, like most demented persons, thought himself the victim of a conspiracy, and, under this impression, wrote to his wife this letter :

Northamptonshire : Direction—
 Northborough, near Market-Deeping,
 April 18th, 1842.¹

My dear Wife Patty :

If you are my wife (and I am sure you used to be so—aye, ever since I was twenty-five years of age), write to me here, and acknowledge that you are so now ; or, if your inclination is, best make this long absence a final separation, let it be known and I can prove that I am sensible, and have been grossly imposed upon by real enemies, which you will do well to shun as enemies to yourself. You can claim me away from this place as your husband, the same as I was when I left you, with honest and good intention to return to my home and family in a day or two. Since then, months have elapsed, and I am still here, away from them, enduring all the miseries of solitude—which every married man must feel, through years of absence and confinement from his own home and family. Take every kind wish from me for your health and happiness, and for a father's love to your children, who ever wishes them well and happy.

Believe me, my dear wife, that I am, as I ever have been,
 Your affectionate husband,
 John Clare.

To Martha Turner Clare.

On a blank page of the sheet containing the above, Clare had written the verses that follow, which are faulty, and somewhat incoherent, but very touching as the evidence of a sweet nature, "jangled out of tune" :

¹ Clare at times misdated his letters, but this may simply be a mistranscription for 1841. Clare left Dr. Matthew Allen's asylum at High Beech on 20 July, 1841. Or the letter may possibly have come into Wandesforde's hands at a later date than the other manuscripts.

I long to forget them—the love of my life—
 To forget them, and keep this lorn being my own ;
 The honey is cell'd in such changeable strife,
 I long to keep sorrow and trouble my own—
 To live in myself, and to be what I am,
 And to leave earth's delusions and shadows behind,
 Where love may not cheat, nor its happiness damn :
 The shadows of hope I with nature may find.

O, bear me away from this changeable strife,
 To the childhood of nature, the linnet and bee !
 Let her flowers be my children, her freedom my wife,
 Where God, my Creator, is constant and free.
 The flower on the white bush, the nest in the ground,
 Which my own happy childhood once shouted to find ;
 Let me live in those scenes, with the wind blowing round,
 And I shall be happy to bear it in mind,

To think of the joys of that once-happy spot
 Where I lived with my children the whole summer long—
 The mother, the garden, the books and the cot,
 The theme and affection of many a song.
 The snowdrop and crocus are first in the year,
 And there the tall foxglove its red-freckled bell
 To the summer and bee was delicious and dear ;
 And down in the homestead, the pond and the dell

Would hide me an hour in its hazel so green,
 While the world and its troubles kept far, far away ;
 And there silent solitude kept me unseen,
 With love-ties around me the whole of the day.
 And there was the robin, perch'd on the ash tree,
 Would sing me a tune, and then drop for a worm ;
 And there the coy thrush my companion would be,
 While the hazel-bush sheltered my seat from a storm.

And there came the linnet, with wool in its bill,
 To build its new nest in the hedge or the thorn ;
 And there I could see the black sails of the mill,
 And the spire in the gray, sleeping light of the morn.
 And there came the heavy-wing'd kite o'er the lea,
 And the old hens they call'd for their chickens aloud ;
 And there the black crow came and perch'd on the tree,
 And the lark hid itself in the black-bosom'd cloud.

O, bear me away from the tumult and strife
 Where woman or falsehood is not to be found—
 To the scenes which I loved in the childhood of life,
 In the fields which the thorn-hedges sheltered around ;

Where trees without order in spinney clumps stand,
 And in corners the aged or the whattled sheep pen ;
 O bear me to those dearest spots in the land,
 And the peace of my lowly thatch'd cottage again !

Mr. Wandesforde says that Clare, the gentle, harmless lover of nature, who would avoid stepping on a flower, and carefully replace the bough that hid a bird's nest, fancied himself a prize-fighter, and the champion of all England !

Although Clare's early admirers in America were few and their influence limited, their admiration has not ultimately been unfruitful : thanks to them poems and letters of Clare that might otherwise have been lost have been preserved. Pioneers as well as preservers, they began the appreciation of Clare in the United States.

APPENDIX

Early American References to and Reprintings of Clare

This list includes references to Clare and reprintings of his poems found in a fairly extensive search of American periodicals, 1820-50. A few items from books have also been listed. Although the number of entries could doubtless be expanded, I do not believe that the outline of Clare's early reputation in America would be seriously altered.

"Literary Intelligence. *Notices of Works preparing for publication, or recently published.*" *Belles-Lettres Repository, and Monthly Magazine*, ii (January 1820), 232 : lists "Poems, Songs, and Sonnets. By John Clare, a Northamptonshire peasant".

"Art. XXX. Intelligence in Literature, Science, and the Arts." *Port Folio*, xxxv (September 1820), 251-60. Includes (p. 253) a brief account of Clare ; quotes six lines from "Address to Plenty".

"Art. VI. *Poems, descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery.* By John Clare, a Northamptonshire Peasant. Published at London." *Analectic Magazine*, xv [N.S., II] (September 1820), 255-61. Brief introductory remarks, preceding excerpts from the *Quarterly Review*.

Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review [New York], i (October 1820), 538. Lists "*Poems, descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery.* By John Clare. 3d edit." ; quotes one sentence from the *Quarterly Review*.

"'Falling Leaves'—by John Clare, the Northampton Peasant. 'The Setting Sun' By the same." *Literary Gazette, or Journal of Criticism, Science and the Arts. Being a third series of the Analectic Magazine*, i (10 February, 1821), 95. From *Poems, Descriptive*.

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“Visit to John Clare, the Northamptonshire Peasant. With a Notice of his New Poems.” *Athenæum*; or, *Spirit of the English Magazines*, x (15 January, 1822), 293-300. From the *London Magazine*. “Song. By John Clare.” *Ibid.* p. 312. “Of all the days in memory’s list.” From the *Literary Gazette*.

“Song. By John Clare.” *Ibid.* p. 319. “There was a time, when love’s young flowers.”

“To the Clouds. By John Clare.” *Ibid.* x (1 February, 1822), 336. “O Painted clouds! sweet beauties of the sky.”

“To an Infant Daughter. By John Clare, the Northamptonshire Peasant.” *Ibid.* p. 345. “Sweet gem of infant-flowers.”

“To My Mother (From *Clare’s Poems*).” *Port Folio and New York Monthly Magazine* (Philadelphia), xxxviii (February 1822), 172. “With filial duty I address thee, Mother.”

“To an Infant Daughter. *From the same*.” *Ibid.* p. 173. “Sweet gem of infant fairy-flowers!”

“Ballad.” *Athenæum*; or, *Spirit of the English Magazines*, xi (1 April, 1822), 42. “I dreamt not what it was to woo.”

Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review (New York), iv (May 1822), 495-6. Reprints review of *The Village Minstrel and Other Poems* from the *Monthly Review*.

“Hymn to Spring.” *Athenæum*; or, *Spirit of the English Magazines*, xi (15 May, 1822), 134-5. “Thou virgin bliss the seasons bring.”

“Biography. July, 1793. Robert Clare, The Poet Farmer Boy, Born.” *Ibid.* xi (15 July, 1822), 314-15. A brief account; reprints “What is Life?” and “The Summer Morning”.

“Song. By John Clare.” *Ibid.* xi (1 August, 1822), 368. “The morning hours the sun beguiles.”

“The Literary Police Office, Bow Street.” *Ibid.* xiii (15 May, 1823), 151-3. From the *London Magazine*; Clare is treated (pp. 151-2).

“Sonnet.—Silence.” *Ibid.* p. 162. “There is a silence where hath been no sound.”

“The Literary Police Office, Bow Street, London.” *Port Folio, and New York Monthly Magazine* [Philadelphia], xl (June 1823), 504-9. From the *London Magazine*, without acknowledgment; Clare (p. 505).

“The Quiet Mind. By the Northamptonshire Peasant.” *Museum of Foreign Literature and Science*, xii (February 1828), 286. “Though low my lot, my wish is won.”

Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art, xxxii (March 1838), 429-30. Reprints S. C. Hall’s letter to the Editor of the *Court Journal* and the biographical sketch of Clare reprinted there from Hall’s *Book of Gems*.

“ Letter from Correspondents. Letter from London.” (The “ Letter from London ” is signed “ W. C.”). *New-York Mirror*, xviii (15 August, 1840), 60. ³A brief account of Clare ; corrects the false report of his death. “ W. C.” was William Cox : see *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*.

[Anna Cabot Lowell], *Poetry for Home and School* (Part I). Boston, 1843. Includes (pp. 242-244) “ The Summer Evening ”, much condensed. Second edition, 1846 : “ The Summer Evening ” (pp. 240-1).

“ John Clare, the Peasant Poet.” *Littell's Living Age*, ii (26 October, 1844), 706. Reprints “ J. N. of Worcester's ” account of his visit to Clare.

“ From our London Correspondent.” *New-York Mirror, A Reflex of News, Literature, Arts, and Elegancies of Our Time*, v (10 October, 1846), 12-13. Describes meeting Clare at Milton. Unsigned, but perhaps by Charles Frederick Briggs.

Cyclopaedia of English Literature. Ed. Robert Chambers. Boston, 1847. Clare is noticed (ii. 425-429).

Samuel Smiles. *Brief Biographies*. Boston, 1861. Includes a sympathetic sketch of Clare (pp. 432-9).