

A STUDY OF JOHN CLARE
IN HIS HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Scope

As the title indicates, the basis of the thesis is to set John Clare's life and work within the context of the social and political history of his time. It is a study that is long overdue. The manner in which topical and political matters were mediated to him and were reflected in his work are analysed. His introduction to the literary and social worlds of Stamford and London is evaluated, and the advantages and disadvantages of patronage assessed. The active and complex political culture of Stamford has been taken into account as this may have affected his later political statements and a growing awareness of his audience. His antagonism to enclosure and the social changes that it engendered are considered. Three major questions that arise from this are addressed.

Method

The two local newspapers that Clare is known to have read are used throughout. His correspondence with friends, colleagues and casual correspondents has provided valuable insights as have his poetry and prose writings. Research in the Northamptonshire Record Office has revealed important new information in the form of one book of Enclosure Commissioners' Minutes dated 1809-14, the first five years of the enclosure of Helpstone, Clare's native village.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to set the thirty-seven years of John Clare's active working life, and his work, in its historical and political framework. The contemporary scene during these years, 1793-1830, coincided with a period of far-reaching change in this country, which becomes apparent when reading the newspapers of the time. The thesis is not put forward as evidence that Clare was writing directly about these events as a chronicler but that he assimilated many items of news and reproduced them, often at a later stage, in his poetry and prose, because they were appropriate emphases when needed.

Such newspapers brought to Clare's attention many aspects of day-to-day life; matters that the average farm worker, probably illiterate, would not have encountered. Some two hundred years later we are privileged to be able to read copies of some of those local papers that we know the poet read, namely the *Stamford Mercury* and *Drakard's Stamford News*. These papers have been used as part of the source material, as well as Clare's out-going correspondence, and his incoming correspondence contained in the Egerton MSS 2245-49. The fortuitous discovery by an archivist in the Northampton Record Office of one book of Commissioners' Minutes has proved invaluable. This covers the period 1809-1814 and includes the Helpstone Enclosure. This facilitates the examination of three important questions concerning this enclosure that have not hitherto been addressed, namely (a) why was there so long a delay between the submission of Claims and the grant of the Awards, (b) why was there apparently no opposition or protest concerning the enclosure, and (c) why was Clare, a landless labourer with no commoning rights, involved in the outcry against the enclosure? Copies of the Claims and the Awards have also supplied additional and valuable material.

As a young and new reader Clare was liable to be affected by much that he read but perhaps the opinions reported in *Drakard's Stamford News* were the most influential. This was a paper of news as compared with the *Stamford Mercury*, a business paper which carried very little editorial comment on current events. Little credit has, to date, been ascribed to the first editor of the *News*, one John Scott, whose writing and influence on that paper has been commended: 'Scott's vigorous, straightforward attacks upon abuses of power, his championing of the oppressed, and his outspoken advocacy of parliamentary reform had attracted wide attention.'¹ This could account for some of Clare's above-average general knowledge. It is evident from his letters that he was ready to comment, in his letters, on a wide range of subjects with such well-informed men as John Taylor and James Hessey, his publishers, and Thomas Pringle, Secretary

of the Anti-Slavery Society. In 1820 Scott moved to London to become editor of the *London Magazine* and Clare, in the year that his first volume, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, was published, encountered Scott's work for a second time. He was sent copies of the *London Magazine* by his publishers, Taylor and Hessey, on a fairly regular basis. The political turbulence caused up and down the country by the effects of the French Revolution, can be clearly detected in the *News*. A government that was dogged by fear of a similar uprising in this country resorted to repression as the most effective means of avoiding it. The slightest sign of seditious activity was severely dealt with. Legislation was introduced that affected aspects of Clare's life in the approach to his work by both his publishers and his patrons. General dissatisfaction with the Government was illustrated by the plots and violence that were made public. The Prime Minister was assassinated in 1812, the Peterloo massacre took place in 1819, and the Cato Street Conspiracy in 1820. The imprisonment of John Drakard, owner, printer and publisher of *Drakard's Stamford News*, on a charge of inciting the Army to revolt, made a significant impression in Stamford, illustrated by the size of the subscription raised for him by his sympathisers.² The impact of the French Revolution cannot be underestimated.

The cost of the wars with France was not allowed to pass unnoticed. Attention was frequently drawn to this in the *News* and Clare was ever-conscious of the suffering of the average man and woman. The return of the troops led to unemployment and the rise in prices was followed by starvation in some parts of the country. Such poverty could only add to the general dissatisfaction that was prevalent; the lack of Government support for the needy was noticeable and was commented on in the *News*. Crime increased and figures for its detection and punishment were published. With a Government that was considered to be corrupt and uncaring there was a general call for the Reform of Parliament which continued for some years. The monarchy was not held in high repute or regard largely due to the lifestyle of the future king, the Prince Regent, Religion was a subject that was also commented on without restraint in the *News*: the Established Church was also held in disrepute at this time. The question of education for the working classes was also beginning to be discussed and was referred to in the *News*. These subjects are examined in detail in Chapter Two.

The influence of Clare's literary and financial patrons is fully discussed in Chapter Three. Patronage, which had largely passed to institutions by 1820, had also become the province of an increasingly erudite public. To Clare, several of the patrons to whom he had been introduced or had met, were of doubtful advantage to him in some ways. His literary patrons became his greatest support and source of education. It can be clearly seen however that patronage that extended to intervention in his private life was in many ways a distraction and a hindrance.

Financial support, initially provided by Lord Radstock, the Earl of Exeter, and the Fitzwilliam family, he undoubtedly needed and appreciated. However, direct interference and attempts to supervise his lifestyle, his religion, and political opinions, he found increasingly unacceptable. Admonitions, homilies, 'improving books', and letters containing moral injunctions were poured on his head by his early patron Lord Radstock, the well-meaning, dictatorial, aristocratic evangelical. Clare, writing from his knowledge and observation of country life and customs, also fell foul of the delicate social conventions of many of his readers. Their two worlds were miles apart and the effort to square this circle was at the cost of wrangling between Clare, his publisher who was also his literary mentor, and the Earl. He seems to have been drawn into suspicion of possible radicalism, a serious and dangerous offence in a sensitive political era, and thus into greater efforts on his part to try to anticipate the audience who might come into contact with his work. This at times compounds the difficulty of interpreting the significance of his poetry, prose, and correspondence. Nevertheless he soon learned that involvement in politics could only hinder his advancement in the circles on which he relied for support and he struggled to placate his patrons, but not without resentment. He did not give way entirely however, and wrote two overtly political poems 'The Summons' and 'The Hue and Cry' in 1829. His political satire *The Parish* is dated 1820-22. A fierce attack on the evils of local government, it was fearless and was not published in his lifetime.

Although Clare's formal education had been scanty and he was largely self-taught there can be no doubt that his various literary patrons made a considerable contribution to this. Edward Drury, Stamford bookseller, publisher and critic initially guided his reading and granted unlimited access to books. Octavius Gilchrist, a local socialite, businessman, antiquarian, and writer, supplied his early social background, providing access to his own classical library, and introduction to a circle of well known literary men. John Taylor, his publisher, correspondent, and friend, was a natural teacher who afforded Clare his introduction to the camaraderie of the 'Londoners', fellow members of the group who wrote for the *London Magazine* of which Taylor was the editor from 1821 to 1824. Mrs Eliza Emerson, a minor figure on the London social scene, provided further social polish and, from the time Clare spent in her home, insight into the lifestyle of a moderately wealthy upper middleclass household. Clare made the most of opportunities that were given to him and also grasped the friendship with men of such diverse characters as Ripplingille the artist, and Revd Henry Cary, a most benevolent, open-minded and humorous cleric.

At times Clare judged Enclosure as the domination of the wealthy landowner over the labouring class, surely reflecting the viewpoint of those friends and neighbours with whom he

associated regularly. As a poet he also mourned the changed landscapes, moving on to nostalgia for those missing landmarks he had known and loved all his life. A study of Clare's concern in many aspects of Enclosure, particularly where it concerned his native village Helpstone, has been directed towards his unlikely involvement in the matter. The simple and obvious fact that he was surrounded by examples of Enclosure, and that it directly affected his friends and neighbours has been examined. The delay between the passing of the Act in 1809 to enclose the lands of Helpstone and neighbouring villages and the grant of the Award in 1820 raises a question that has never been addressed. An explanation has been put forward. As Northamptonshire was one of the principal counties of Enclosure and was rife with protest it appears strange that no disturbance has been recorded in or very near Helpstone. This has also been examined. A third question, arising from the obviously deep concern of a landless labourer/poet in such a subject adds emphasis to the strength of discussion in a small environment. Clare appeared to take up the cause of the small man and identify with it. Unsurprisingly, the social changes that then followed Enclosure affected him greatly. Interwoven into his lamentations over the loss of familiar landscapes and landmarks were his recollection of boyhood games and ancient customs associated with the seasons of the farming year. He deplored the changes that were undercutting the old society that he knew and loved. critic, initially guided his reading and granted unlimited access to books.

Crime increased and figures for its detection and punishment were published. With a Government that was considered to be corrupt and uncaring there was a general call for the Reform of Parliament which continued for some years. The monarchy was not held in high repute or regard largely due to the lifestyle of the future king, the Prince Regent. Religion was a subject that was also commented on without restraint in the *News*: the Established Church was also held in disrepute at this time. The question of education for the working classes was also beginning to be discussed and was referred to in the *News*. These subjects are examined in detail in Chapter Two.

The subject of religion was controversial and was frequently brought forward as a topic for discussion by the *News*. Religion was important to Clare and he poured contempt on those who only paid lip service to the Church. His interest became a personal search. He read diligently the many books on the subject presented to him by Lord Radstock, Mrs Emmerson, and clerics, and commented on them in his Journal. He examined the information and evidence that was available to him concerning other beliefs, the Quakers earning his special admiration, the Roman Catholics some scornful amusement and incredulity. He scrutinized his own belief which led to questions and discussions with Taylor and Hessey, his publishers who had become

friends and confidantes. Unfairness, corruption, and any form of cant and hypocrisy were anathema to Clare, who had been strictly brought up by his parents to respect honesty and those precepts laid down by the teaching of the Established Church in which he had been brought up. Attention is drawn to the fact that his bouts of depression and an increased interest in religion appear to have coincided although no conclusions can be reached from this.

This, then, was a time of great change, political, social, economic, educational, and religious, and of an upsurge in independent thinking. It was also an era of great discontent and unrest and thus a difficult time in which to live. This thesis follows the history of John Clare the country poet, from his introduction to the pageant that was London society to his success and lionization, which naturally dwindled during the next ten years or so. As public interest turned away from poetry to novels and to a search for greater academic knowledge Clare continued to write the poetry he felt compelled to produce.

NOTES

1. Josephine Bauer, *The London Magazine* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1953), p. 59.
2. Patrick O'Leary, *Regency Editor: A Life of John Scott* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), p. 42.

Chapter 2. Historical and Political Background

2.1 Introduction

The twenty years of war (1793-1815) between Britain and revolutionary and Napoleonic France occurred at a time when industrial, agricultural, and social changes were taking place here. They were years of extreme hardship for the poor, both for those who had crowded into new factory towns in search of work and for those who had remained in rural areas where enclosure was still taking place and jobs were scarce. Generally, wages were low and prices high. Events of major importance had taken place in Europe during the year 1793, the year of John Clare's birth. Louis XVI of France was tried and executed, France declared war on England, the Terror in France began, and Marie Antoinette was executed. In England, the anti-Jacobin movement started, and in Scotland the Treason Trials began.¹ Ripples of alarm were felt by those in positions of power in England at the result of the French Revolution lest the contagion of unrest and anarchy should spread across the Channel. Burke, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, warned that these events could be the precursor of an uprising in England.² Clare himself has provided a first-hand account of the general alarm that finally involved national enlistment and his own service in the militia:

When the country was chin deep in the fears of invasion and every mouth was filled with the terrors which Bonaparte had spread in other countries a national scheme was set on foot to raise a raw army of volunteers [...] the papers that were circulated assured the people of England that the French were on the eve of invading it and that it was deemed necessary by the regent that an army from 18 to 45 should be raised immediately this was the great lye and then the little lies were soon at its heels which assured the people of Helpstone that the French had invaded and got to London and some of these little lies had the impudence to swear that the French had even reached Northampton [...] We had a cross graind sort of choice left us which was to be forced to be drawn and go for nothing or take on as Volunteers for the bounty of 2 guineas I accepted the latter³

This also gives a clear indication that news of national importance, as well as hearsay, could reach even remote hamlets such as Helpstone, on the edge of the Lincolnshire Fens.

The newspapers of that time provide a graphic picture of the way in which events were seen by writers and editors of the period, as well as enabling us to review them with the benefit

of hindsight. Examination of some of the papers that Clare would have read as soon as he became a member of the reading public reveal the manner in which important events were mediated to him. Initially it was likely that it was the principal local papers that came his way, namely *Drakard's Stamford News* and the *Stamford Mercury* that were in general circulation in his area. He recorded reading a newspaper 'in weeding time' in early youth when employed on a farm.⁴ An entry in his Journal tells us that he read the *Mercury* regularly for a period from December 1824.⁵ His references to advertisements for razor strops and Turners Blacking in 'Some Account of My Kin, My Tallents & Myself' support the view that he read this paper diligently.⁶ Although he acknowledged receiving the newspapers that his patrons, Lord Radstock, Mrs Emmerson, and others, sent to him, he does not always record what these were, or their exact dates. In this chapter, therefore, eight subjects will be examined from among those reviewed in the *Mercury* and the *News*, namely General Unrest, War, Poverty, Reform, the Monarchy, Corruption, Religion, and Education. These also serve to illustrate the differing political views of the editors or owners of these two papers. The *Stamford Mercury*, first published in 1712 and self-styled 'Britain's oldest newspaper', was owned and managed by an old-established Stamford family. A business paper, filled with advertisements, it was also a typical country newspaper, in which the editor refrained from expressing views likely to be found too controversial.⁷ The *Stamford News*, on the other hand, was established in 1809 by a comparative newcomer to the town, one John Drakard, publisher and printer, a Yorkshireman who had come to live in Stamford as recently as 1800. He was bitterly opposed to the Cecil family at Burghley House, Stamford.⁸ It can be established from Clare's letters that he knew John Drakard⁹ and met Brownlow Cecil, the second Marquess of Exeter, who became one of his early patrons.¹⁰

2.2 General Unrest

Consideration of events in France was introduced to readers of the *Stamford News* in its first issue in 1809, when Clare was sixteen years of age:

At this momentous era, when the countries by which we are surrounded are in a state of political convulsion, and a mighty Despot has advanced from the lowest obscurity to walk with gigantic strides over ancient governments, deposing their Sovereigns from their thrones at his pleasures [...] we are particularly interested to enquire into the causes which have led to so serious a vicissitude in human affairs, and by a comparison of the history and present state of other countries with our own, to admire and protect

everything which is good in our Political Constitution, and to propose the eradication from it of such evils (if they exist) as have led to the ruin of other nations.¹¹

Clearly the ‘mighty Despot’ referred to here is Napoleon Bonaparte, sometimes caricatured as ‘Boney’ in the early nineteenth century to scare children from wrong-doing. Clare also used this ogre-figure in 1832 to describe Enclosure, a ‘bogyman’ to many a countryman:

Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain
It levelled every bush & tree & levelled every hill
& hung the moles for traitors though the brook is running still¹²

He not only likens the tyranny of Bonaparte to the enforcement of Enclosure Acts, the levelling of the land to the ‘egalite’ of the revolutionary ethos, but introduces the veiled warning that the menace of repression, and/or revolution, had not been quelled but, like the brook, continues on its way. It is worth noting that Clare’s first visit to London took place in early March 1820.¹³ A few weeks earlier (on 23 February 1820), the Cato Street Conspiracy to assassinate the entire Cabinet had been exposed by the infiltration of Government spies; a trap had been set and the plotters arrested.¹⁴ Without doubt this would have been a matter for general discussion and agitation during the time of his visit and he may well have had these events in mind when, with hindsight, he wrote in 1832:

Here was commons for their hills where they seek for freedom still
Though every commons gone & though traps are set to kill
The little homeless miners—O it turns my bosom chill¹⁵

with a reference to the ‘miners’, the moles or conspirators, known by then to have held their secret meetings in taverns, chapels, coffee houses, and private houses throughout London.¹⁶

2.3 The Wars with France, 1793-1815

The Editor of the *News* clearly intended to emphasise, at an early stage in his management, his concern over the state of the country as well as his distrust of Napoleon. The cost of the war in which England had become involved gave rise to this criticism in 1809:

PEACE OR MORE TAXES

The war cannot be carried on without new loans and new taxes to pay the interest of those loans. But taxation can proceed no further without destroying the very root itself of all practicable taxation. The labouring class can pay no more. It is too late to listen to the half-informed though not half-fed men, who pretend that the labouring class live well and still have something to spare. He who visits them knows the contrary. Such a one sees them living on fare which no working man can live on and preserve the full powers of labouring. He sees them in rapid preparation for the fever house.

Comparison was made between this state of the labourers and the wealthy landlord who held the means of livelihood for the poor in his control but could hardly be made to pay out anything, a man portrayed as selling the work of their hands (for which he paid little) to meet his own taxes.¹⁷

Clare appears to have been well aware of the effects of war. He wrote such poems as 'Poor Soldier':

O long I have fought for my country & king
 & now am returned for to beg
 Robd of the fruits which my labour did bring
 By the loss of a arm & a leg¹⁸

The labourer, who had been compelled to fight, is depicted as having been robbed, on his return home, of the means of earning his livelihood. Young women whose lovers had not returned from the war are compared, in 'Milk Maids Lament', to lone birds:

Like the odd larking upon the bleak meadows
 & lorn mopeing q[u]ail on the hard frozen lea
 Which the Gun of the hard hearted swain has made widows
 I meet the sad trouble that war bringeth me
 All hopes they are vain while the grim war is scowling
 Its fate may already alight on him now¹⁹

They, too, had to pay the price of war as well as the men who went to fight. Clare was sensitive to the degradation of begging, the fate of many a returning soldier:

& let pity find an odd penny good neighbours
 To the life ebbing wreck & grey age & deep scars
 My bow back is warpd wi excess of hard labours
 My arms left behind me in hot bloody wars ²⁰

It is noticeable that all these poems are dated 1819-20. He openly inveighed against war in such poems as 'The Wounded Soldier' (dated 1808-21) ²¹ and praised those whose self sacrifice had been devoted to their country:

Their british courage british breed
 How they could fight how they could bleed
 For their own right and others too
 So Nobly prov'd at Waterloo ²²

The cost of the war to a working man was his blood, or his life. All these poems were written at a time when the plight of the returning service men would have been most noticeable

2.4 Poverty

Economic depression after the wars was caused by a slump in the demand for manufactured goods and unemployment was further increased by the number of men demobilised. Additional distress was created in both industry and agriculture as machines took over from manpower. Machine-breaking, rick-burning, and theft were resorted to by the unemployed in town and country. There was little sympathy in Government circles for the plight of the poor. Brown records that between the years 1817-20 crime and punishment rose to new heights; during 1822, five thousand one hundred and seven people were sentenced to death and four hundred and twenty-seven were executed.²³ Knowledge of such punishment, added to a countryman's experience of the gamekeeping practice of displaying dead vermin (supposedly to act as a deterrent to other predators), may have contributed to some of the imagery that Clare used in later years. 'Remembrances', dated 1832, gives a striking example:

O I never call to mind
 Those pleasant names of places but I leave a sigh behind
 While I see the little mouldywharps hang sweeing to the wind
 On the only aged willow that in all the field remains

& nature hides her face where theyre sweeing in their chains
 & in a silent murmuring complains²⁴

At the same time the poet is recording again his awareness of the prevalent undercurrent of discontent that was abroad throughout the country, and was, perforce, silent. His, (or their) comment is only a 'silent murmuring', well hidden, perhaps as yet unnoticed.

From its inception the *News* showed deep concern for the plight of the needy. This is apparent from a leading article in 1809:

THE POOR

The state of the lower and labouring poor of the community forms, in every country, the best criterion of its internal prosperity and political stability. To every man of reflexion the situation of the poor in our own Island must afford matter of deep concern

An extract from a *Survey of Sussex* was quoted to drive the point home. The condition of the poor was depicted as being far below the standard expected in any wealthy country; their homes infested with filth and vermin, their clothing inadequate, their education neglected.²⁵ By November 1811 'alarming riots in Nottinghamshire' which involved frame-breaking were reported, followed by attacks on haystacks.²⁶ In 1812 there was an outspoken comment on pauperism in the *News*:

Ministers and others are fond of talking of the prosperous state of the country, the briskness of trade and the increase in wealth. Let them listen to the truth [...] the increase in the number of paupers.

An extract from the *Liverpool Mercury* was used to record a rise in pauperism from two hundred and eighty-eight to three hundred and fifty in one month in that city. Statistics gave similar details from other parts of the country.²⁷ In 1814 bad weather necessitated subsidies to the needy; the misery of the poor in the metropolis was the subject of comment in the *News*, as was the distribution of bread, faggots, coal, and flour in various rural parishes, Boston and Spalding being among those mentioned in Lincolnshire.²⁸ A contrasting report in 1818 from the *Stamford Mercury* stated that 'it was pleased to report the generous consideration of the higher orders of this neighbourhood for the poor round their mansions' at that time.²⁹ At no time does Clare comment on any such distribution in his village.

Parliamentary indifference to the plight of the poor was noticeable. In 1820 the Political Observer of the *News* drew attention to this:

A petition was presented from the Irish labouring poor of St. Giles's containing a description of their distress through lack of employment, appealing for some means to be devised to enable them to earn bread. They observed that they had heard a lot about paper money and bullion and radical reformers but believed their distress was owing to the need of work.

This report was laid on the table and Lord Castlereagh moved that the House should adjourn until 15 February, some six weeks later.³⁰ The unusual lack of editorial comment contains an implicit, loaded criticism of the current mode of government. As Olivia Smith has pointed out:

Between 1793 and 1818 (and later as well), Parliament dismissively refused to admit petitions because of the language in which they were written. [...] The few that were accepted were ordered to lie on the table and not referred to Committee. [...] The necessity of writing in a 'decent and respectful language' was a new requirement for petitions.³¹

Reports of distress continued to proliferate. By 1830 attention was drawn to a great Birmingham Meeting, attended by twelve to fifteen thousand persons, held to consider the alarming state of the country and to form a Great Political Union. The paramount importance of an effectual reform of Parliament was agreed. The Editor of the *News* stated: 'People everywhere feel their distresses, which point to a corrupt House of Commons, lavish expenditure, and the load of taxation'.³² Later in that year there were similar reports of such meetings in Buckinghamshire, Coventry, Manchester, Rutland, and Northamptonshire.³³ Readers everywhere in the locality, which of course included Helpstone and Stamford, were being given ample food for thought and discussion and, for those who could not read, there were always those in taverns and shops who were ready to do so. Of such gatherings and debates E. P. Thompson comments:

Throughout the war years there were Thomas Hardys in every town and in many villages throughout England, with a kist or shelf full of Radical books, biding their time, putting in a word at the tavern, the chapel, the smithy, the shoemaker's shop, waiting for the movement to revive.³⁴

Clare described the cobbler's shop in his village as: 'A place of amusement for the young ploughmen and labour[er]s on winter evenings'.³⁵ This could also have been the forum for many a political discussion in Helpstone at which he was present. He describes his 'Clerk of the parish & schoolmaster too':

Hed many things to crack on with his ale
For clowns less learned to wonder at the tale
& oer his pot hed take the news & preach
& observations make from speech to speech³⁶

The Hammonds consider that the first sign of the strain that was being felt by the underprivileged was the rioting of 1816, the year of the first peasants' revolt:

The labourer [...] differed from the other victims of distress in that he had not benefitted, but, [...] had lost, by the prosperity of the days when the plough turned a golden furrow. His housing had not been improved; his dependence had not been made less abject or less absolute; his wages had not risen; and in many cases his garden had disappeared.³⁷

This view is supported by the fact that when the cottage Clare shared with his parents was divided into four they lost the use of a large garden, but were fortunate in retaining an apple tree and the valuable fruit it produced. This made up the greater part of their rent. In the year that his father became too disabled to work the tree failed to produce fruit and he was unable to pay: parish officials threatened to brand his possessions to prevent their sale. With two years' rent in arrears he was pauperised. His son's 'unexpected prosperity' enabled him to retain the house for his parents but no other help was forthcoming.³⁸ Apparently the wealthy were able to accept, with equanimity, the misfortunes of the underprivileged as the intention of Divine Providence. The Hammonds opine that when the wealthy were affected in any way by the adverse conditions of the poor they took care to safeguard their own interests but otherwise seemed totally unaware of any social problem outside their immediate circle.³⁹ Referring to pauperism and the application of the 'Speenhamland Act' (introduced by magistrates in 1795), Trevelyan observes:

This payment of rates in aid of wages relieved the large employing farmer from the necessity of giving a living wage to his workpeople, and most unjustly forced the small

independent parishioner to help the big man, while at the same time it compelled the labourer to become a pauper while he was in full work! [...] The large farmers were confirmed in their selfish refusal to raise wages, the independent classes staggered under the burden of the poor-rate, while idleness and crime increased among the pauperized labourers.⁴⁰

By 1814 the Editor of the *News* pointedly drew attention to:

HAPPY RESULTS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION TO EUROPE

Religious intolerance and superstition have been set aside; narrow, selfish, and erroneous systems exploded; court prejudices and corruptions crushed: the intolerance of kingly and aristocratic pride humbled; the dignity of human nature and the majority of people upheld. The rights of the people have been vindicated. The privilege of mankind asserted.⁴¹

Experience of poverty was no novelty to Clare. Jobs were scarce in rural areas and seasonal unemployment was a constant source of grievance for agricultural workers. The poet likened their treatment to that meted out to animals:

But men we know like dogs may go
 When they've done all they can [...]

 Though thou'rt a dog (with grief I say't)
 Poor men thy fare partakes
 Like thee lost whelp the poor mans help
 Ere while so much desir'd
 Now harvests got is wanted not
 Or little is requir'd⁴²

He drew further attention to this state of distress in 'The Lamentations of Round Oak Waters',⁴³ 'Address to Plenty in Winter',⁴⁴ 'Impromptu on Winter',⁴⁵ and in an untitled poem in which the wealthy are depicted as dying 'gorg'd like beast in clover / We die for wants of bread'.⁴⁶ This picture of deprivation, developed in later lines, depicts the drive to theft:

As Ive begd food & clothing & nobody gi em
 The next plan to take is—hard fortune a curs ont
 As begging wornt speed I mun rob & make wors ont⁴⁷

He also gives a memorable description of want in both old age and in youth in ‘Lubins sigh for the pauper’, no doubt depicting both his father’s plight and his own in childhood.⁴⁸ ‘The Widow or Cress Gatherer’ tells a similar story:

I mark the widow & her orphan boy
 In preparation for their old employ
 The same lorn figures as they usd to be
 Rags pinched with hungry care from poverty
 The cloak & hat that had for seasons past
 Repelled the rain & buffeted the blast
 Tho worn to shreddings still are occupyd
 In makeshifts way their nakedness to hide [...]

Picking half naked round the brooks for bread
 To earn her penny ere she can be fed.⁴⁹

He also addressed this subject in prose, writing around 1829-1830 an ironic letter to an Editor (unspecified) entitled Apology for the Poor. Couched in apologetic terms, the writer humbly enquires whether the voice of a poor man may be heard. Claiming that he only wishes to ask a few questions he enquires about the possibility of some benefit coming the way of the poor: ‘After all this stir about taxation & tythes & agricultural distress’, so often have they been disappointed in the past after promises of reduction in prices when taxes had been reduced. Reference is made to the Corn Law of 1815; the price of bread having been raised artificially, to the benefit of the farmer and the detriment of the poor. He finds it necessary, for fear of giving offence, to plead for the right to ask these questions, making it clear:

I am so little of a politician that I would rather keep out of the crowd than that my hobnails should trample on the gouty toes of anyone [...] I wish the good of the people may be found at the end & that in the general triumph the poor man may not be forgotten for the poor have many oppressors & no voice to speak his oppressions above them

In this seemingly deferential request he attempts to exempt himself from any charge of being involved in political controversy while at the same time adroitly placing the blame for this social neglect squarely on the affluent, those high-living men whose lavish lifestyle might well earn them ‘gouty toes’. He takes the opportunity to add that as a poor man himself he is ‘naturally wishing to see someone become the advocate and Champion for the poor’ The letter is carefully signed, as though to underline the cringing approach, ‘I am sir your humble St A Poom (sic) Man’.⁵⁰ A further essay (untitled) addresses the same problems:

If the nessessitys of the poor are always to be left to the mercy of anothers prosperity—
their oppressions in a general way will always be permanent & their benefits ever
precarious thousands of poor will be left as destitute of comfort under the high prices of
the Farmers interests as thousands of the poor are now

There is a further reference to taxes and a wish that someone would become ‘the champion of the poor’, perhaps to emphasise the fact that the poet had no ambition to assume that role himself, or to absolve himself from any suspicion of authorship.⁵¹

2.5 Reform

Any movement in favour of change was interpreted as a threat by those in positions of power. Opposition to proposals for the reform of Parliament was considerable despite the fact that there was no Parliamentary representation in the new large industrial towns that had grown up, and the need for this should have been clear to all right-thinking men. In a Parliament that was rife with corruption, reform was urgently needed. Boroughmongers sold seats to the wealthy and electors were bribed. This state of affairs was later satirised and fully illustrated by Dickens in the *Pickwick Papers*, published in 1836-37.⁵² In the *News* of June 1810 a report was given of a meeting in Nottingham in favour of Reform with a motion from the floor:

Unless Reform was carried into effect the sun of England’s glory was set for ever.
Corruption has now struck at her roots, and is fast undermining her.⁵³

It seems appropriate at this stage to examine the identity and credentials of the editor who was such an ardent reformer. Hughes states that on the 6th October 1809, the date of the first issue of Drakard’s *Stamford News*, one John Scott began his work as editor, and adds:

After the first few numbers, Scott's editorial articles became apparent in their vigorous and outspoken advocacy of Parliamentary Reform. Here was trained the pen, which later, in *The Champion*, was to have much influence on the Government.⁵⁴

John Scott was an established journalist from London. His editorship is confirmed in Drakard's *History of Stamford*.⁵⁵ Bauer commends his work with the *News*: 'Here Scott's vigorous, straightforward attacks upon abuses of power, his championing of the oppressed, and his outspoken advocacy of parliamentary reform had attracted wide attention.' He was opposed to war and the cost of war, particularly as it affected the lives of the poor. Clare himself was sensitive to these hardships and the impact they had on those who could least afford them. The poems he wrote at that time may appear over-effusive but they are representative of the problems of those around him. This is discussed above. An article by Scott in which he denounced military flogging was the cause of an eighteen months' prison sentence, imposed on John Drakard as owner, printer and publisher of the *News*. Scott ran the paper alone until Drakard's release from Lincoln Prison in 1813. The editorial role of Octavius Gilchrist and others is examined fully in chapter 3.3. Scott then started *Drakard's Paper*, a London edition, which he later bought, renamed *The Champion* and ran until 1817. His editorship of the *London Magazine* lasted from 1820 until his death in a duel in 1821.⁵⁶

Under Scott's editorship, and beyond, the *News* continued its campaign for Reform. By way of contrast the *Mercury*, in 1821, drew attention to the presentation of 'about one hundred petitions' for parliamentary reform and quoted, without comment, Canning's reply that the present constitution was the best and that any reform would only serve to undermine that and introduce tyranny.⁵⁷ This instance serves to emphasise the view expressed by Brown that both the ruling class and the Established Church were: 'Terrified by the French Revolution into hostility to all change'.⁵⁸

Whether Clare was motivated to join the controversy cannot be judged. His 'Labourers Hymn', dated 1822 or later, certainly calls on the Reforming Men of England to live up to their reputation for steadfastness and behave honourably, as they had ever done, and denounces those who had joined the cause from motives of self-interest. Honesty is proclaimed as the watchword.⁵⁹ The 'Reformers Hymn' is given the same date.⁶⁰ Upholding the monarchy is a major theme in both poems. The poet is thus presenting himself as a loyal man, a patriot, and a man of integrity, for an audience he clearly wishes to impress. Johanne Clare considers that these poems, with their use of sea faring terms, were written 'primarily to please Radstock'.⁶¹ This

may have been the case and is examined in a later chapter. By this stage in Clare's early career as a writer, in 1822, his own reputation was under scrutiny: his criticism on the subject of 'accurs'd wealth' had not endeared him to that particular patron and is examined in chapter 3.5. During the period 1820-30 King George IV, a Tory, was on the throne and the Tory party in government. The proposed introduction of Reform was unpopular in these circles and, despite pressure from outside parliament, progress was slow. Clare, having no doubt read some, if not all, of the references to the subject in these newspapers, later expressed his views in moderate terms in a letter to the wife of the Bishop of Peterborough:

I am no politician but I think a reform is wanted— not the reform of mobs where the bettering of the many is only an apology for injuring the few—nor the reform of partys where the benefits of one is the destruction of the other but a reform that would do good & hurt none—I am sorry to see that the wild notions of public spouters always keep this reform out of sight—& as extreams must be <corrected> met by extreams—the good is always lost like a plentiful harvest in bad weather—mobs never were remembered for a good action but I am sorry to see it now & then verging into the middle classes of society whose knowledge ought to teach them commonsense & humanity for if they have it they never let it get into their speeches ⁶²

This was written in January 1831, thus before the passing of the First Reform Act in 1832. By this time he was aware of 'political correctness' and was conscious of the status of the recipient of his letter. Equally, the maturity and reasonable tone of his political views was becoming more evident.

2.6 The Monarchy

The monarchy was deeply unpopular and the divergent views of the two papers are most apparent where this subject is concerned. In 1819 a verbatim account was given in the *Mercury* of the Parliamentary discussion on the Poor Law, when no decision was reached. However, further debate on the grant of funds to the royal household followed and a grant was immediately agreed.⁶³ No editorial comment was made but the discerning reader was left to read what he wished into this. Some years earlier the *News* had drawn attention to a charge of £20,000 for the supply of candles alone to the household.⁶⁴ The implicit criticism was there for all to see. Whereas the editor of the *News* did not hesitate to draw attention to the shortcomings of any member of the royal family, the *Mercury* continued to record events factually without any

criticism, as in the above case.

Brown notes that the services of the author Hannah More were enlisted to defend this country, through her literature, against: ‘The flood of philosophy, infidelity and disrespect for inherited privilege that poured fearfully across the Channel from 1790 on.’⁶⁵ This certainly seems to have reached England in the case of the private life of the Prince Regent which had earned him unfavourable comment for some time.⁶⁶ In 1819, William Hone, London author, printer, and bookseller, a friend of Charles Lamb, published *The Political House that Jack built*, a satire following the pattern of the well-known nursery rhyme. The Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights are described as the country’s inherited treasure and officials in power as the vermin that would plunder that wealth. The Prince Regent is depicted in an illustration as over-fat and over-decorated. By way of contrast:

These are THE PEOPLE all tattered and torn,
Who curse the day wherein they were born,
On account of Taxation too great to be borne;
And pray for relief from night to morn;
Who, in vain, Petition in every form
Who peaceably Meeting to ask for Reform
Were sabred by Yeomanry Cavalry who,
Were thanked by THE MAN, all shaven and shorn⁶⁷

a reference to the tragic events of Peterloo, where people were killed and injured, which had occurred some seven months before Clare’s first visit to London.⁶⁸ This incident was reported in the *News* as an ‘Affray between the Military and the People’. A second report a week later was followed by three pages of critical letters and comments. It was noted that the Regent had thanked the Manchester magistrates and the Yeomanry for the action that had been taken. It was also noted that he was afloat near Cowes at the time.⁶⁹ Such incidents of Royal indifference were a gift to the radical press. Reaction in the *Mercury* was very different. A first reference claimed that ‘Orator’ Hunt had made a triumphal entry into Manchester, adding ‘We are reluctant to make the conduct of that person the subject of greater notoriety’, while the second, an extract from the *Manchester Mercury*, stated: ‘The events of yesterday will bring down upon the name of Hunt and his accomplices the deep and lasting execrations of many a sorrowing family.’⁷⁰ There is no evidence that Clare read this particular work of Hone’s although from a letter from him to Hone it appears that they had met during one of his visits to London in 1820 and 1822.⁷¹

With this letter, dated 1823, Clare presented Hone with a copy of *The Village Minstrel* and Hone responded with the gift of *The Tale of a Tub* in 1828.⁷² The Government's response to Peterloo was in the form of six harsh coercive Acts, indicative of the apprehension felt in those circles of an uprising among a palpably disaffected proletariat.⁷³

Further examples of the differing presentation of news by the two papers are apparent in their treatment of the demise of two members of the royal family. In 1818 the death of Queen Charlotte was reported in the *News* with comment on the political power and influence, as well as the ample provision of £100,000 each year that she had enjoyed, together with the palaces of Richmond and Windsor.⁷⁴ The *Mercury*, in contrast, devoted a eulogy to the deceased Queen, outlined heavily in black.⁷⁵ After the death of King George III, the new King, George IV, was regarded by the *News* either with scorn or as a figure of fun, on account of his lifestyle.⁷⁶ The Bill of Pains and Penalties that was to have been brought against his Queen, Caroline of Brunswick, had been abandoned by Parliament, public opinion having swung in her favour. Bauer claims that the Queen's trial had 'excited party spirit', as the result of which the Queen's supporters were considered radicals, while those who opposed her were 'persecutors and calumniators'. In her opinion the trial served to encourage contempt for rulers and prepare the way for change.⁷⁷ The *Mercury* continued to refrain from comment. Clare, no doubt fully aware of the circumstances, reacted cautiously to the general stir in a letter to Hessey:

Are you 'St Caroline' or 'George 4th' I am as far as my politics reaches 'King and Country' no innovations on Religion & government say I [...] Lord R. ask'd my opinion of the present matters & I bluntly told him that 'if the King of England was a madman I should love him as a brother of the soil' in preference to a foreigner who be she as she be shows little interest or feeling for England when she lavishes such honours on the menials of another⁷⁸

In verse he was less restrained and against this background wrote two explicitly political poems 'The Summons' and 'The Hue and Cry', clearly indicating his awareness of the scandal surrounding the monarchy and the criticism of the government. These poems, an exposure of shortcomings in society and government circles, are written in ballad form. 'The Summons' which appeared in the *News* in September 1829, chronicles the progress of a 'meddlesome old man' armed with sentences of death. Depicting a series of incidents enables the poet to launch an outspoken attack. Idleness and neglect of duty are portrayed in the person of a well-fed parson 'who owned three livings'. Illustration of the Church's lack of charity and compassion towards

the needy is given in the contrast between his situation in life and that of a dying widow in the workhouse nearby with only bread and water to sustain her. Injustice is encountered in a court of law where the magistrate, supposedly the epitome of justice, defies the imposition of death on him. The city is depicted as corruption itself and death sentences, or summonses, are left at every other door, to emphasise the point that neither the rich titled man nor the poorest labourer could escape the inevitability of death. The proud, such as members of Parliament, even the monarchy, face the same end. In this poem Clare is fearless in directing his indignation and protest to quarters where he considered criticism was merited.⁷⁹ ‘The Hue & Cry’, dated 1830, was published in the *Stamford Champion* in 1831, a paper to which Drakard had invited Clare to contribute in 1829.⁸⁰ A poem of five hundred and forty lines compared with the two hundred and forty-four lines of ‘The Summons’ it has neither the sense of drama nor the vivid word-pictures of the former. Pointedly sub-titled ‘A Tale of the Times’, it is clearly intended by the writer to draw attention to the need for both a national and an individual awakening, or re-awakening, of moral conscience. For this purpose the poet appoints an interrogator, in the form of a ‘crooked old man’ whose identity remains a mystery throughout. He may have been intended to represent the legendary Captain Swing whose exploits are chronicled by Hobsbawm and Rudé in accounts of the Swing riots.⁸¹ In letters to Frank Simpson and to Henry Behnes Burlowe in December 1830 Clare described what he had seen of a mysterious stranger in the neighbourhood and the fire-raising that had occurred.⁸² In the poem he mocks the government’s attempts to ensnare the man, in a skit on the yeomanry’s amateur performance:

Arms right was the signal—some used the wrong hand
 Never mind they were gallant men all
 & many who leapt on their war horses backs
 From their war horses backs got a fall (ll. 25-28)

When discipline and repression did not succeed the Government turns to preaching. When this fails to quell the trouble a general fast is proposed in the hope that further malnutrition might help to calm people down, ‘to persuade the poor flocks to get thinner’ as the poet puts it. A suggestion, supposedly from Government circles, possibly to try to ridicule the excitement, implies that the old man might be ‘Bouneparte risen again’, or Cobbett, Paine, or Voltaire. The trouble-maker continues to show a clean pair of heels. Clare’s inquisitor pries into everything. He criticises the law, and placemen who ‘hankered for spoil’ while labourers continued to starve and to work. The tricks of book reviewers, plagiarists, and excisemen are examined and exposed.

The campaign continues into the market place against those who gave short weights and measures, such as drapers, grocers, publicans, millers, bakers, butchers, tailors, and clothiers. Employers are attacked for the payment of inadequate wages but it is predicted that any improvement will only be temporary. Even churchgoers and faithless lovers are drawn into the picture while the clergy does not escape comment. In conclusion, it is stated that ‘Time conscience and truth’ were the three main factors that really motivated the old man, and it was this that was causing the majority of people to keep quiet for a while. But it was 1830, King William IV had succeeded to the throne and the poet had perhaps become optimistic, or more cynical, so his conclusion is sanguine, or ambiguous. ‘The king on his throne was a true honest man/So the world it went on very well’.⁸³ These are two clever poems. They are also deep, far-ranging, and very thoughtful commentaries on social ills. They illustrate again Clare’s growing maturity, his command of detail, and his penetrating political awareness, now sharpened by cynicism. They also show his power to absorb and interpret the reports on current affairs that were circulating and his ability to formulate a personal opinion. He accepts that no one wishes to know the truth: ‘The monk hid his face in his cowl for a while & each snail hid his face in his shell’. Truth was, indeed, ‘a vile offence’, as the poet observes in *The Parish*.⁸⁴

Clare continued to write of his concern about the state of the country throughout 1830. To Cary in that year he wrote: ‘I do not know how times are with you in the city but with us ‘sales & bankrupts’ form the general conversation among all classes & conditions of men’,⁸⁵ and to Robertson: ‘What do you think by the bustle & bother of this country meeting mania when every village is metamorphosed into a Forum and every Giles into an orator’.⁸⁶ He had already confided to Henry Behnes Burlowe: ‘I [...] have since been alarmed at the upstir of fire & famine & such like currencys & under the influence of these ridicules I have scribbled a poem of 50 verses detailing the alarms’.⁸⁷ By January 1831 he wrote to Taylor:

We are quiet in our neighbourhood but as a spark dropt in gunpowder—the least impression either of oppression or imaginary oppression would burst into a flame—& yet the ‘people’ as they are called were a year or two back <were> as harmless as flies—they did not seem even to be susceptible of injustice but when insult began to be tried upon them by the unreasonable & the proud their blood boiled into a volcano & the irruption is as certain as death if no remedy can be found to relieve them God forbid that I should live to see a revolution⁸⁸

2.7 Corruption

Corruption or suspected corruption, in Government circles, were favourite topics generally as well as in the *News*. In 1810 the Prime Minister was quoted as proclaiming the present time as ‘The Golden Age of Purity’ with British statesmen distinguished by their scrupulous integrity. The Editor of the *News* added a warning:

The Times of Tuesday reports the satisfaction the country must feel at the detection of peculation—the dishonesty of a public Accountant of eminent rank and high connections [...] During Pitt’s long administration everything was reported to the public in a false light [...] We venture to think the country will not long continue to be deceived [...] in different parts of the country people are assembling to express sentiments on the misconduct of their servants.⁸⁹

In 1812 the paper described the appointment of Lord Liverpool and his associates as ‘A tissue of intrigue and chicanery;—a lump of deceit and perfidy’.⁹⁰ Readers were openly invited to look on members of the aristocracy with contempt. In 1818 an extract from the *Black Dwarf* was quoted:

The nobility have many advantages—they have only to behave decently to ensure respect. No one enquires how they obtained their fortunes [...]

‘Let high birth triumph – what can be more great!
Nothing – but merit in a low estate’.⁹¹

It is hardly surprising that in 1821 John Drakard, the owner of the *News*, was horsewhipped in his shop, possibly in retaliation for a similar article. So Clare speculated in his comment on the incident: ‘The stranger had a footman with him & is some one no doubt that the Paper has provokingly abused’, a further example of his power of detached discernment, unaffected by the apparently amicable relationship between himself and the owner of the newspaper.⁹² The strategy of using quotations from other papers in the *News* achieved a dual purpose, not only serving to provide the desired information but also demonstrating that the editor was not alone in thinking as he did. Vituperative articles continued to appear in this paper from time to time.

Clare’s view of corruption and the lack of integrity in both public and private life is summarised in ‘A Speech from the Bone & Cleaver Club’. He criticises the approach to religion, to justice, slavery, tithes, and taxes. ‘Cant humbug & hypocrisy are the three in one grand principles of this age’ he proclaims:

We must go to Church with farmer folly to be good & get an hours sleep in the pew only contriving to waken to sing amen with the clerk in the prayer for the royal family only go to church Mr. P. thats all go to church wait in the porch to make a bow to the priest & praise his dull sermon Mr. P, thats truth⁹³

2.8 Religion

The Church had also fallen into disrepute, absenteeism and pluralism being the chief causes for criticism. Appointments were given to favoured families and their relatives, to the wealthy, the noble, or those well-placed politically, by the government or by those in power in the Church. In some areas this gave rise to the neglect of parishes, the spiritual welfare of parishioners receiving scant consideration. In 1810 the *News*, as outspoken on this subject as on any other neglect of public duty, published, without comment, this doggerel to describe a supposed wedding ceremony and the negligence of a hunting parson, or squarson:

The Nottinghamshire Parsons; Or, the Banns forgotten

One day he had a pair to wed
The fox came by in view, Sir
He drew his surplice o'er his head
And bade the pair adieu, Sir

They both did pray that he would stay
For they were not half bound Sir
He swore that night to bed they might
And Tally ho the hounds, Sir⁹⁴

The subject of nepotism and clerical appointments are examined further in Chapter Six.

As Church neglect continued, Nonconformist sects were reaching out to those in need. Trevelyan claims that adverse reaction to the atheism of the Republican movement in France had helped the spread of the Wesleyan movement in this country. The Nonconformist sects had then carried their Christian mission to newly-created cities and, with the war over and anti-Jacobin fears virtually forgotten, the Church establishment was left to confront these sects, newly inspired with evangelical vigour and no longer prepared to accept reluctant toleration.⁹⁵

Evangelicalism, and the manner in which it affected Clare's work is fully discussed in chapter 3.1. The Hammonds draw attention to Adam Smith's fear at that time, namely that 'enthusiasm', the religious force so dreaded by men of science and reason, would spread among the poor because the clergy 'were so little in touch with the mass of the people'.⁹⁶ Clare's brief involvement with the Primitive Methodists is described in Chapter Six.

The *News* openly mocked church activities. In 1819 a complete column was devoted to an article entitled 'The English Bonzes—vulgarly called Parsons':

The established order of bonzes in England is in a more prosperous condition than I have elsewhere seen any other bonzes. The dupes of superstition everywhere allow their bonzes to lead a fat and lazy life

This was signed '*The Black Dwarf*'⁹⁷

Clare drew attention to clerical shortcomings in *The Parish*, mostly written between 1820 and 1824 but unpublished in full in his life time. His stance on the subjects of religion and social policy is clear; he intends to denounce oppression of the poor, hypocrisy in religious matters, and a lack of justice for those in need of it, wherever they are found, as he states:

I fearless sing let truth attend the ryhme
Tho now adays truth grows a vile offence
& courage tells it at his own expence (ll. 8-10)

In these lines he is also recording an awareness of the risk that he and other writers accept when they draw attention to the unacceptable treatment meted out to the underprivileged. He sees Honour as replaced by 'Knavery and cant' and deals scathingly with hypocrisy. The regular church-goer is mocked as one who was capable of 'cheating the poor with levys doubly paid'. He knew he would be branded 'rogue or radical or what you will' for dealing in satire when rewards could be gained by using flattery but insists that truth would be paramount in his verse.⁹⁸

In 1819 the *News* gave some space to the Roman Catholic cause, quoting from an article in *The Times* on Catholic Emancipation, followed by an editorial emphasising the anxiety of those who wished to see an end to degrading restrictions on religion.⁹⁹ This was a subject to which Clare had given some thought, as is indicated in a letter to him from Henderson on 11 March 1829.¹⁰⁰ This is again illustrative of the interest he took in a wide range of topics and, together with other comments he made on the subject of Roman Catholicism is examined in

Chapter 6. By 1830 he was prepared to be outspoken on the subject of the clergy. Observing that he still heard from the Revd H. F. Cary, he remarked in a letter to Taylor:

Still a Curate I dare say to the disgrace of Bishops & Patrons of Church property—but merit has nothing to do nowadays even with matters of godliness—cant chicanery and hypocrisy are the only candidates that shuffle into success¹⁰¹

2.9 Education

Opinion was sharply divided on the subject of education for the underprivileged. There existed a built-in fear among old-school Tories that, if social inequality were allowed to lapse and schooling extended to the poor, they would become discontented, insubordination would result and work would suffer. More liberal opposition to this line of thought contended that this was a fallacious argument. Robert Owen, among the latter group, recorded in his autobiography in 1818 that he advocated ‘an entire change of training the human race from birth.’¹⁰² The *News* had already expressed the view that action might have been taken sooner by the established clergy and that the Editor might soon ask readers to take more note of the on-going discussions between the Church and Dissenters on the comparative merits of the new system of education.¹⁰³ Unfortunately Clare was born too early to benefit from any of these projected benefits.

Writing in his autobiography about his own early thirst for knowledge, he had this criticism of the education of his generation:

I must digress to say that I think the manner of learning children in village schools very erroneous, that is soon as they learn their letters to task them with lessons from the bible and testament and keep them dinging at them, without any change, till they leave it A dull boy never turns with pleasure to his school days when he has often been beat 4 times for bad readings in 5 verses of Scripture, no more than a Man in renewed prosperity to the time when he was a debtor in a Jail¹⁰⁴

Here he was drawing attention to the system of endless repetition rather than criticising the use of the Bible for the purpose. He wrote from personal experience and related learning the third chapter of Job himself during Christmas week, and his reward for so doing.¹⁰⁵ His own early education was initially based on the songs his mother and father had sung, and their stories.’ Such childhood memories he recalled in *The Shepherd’s Calendar*:

When listning on the corner seat
 The winter evenings length to cheat
 I heard my mothers memory tell
 Tales super[s]tition loves so well
 Things said or sung a thousand times
 In simple prose or simpler rhymes¹⁰⁶

He may have been remembering this early teaching when he wrote:

Ryhme is a gift as our folks here suppose
 Nor wealth nor learning ever makes a poet
 Tis natures blessing so the story goes
 & my condition goes the way to show it
 Tho up to Bible classes I was taught
 My school account is hardly worth the telling¹⁰⁷

He also acknowledges the songs and stories of the old women working in the fields.¹⁰⁸ Such schooling as he did have, somewhat sporadically, took place at a dame school in Helpstone and a church school in the nearby village of Glington.¹⁰⁹ Later his reading extended to chapbooks and such scraps as he could borrow, buy, or find.¹¹⁰ He was also helped by a friend, John Turnill, the son of a neighbouring farmer, who introduced him to writing and to Mathematics.¹¹¹ Edward Drury confirmed these details in a letter to Taylor in June 1819:

John was born July 13, 1793: and all the schooling he had was paid with the little money he earned himself either as a ploughboy, or assisting his father morning & evening in the barn. The whole term of his schooling was only a few months in 3 years: his schoolmaster was James Merrishaw, of Glington, an adjoining village; all his learning consisted of reading the bible. He tells me he was taught to write by a young man in the Excise.¹¹²

The tributes he paid in later life to the contributions his former teachers made give an indication of the value he set on this early education. To Mrs Bullimore, his dame school teacher, he attributed his taste for reading:

Beneath her ruling rod tho' not severe
 I relish'd learning and I lov'd to hear
 Those pleasing tales which she would often tell
 [...] In the same sence of her it may be said
 Who's guiding hand my infant foot-steps led
 To learning path—that her impressing plan
 First laid the basis of the future man
 And by imbibing what she simply taught
 My taste for reading there was surely caught¹¹³

Of Mr Merrishaw, on finding his neglected grave, he wrote:

For thou it was dear injur'd man that gave
 This little learning that I now enjoy;
 A Gift so dear that nothing can destroy.
 Twas thou that taught my infant years to scan
 The various evils that encompass man
 Thou Also taught my eager breast to shun
 Those vain pursuits where thousands are undone

A tribute to the personal example as well as the moral teaching of a conscientious master.¹¹⁴
 Drury also gave Taylor a clear description of Clare's efforts to improve his own education. In
 May 1819 he wrote:

He has tried at almost all studies, Music, Mathematics, Drawing, (vide the Rose in the
 MSS) Arithmetic but having only 1/- old books from the meanest bookstalls to instruct
 him, his labored progress was, as he states, accompanied with the most heart-felt anguish,
 & envy to learn of others being versed in these things: so strong he would feel the
 vexation of mind that after laboring in vain at sciences that cannot be learnt without a
 master, he has actually become completely sick & severely ill from mental harm

This indicates the effect that frustration had on a sensitive and gifted man.¹¹⁵

In after years Clare expressed his concern for his own children's education when writing
 to them from Northampton General Lunatic Asylum. To Charles, who was fifteen years old, and

to Frederick, who had already died, he wrote to remind them of the importance of learning and of such subjects as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Mathematics, Land-surveying and Arithmetic.¹¹⁶

As these comments and extracts from newspapers and Clare's own work illustrate in this chapter, there was no reason for anyone able to read or discuss such papers as the *Mercury* or *News* to be ignorant of either national or international affairs. It is noticeable in Clare's letters to Taylor, Hessey, and to many others, that he was by no means ill-informed over an extremely wide range of subjects. Newspapers of the time were providing a wide field of knowledge and were an educative force for those prepared to read and mull things over, as Clare was. This has been traced through his comments on the privation and misery suffered by many during the war years, the severe repression inflicted by government legislation, the poverty that was widespread, his informed view of the need for Reform, and the corruption that was prevalent. The differing approach of the two Stamford papers to political loyalty and to matters connected with the monarchy served as guidelines to the conventions with regard to political matters that it was expedient for him to follow, or avoid. His thoughtful evaluation of education, and of his own struggle to achieve it, enabled him to counsel his sons on the wisdom of study.

At times, when comparing the views expressed in his poetry and prose, it is difficult to be certain what he really thought about the events and policies under discussion. He was under considerable pressure to conform to the conventions, literally the demands, of the social and political climate of the time. Not only was there government repression to contend with but also the social requirements of his patrons with regard to 'suitable language', his editors' criticisms of his 'provincialisms' and his grammar, and the expectations of the audience for whom, and to whom, he wrote. In this way, his writing was controlled to a very great extent. He was also controlled by the financial need to care for his family, by ambition for success as a writer, and by his own need for acceptance in the 'polite world', as well as the literary world, into which he had been introduced. Yet politically, as he wrote to Mrs Emmerson, his views were in both camps:

I wish success heartily to my friends wether wigs torys or radicals but as to enemys in any of these matters I wish none [...] between such matter I am as a blank leaf between two pages of letter press ready to receive all impressions that coincide with my opinions or refute them [...] I hate party feudes & can never become a party man but where I have friends on both sides there I am on both sides as far as my opinions can find it right but no further not an inch¹¹⁷

He gives a clear picture of a man pulled two ways. Increasingly conscious of the reception he

would receive, he nevertheless challenged the establishment through his writing but, constrained by so many factors, his hands were tied. The weight of criticism and disapproval on the one hand and wealth and influence on the other defeated him, just as the small farmer and agricultural workers were defeated in the struggle against enclosure. Through his poetry and prose, with these restrictions, the true Clare could not fully emerge during his lifetime

NOTES

1. Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1730-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 190.
2. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Connor Cruise O'Brien, (London: Harmondsworth, 1970), passim.
3. *By Himself*, pp. 93-94. Robert Heyes has established that Clare was a member of the Northamptonshire Local Militia, Eastern Regiment, with headquarters in Oundle, and that he served for the full four years, 1812-1816. Robert Heyes, 'John Clare and the Militia', *John Clare Society Journal*, 4 (1985), 48-53.
4. *By Himself*, p. 50.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
6. *Early Poems*, II, pp. 607-08. Typically, the *Mercury* of 27 April 1811 carried advertisements for Japan Blacking, 20 acres of excellent turnips, and a capital boar pig, in the same block.
7. David Newton and Martin Smith, *The Stamford Mercury: Three Centuries of Newspaper Publishing* (Stamford: Tyas, 1999), pp. 22-25, 83, 106.
8. John Clare Billing, 'Stamford and its Historians', undated, p.3. Stamford Museum. A paper read at a meeting of the Stamford Historical Association at St. Paul's School, Stamford. John Clare Billing was a descendant of Clare's sister Sophy, married to William Kettle in 1821, and was a great-nephew of the poet. Mary Moyse, 'John Clare's Family Tree', *John Clare Society Journal*, 8 (1989), 24-30 (p. 30).
9. *Letters*, p. 252.
10. *By Himself*, p. 119.
11. *News*, 6 October 1809.
12. *Middle Poems*, IV, p. 133.
13. *Letters*, p. 36.

14. Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1, 89, 113-14, 116-17, 128-29, 137, 150, 199-200.
15. *Middle Poems*, IV, p. 132.
16. McCalman, p. 89.
17. *News*, 24 November 1809.
18. *Early Poems*, II, p. 396.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 440.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 443.
21. *Early Poems*, I, p. 91.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
23. Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 43.
24. *Middle Poems*, IV, p. 132.
25. *News*, 24 November 1809.
26. *Ibid.*, 22 November 1811, 29 November 1811.
27. *Ibid.*, 21 February 1812.
28. *Ibid.*, 4 February 1814.
29. *Mercury*, 2 January 1818.
30. *News*, 7 January 1820.
31. Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 30-31 (p. 30).
32. *News*, 20 January 1830.
33. *Ibid.*, 5 March 1830.
34. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 201. Thomas Hardy was founder and first Secretary of the London Corresponding Society, p. 20.
35. *By Himself*, pp. 64-65.
36. *Early Poems*, II, p.655. There was widespread accusation that beerhouses, and the radical newspapers read there, were behind rioting as late as 1830. Hobsbawm and Rudé state that beerhouses were obvious centres for discussion but that there is no evidence that they were more effective centres of discussion than village pubs. E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 64.

37. J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832*, 2nd edn (Gloucester: Sutton, 1987), p. 176.
38. *By Himself*, pp. 116-17.
39. Hammonds, pp. 207-08. 'When the misery of the poor reacted on their own comfort, as in the case of poaching or the pressure on the rates, they were aware of it and took measures to protect their property, but of any social problem outside these relations they were entirely unconscious'.
40. G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), p. 469.
41. *News*, 20 May 1814.
42. *Early Poems*, I, p. 203.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 228-34.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 310-24.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 437.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
48. *Early Poems*, II, pp. 135-36.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 652, 657.
50. John Clare, *A Champion for the Poor: Political Verse and Prose*, ed. by P. M. S. Dawson, Eric Robinson and David Powell. (Ashington and Manchester: Carcanet and Mid-NAG, 2000), pp. 267-69 (p. 268).
51. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
52. Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (London: Chapman & Hall: Humphrey Milford, nd), pp. 210-20.
53. *News*, 9 June 1810.
54. T. Rowland Hughes, 'John Scott: Editor, Author and Critic,' *London Mercury*, XX1 (1930), 518-28 (p. 518).
55. *The History of Stamford* (Stamford: printed by and for John Drakard, 1822), p. 431. When in Stamford, John Scott is said to have lived in the parish of St. John, West, a few paces from Drakard's business premises. Patrick O'Leary, *Regency Editor: A Life of John Scott* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), p. 46.
56. Josephine Bauer, *The London Magazine* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1953), pp. 37, 59.
57. *Mercury*, 20 April 1821.
58. Brown, p. 3.

59. *Early Poems*, II, pp. 590-93.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 593-95.
61. Johanne Clare, *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), pp. 19-20. Discussed fully in chapter 3.1. Lord Radstock was Admiral of the Fleet, the Hon. William Waldegrave, first Baron Radstock.
62. *Letters*, p. 560. Alan Vardy, in the *John Clare Society Journal*, 29 (2001), p. 83, discusses the question of whether Clare felt inhibited in expressing his political opinions to Mrs Marsh. He points out that Clare's poem 'The Cottager' appeared in *The Bee* on 31 December 1830 beside a forceful letter from the Bishop on the subject of tithes and considers it unlikely that Clare would have overlooked this fact. Vardy concludes that the frankness of Clare's political comments to Mrs Marsh were uninhibited, which is clear in his correspondence with her. The above quoted letter is ample evidence of this.
63. *Mercury*, 12 February 1819.
64. *News*, 21 February 1812.
65. Brown, *Fathers*, p. 123. Hannah More (1745-1833), whose Cheap Repository Tracts had led to the formation of the Religious Tract Society in 1799.
66. *News*, 6 October 1809, 3 June 1814.
67. William Hone, *The Political House that Jack Built* (London: 1819, 23rd edn), unpaginated.
68. R. J. White, *Waterloo to Peterloo* (London: Mercury, 1963), pp. 181-87. In August 1819 a peaceful meeting of some fifty or sixty thousand people had been held in St Peter's Fields, Manchester, 'To consider the propriety of adopting the most legal and effective means of obtaining Reform of the Commons House of Parliament'. Special Constables and the Yeomanry were unable to arrest 'Orator' Hunt and the 15th Hussars were called in. As the result eleven people were killed and many hundreds were injured.
69. *News*, 20 August 1819 and 27 August 1819.
70. *Mercury*, 13 August 1819 and 20 August 1819.
71. *Letters*, p. 270.
72. *Catalogue*, p. 32, Item 371.
73. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 158-59, 727, 768. The Two Acts of 1795 had made it a treasonable offence to incite the public to hatred of King, Government or Constitution by means of writing or speech. In 1817 the Gagging Acts placed further restrictions on written works. The Six Acts of 1819 were yet another extension of this legislation.

74. *News*, 20 November 1818.
75. *Mercury*, 20 November 1818.
76. *News*, 4 February 1820. King George III died in 1820. King George IV reigned from 1820 to 1830.
77. Bauer, pp. 18-20.
78. *Letters*, pp. 109-10.
79. *Middle Poems*, IV, pp. 482-93, 'The Hue & Cry', pp. 518-43. Professor Philip Martin drew my attention to the tradition of light verse, closely linked to political satire, that had been evolving towards the end of the eighteenth century. This was used for political comment by Coleridge in 'The Devil's Thoughts' and also by Southey. Shelley's poem 'The Devil's Walk. A Ballad' may have established this particular genre. There is also 'The Devil's Drive. An Unfinished Rhapsody' in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Murray, 1876), p. 58.
80. *Letters*, p. 490.
81. Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, p. 116. The nearest riots to Clare's home were at Sawtry, and Alwalton some eight miles from Helpstone.
82. *Letters*, pp. 522-25.
83. *Middle Poems*, IV, p. 542 (ll. 531-32).
84. *Early Poems*, II, p. 698, l. 9.
85. *Letters*, p. 494.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 497.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 524.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 533.
89. *News*, 19 January 1810.
90. *Ibid.*, 19 June 1812.
91. *Ibid.*, 29 May 1818.
92. *Letters*, p.160.
93. *Champion for the Poor*, p. 286.
94. *News*, 14 September 1810. A squarson. [Jocular combination of Squire and Parson]. A parson who is also the squire in his parish. *OED*.
95. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, p. 494.
96. Hammonds, *Village Labourer*, p. 216.
97. *News*, 30 April 1819. Bonze: 'A term applied by Europeans to the Buddhist clergy of Japan, and occasionally of China.' *OED*.

98. *Early Poems*, II, pp. 697-778 (p. 698). *The Parish* was printed in the *Stamford News* on 17 August 1827, in *The Champion* on 5 January 1830, and reprinted in the *Stamford News* on 8 January 1830, on all occasions with omissions.
99. *News*, 7 May 1819.
100. Eg. MS 2248, fols 126 r-v.
101. *Letters*, p. 511.
102. Robert Owen, *Life of Robert Owen by Himself* (London: Knight, 1971), p. 215. ‘The country was not yet ready to accept the idea of schools for all. While a number of people had endorsed the charity schools, others asserted that the poor, if educated, would become discontented with their lot and unwilling to engage in humble occupations’. Maurice J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830* (London: Cass 1965), p. 21.
103. *News*, 17 January 1812.
- REMARKS—suggested by the late meeting at Lincoln
for the purpose of instituting a system of National Education.
- Dr. Bell unites with secular instruction, the peculiar religious principles of a religious party, [...] The children are to be required to attend the Established Church. Mr. Lancaster’s schools differ [...] by being strictly confined to the instruction of the children in reading, writing, and arithmetic. [...] But no particular religious formula is adopted. [...] The children are left to be instructed in these by their parents and clergy.
104. *By Himself*, p. 6. *OED* 1. Learn—to get knowledge 2. To impart knowledge. To teach. ME. Clare himself uses the word impartially in a Journal entry of 12 October 1824.
105. *By Himself*, p. 33.
106. *Middle Poems*, I, p. 21. *Middle Poems*, II, pp. 237-42. *By Himself*, p. 2. Clare records his father’s fondness for ballads and his boast that: ‘He could sing or recite above a hundred’. The oral tradition was of great value to Clare. Songs in the Clare manuscripts are to be found in George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983), pp. 80-380.
107. *Early Poems*, II, p. 607.
108. *By Himself*, p. 68.
109. *Ibid.*, pp. 4,33. Grainger also mentions Clare’s attendance at Mr Seaton’s school in the vestry of St Benedict’s church, Glington. *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 332 n. 7.

110. *By Himself*, pp. 61, 68.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.
112. Northampton Public Library, NMS. 43 (5).
113. *Early Poems*, I, p.197-99, ll. 19-21, 45-50.
114. *Early Poems*, I, pp. 55-58, ll. 53-58, pp. 456-57.
115. NMS 43 (3).
116. *Letters*, pp. 665-67.
117. *Ibid.*, p. 527.

Chapter 3. The Making of a Poet

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the various contributions made to John Clare's work, social life, and financial circumstances both by events and by certain of his patrons, and to assess how, if at all, they affected his career.

3.1 Stamford

As is now well known, John Clare lived in poverty throughout most of his life. He has been described as 'The son of the poorest man in the parish'.¹ Clare himself referred to his native Helpstone as a 'gloomy village in Northamptonshire, on the brink of the Lincolnshire fens'.² Helpstone provided a limited circle of acquaintances and little to encourage an exceptionally gifted child. As late as 1820 Edward Drury wrote this description: 'There is no direct communication with Helpstone of any kind. It is a solitary village and all the intercourse it has with the world is the once a week market post.'³ However remote Helpstone was, Stamford was Clare's nearest town, some eight miles distant by the field paths he would have walked.⁴ It became important to him, providing the intellectual stimulus his village lacked, a fact that has been overlooked. Of necessity he went there regularly throughout his working life, initially on orders for his masters but latterly to play the fiddle to raise money, to occasional visits to the theatre, or to see a doctor.⁵ By about 1820 he was going to visit or stay with Edward Drury, a Stamford bookseller, the cousin of John Taylor of London who was to become the publisher of Clare's first three books of poetry.⁶ Clare's experience with Drury over the publication of his first volume, and the personal and financial controversy into which this drew him, was educative in itself.⁷ This involvement on the fringes of the literary world led to his introduction to Octavius Gilchrist, (see section 3.3 below), into whose house he was subsequently welcomed as a friend.⁸ The company and conversation of the Oxford-educated and highly articulate Gilchrist was just the type of crash course needed by the poet in preparation for the social encounters that were shortly to come his way in London. He also knew a number of other influential Stamford citizens, Richard Newcomb, proprietor and editor of the *Stamford Mercury*, Frank Simpson, artist son of the town's mayor, John Drakard, bookseller, newspaper proprietor and publisher, who started *Drakard's Stamford News* and the *Stamford Champion*, and the Revd Thomas Mounsey, second master at the Free Grammar School, were among them.⁹ Clare's Autobiography, Journal and Letters are sprinkled with references that give some insight into his

familiarity with the town. It is significant that it was in Stamford that, in his own words, ‘he had heard much of Hilton, the painter’ before he met him in London in 1820.¹⁰

Stamford was no backwater but was apparently a renowned shopping centre throughout the county. According to Rogers, by the early eighteenth century it had become the trading centre for the region and a collecting centre from where carriers distributed newspapers to outlying areas, and goods to London markets.¹¹ O’Leary describes it as an important market town of some five to six thousand inhabitants by 1809, a staging post on the Great North Road to Scotland and to York.¹² There was considerable social bustle. It had a tradition of gentility as well as trade and by the standards of that time was becoming a sophisticated town. The fact that there were Assembly Rooms, a Theatre, a Library and Newsroom, that Race Meetings were held and cricket matches played, were refinements that were no doubt considered remarkable by the young Clare.¹³ Of the original eleven churches of mediaeval times there were five remaining by the time of his connection with the town.¹⁴ A Methodist Chapel followed by an Independent Chapel were built by the mid-century. By 1801 there was a Grammar School, a Bluecoat School and several private academies.¹⁵ Small industries were producing malt, beer, soap, candles and flour and providing employment.¹⁶ There was also entertainment; in a twelvemonth there were eight fairs for beasts, four cattle markets, and three Feasts ‘for gatherings of the humble classes to enjoy the annual holidays’.¹⁷ According to Till, by 1796 there were also thirty-one public houses, one for every one hundred and twenty-nine inhabitants.¹⁸ The contrast between Helpstone and Stamford would have seemed considerable to Clare until the occasion of his first visit to London in 1820.

The high point of the coaching trade was reached by the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By this time some thirty stage coaches and forty mail coaches were passing through Stamford’s narrow streets each day, their passengers staying overnight or stopping to change coaches, bringing prosperity to the inns and ancillary trades.¹⁹ Account must therefore be taken of the number of participants, attendants, and hangers-on involved in these many activities who would inevitably have rubbed shoulders with the local populace which, from time to time, included the young John Clare. Robert Owen, who had arrived in the town in 1791 to serve his apprenticeship as a linen draper, drew attention to the value that such contact had for him as an unsophisticated youngster in a similar situation. He described the shop where he worked:

The articles dealt with were of the best, finest most choice qualities that could be procured from all the markets of the world—many of the customers were of the highest nobility in the kingdom, often six or seven carriages belonging to them were at the same

time in attendance at the premises. [...] The shop had become a kind of general rendezvous of the higher class nobility. [...] I had thus an opportunity of noticing the manners of these parties and of studying their characters when they were under the least restraint [...] These circumstances, trivial as they may appear, were of essential service to me in after life—for they prepared me in some measure for the future intercourse I had with what is called the great world.²⁰

After 1769 the journey to the capital took one day only and links with London markets ensured that Stamford was the first town in the county to enjoy the latest fashion in a variety of goods.²¹ Altogether it was a bustling, thriving town that William Cobbett visited in 1830 and addressed about two hundred farmers. He found ‘a very fine and excellent inn, called Standwell’s Hotel, which is, with few exceptions the nicest inn I have ever been in’.²² Clare himself records an invitation to The George in 1820 with an old friend who asked him ‘to beaver with him’, an invitation he accepted.²³ Till states that The George had ‘ten sitting rooms, thirty-eight bedrooms, stabling for eighty-six horses and seventeen pairs of excellent horses in daily work at posting’.²⁴

Clare’s integration into some of the Stamford activities began in 1819 when he was aged twenty-six. By this time he would have heard something of the leading figures and local disputes both by hearsay and from his own perusal of local newspapers. Stamford was a town of news. The *Stamford Mercury* had been established at some time at the end of 1712, providing national and international news as well as commercial information and advertisements.²⁵ By the time Clare entered the Stamford scene the paper was in the hands of the Newcomb family, astute business men but not intellectuals, who decreed that their paper should remain apolitical and avoid editorial comment.²⁶ John Drakard, ‘in politics an advanced radical’²⁷ who had bought a business in the town, had established *Drakard’s Stamford News*, a venture which, according to Newton and Smith, was in partnership with Octavius Gilchrist, a local businessman. A radical polemical newspaper, it was published and printed by Drakard although it is suggested that Gilchrist initially masterminded it.²⁸ According to John Clare Billing, Drakard was ‘of a disputatious and quarrelsome disposition and, being a violent Radical, was especially bitter towards the Cecils at Burghley’.²⁹ Richard Newcomb junior, no doubt fearing the effect that a second paper would have on his business, then contrived to launch the *Stamford & Boston Gazette & Midland Argus* five months earlier in the same year.³⁰ The conflict between the two editors and their newspapers has already been examined in chapter 2.1. In 1830 *The Bee or Stamford Herald & County Chronicle*, apparently established to further the Tory cause, was

published and ran for three years. *The Wasp*, a lampoon of this publication, perhaps published by Drakard, also appeared at about the same time but did not progress further than proof form.³¹ Clare's acquaintance with the main protagonists in these disputes is examined in the following sections. The depth of any friendship between Drakard and Clare cannot be substantiated but it seems that Drakard extended credit to the poet until he could no longer afford to do so.³²

Stamford politics were dominated by the influence of the Cecil family, owners of Burghley House and Park, just outside the town. Brownlow Cecil, the 2nd Marquess of Exeter, 1795-1867, thus two years younger than Clare and destined to become one of his financial patrons, succeeded in 1804 to an estate and dynasty that was accustomed to control the nomination of the two parliamentary seats for the borough.³³ In 1809 the Cecil nominee was opposed for the first time in seventy-five years in a parliamentary election, and still contrived to win the seat. Twenty tenants of the Marquis, suspected of having voted for the opposition, were subsequently sent notices to quit their tenancies.³⁴ The following year, under the heading DOMESTIC NEWS, a report in the *News* stated: 'In Stamford there exists a shameful system of tyranny over the inhabitants. The Agents of the House of Burghley daily effect most cruel, insolent and atrocious actions to keep this borough in subserviency to their political interests.'³⁵ Such matters were no doubt generally known and regularly discussed. Clare could hardly have been unaware of them. There was again Whig opposition to the Tory/Cecil candidate in 1812, 1818, and 1830. In this last election, Newcomb and Drakard joined forces to field a candidate who supported Reform. He was defeated but again a number of Cecil tenants who had voted for him were served with notices to quit their rented properties. Subsequently the Marquess was roundly abused when he appeared in the town.³⁶ Rogers maintains that 'A radical streak persisted in Stamford through most of the nineteenth century'.³⁷

Clare steadfastly avoided any controversy or involvement in political matters, and repeatedly avowed his non-allegiance to any one party, perhaps because he had witnessed the turmoil and personal disadvantages that could arise from such action or because of a newly acquired 'political correctness'. Little attention has been paid in the past to the contribution made by the sophistication and literary culture inherent in Stamford to the social and cultural development of John Clare, and to his educational development as a young writer. This is relevant however, and should not be underestimated.

3.2 Patronage and Patrons

A patron, as defined in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, is 'One who lends his influential support to advance the interest of a person, cause art, etc. Specifically, in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, the person who accepted the dedication of a book'.³⁸ Patronage had had a long history in this country; Chaucer was befriended by John of Gaunt, Shakespeare by the Earl of Southampton, Bloomfield by Capel Lofft, and Wordsworth by Sir George Beaumont, who also supported Coleridge.³⁹ In 1770 Crabbe had only enlisted Burke's interest and support after appeals to the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor failed. He finally became domestic chaplain to the Duke of Rutland and wrote of the disadvantages of such a position in his poem *The Patron*, sounding a note of warning in the concluding lines:

You then, my sons, upon yourself depend,
And in your own exertions find the friend.⁴⁰

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century patronage had apparently been moving away from its original position as the gift of the wealthy and aristocratic into the hands of professional men in positions of power, to those with commercial interests, to literary editors, to owners and suppliers of libraries, and finally to subscription lists, drawn up before the publication of a work. In their turn authors had, perforce, been seeking out different sources of financial help. Writing had become a profession. It seems that relationships between patrons and protégés had not always been harmonious. According to Dr Johnson, a patron was a 'wretch who supports with insolence and is paid with flattery'.⁴¹ Clare himself found the subscription system abhorrent from the outset of his career as a poet when it was originally suggested to him in 1818 by Henson, the Market Deeping printer and bookseller, and Clare mused:

The manner of printing my poems was to me of little consequence to get them printed at all was sufficient so I readily agreed that he was capable of publishing my trifles and the best way for so doing he said was by subscription force puts us to no choice or else I detested the thoughts of Subscription as being little better then begging money from people that knew nothing of their purchase⁴²

By the nineteenth century the system of patronage was dwindling and to have a patron, as Clare had in 1820, was the exception rather than the rule. By the late 1750s, according to Collins, public support was all that was needed.⁴³ Nevertheless, little known and penniless, Clare needed this support, as he himself acknowledged when he reached the stage of attempting to raise a list of subscribers:

I distributed my papers accordingly but as I could get at no way of pushing them into higher circles than those with whom I was acquainted they consequently passed off as quietly as if they had still been in my possession unprinted and unseen⁴⁴

Such a relationship within a patron/client structure clearly involved the domination, or strong influence, of one person or institution, over another, or some degree of control. This, of necessity, could be achieved by force of personality, financial pressure, manipulation, or such persuasion as could be exerted. It was a visible sign of dignity. By to-day's interpretation the word patronage implies a degree of condescension. A situation of superiority and inferiority can be perceived as implicit by either party involved, and thus inequality in status. From the recipient of benefits a donor could reasonably anticipate that he would receive gratitude, deference, obedience, or at least compliance with his wishes, in return for which he or she would be expected to work to enhance the position of the protégé, not only socially and financially, but with advice and moral support. The protégé, in accepting patronage, became vulnerable within the relationship due to the expectation that he would, or should, conform to these unwritten rules. Despite his humble social status, John Clare was no man's creature, nor was he prepared to be. Evidence of this can be found in his robust reaction to the first occasion on which Lord Radstock, one of his earliest and most influential patrons, had cause to complain of the sentiments in certain poems in Clare's first volume, and which, on the decision of his publisher John Taylor, were deleted from the fourth edition.⁴⁵ This major incident in his early career will be examined later in this chapter.

Lord Radstock used a variety of tactics in his efforts to achieve his own wishes, not the least of which was creating situations where a sense of obligation, gratitude, or dependence could be incurred. He was also a benevolent man with no doubt a genuine concern for the young poet. We learn that in March 1820 he asked Lord Milton to provide Clare with a 'neat cottage with a piece of garden ground', rent free;⁴⁶ that he personally made '*considerable additions*' to the funds in John Taylor's hands for Clare's benefit,⁴⁷ and that he had written to Prince Leopold of Saxe Cobourg on the poet's behalf.⁴⁸ Clare had been made aware of these moves by a correspondent, Mrs Eliza Emmerson, possibly a fellow Evangelical of Radstock's, and a minor figure on the London social stage. Radstock had started to send books to Clare in February of that year and finally sent a total of twenty-eight over the next five years. It is noticeable how often the words 'friend' and 'friendship' are used by him in the homilies he inscribed in many of these volumes, as though wishing to stress the very personal nature of their relationship.⁴⁹ Then came the first intervention referred to above. Radstock chose to address his criticisms through a

letter to a Mrs Eliza Emmerson, the contents of which were to be conveyed by her to Clare.⁵⁰ The reasons for this are not clear but are examined in greater detail in section 3.5. It may be that he deemed it wiser to try to maintain the personal bond he was aiming to establish as a father-figure without direct confrontation and dispute. It was a difficult situation for a member of the aristocracy to find himself in; virtually powerless in dealing with a writer who was a free agent as far as his own thoughts were concerned, to give the orders that he would normally direct to an inferior. It was ignominious to plead for compliance by seeming to invoke gratitude for his gifts and favours. However, he appeared able to do this at a later stage. He had, of course, also put Clare in an invidious position as the recipient of books and favours. This was followed by a second intervention in December of that year in which, trying, no doubt to protect his protégé's interests, he attempted to insist on the terms under which Clare's work was published. This time the publisher was offended, and wrote to Clare making it clear that he was not prepared to justify his opinions to his patron.⁵¹ Clare's understandable concern was that this reaction would affect the financial expectations he had from Radstock and his friends as subscribers, which included Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, and he urged Taylor to take this into consideration, adding: 'As for myself interest urges me I must & therefore I must keep the peace with his Lordship.'⁵² Even at this early stage the poet was not deceived. He seemed well aware that gratitude and compliance were expected from him and should have been delivered. In January 1821 Taylor referred back to the problem of the lines objected to by Radstock in Clare's first volume of poetry now running into its fourth edition, and consulted him.⁵³ The poet responded defiantly: 'Never mind Lord R[adstock]'s pencilings in the 'Peasant Boy' what he dont like he must lump as the dog did his dumpling'⁵⁴ Clare was grateful for the considerable help he had been given by Radstock and acknowledged it but he was not bowed down with feelings of gratitude nor with any sense of obligation to conform.⁵⁵ Without this awareness on his part the relationship could have been in danger of developing along lines in which indebtedness predominated and a loss of self-respect was incurred by the recipient as the result. Radstock, as a member of the aristocracy, was accepting the responsibility of ensuring that his protégé appeared as the contented peasant that the governing classes wished to see.

As previously mentioned, Mrs Eliza Emmerson had taken an interest in Clare's work shortly after his first volume was published in January 1820. In her first letter to him, dated 21 February 1820, we find the same insistence on the word 'friend':

To Mr John Clare—Poet!

Tho' lowly bred, and Rude thy fare—

I'll call thee friend ! sweet poet Clare! ⁵⁶

Her association with Lord Radstock socially, and the fact that it was she who had interested him in Clare in the first instance, may also have caused him to enlist her help in upbraiding the poet over the offending lines in the two poems, 'Helpstone' and 'Dawnings of Genius'.⁵⁷ He appeared to have no difficulty in communicating his feelings to her, someone he would have regarded as a social equal. In May 1820 she obediently quoted from Radstock's letter directly to Clare:

It has been my anxious desire of late, to establish our poets character, as that of an honest and upright man—as a man feeling the strongest sense of gratitude for the encouragement he has received— [...] tell Clare if he has still a recollection of what I have done, and am still doing for him, he must give me unquestionable proofs of being that man I would have him to be—he must *expunge!*⁵⁸

Radstock clearly thought that either the reward and punishment technique of dealing with Clare would succeed or the 'More in sorrow than in anger' attitude with which Victorians upbraided their children. But gratitude from the client was obligatory.

However, Clare was fortunate in many of his patrons. Mrs Emmerson, for one, continued to be a true friend. Her letters, invariably effusive, included some wise counsel on a variety of subjects, from grammar,⁵⁹ to the social and political conventions of the time.⁶⁰ According to Mark Storey her last letter to Clare was dated March 1837, three months before his removal to the asylum at High Beech, Epping Forest.⁶¹ His introduction, through Edward Drury, to John Taylor, the man who became his publisher, was fortuitous and has been described by him in his Autobiography.⁶² Taylor was to become more than a publisher: his role as friend, literary and political advisor and educator was invaluable to a young and aspiring poet. Their correspondence was voluminous. Octavius Gilchrist himself, a Stamford resident, grocer, writer, sometime editor of *Drakard's Stamford News*, was another contributor to the poet's general education. He was a local socialite and a known meddler in local politics, a polished, well-educated man, known in London literary circles. It was he who arranged Clare's first visit to the capital, escorting him to a number of places of interest and introducing him to prominent painters and writers.⁶³ Gilchrist can truly be described as one of his literary and social patrons. The progressive, bustling town of Stamford had opened the door to a new world in which Clare encountered a different class of society, as well as many of the literati, and the manoeuvrings of local politics. Financially he was also greatly indebted to Lord Spencer, Lord Fitzwilliam, Lord Milton and the Earl of Exeter.⁶⁴

His relationship with the Revd H. F. Cary was based on a bond of mutual respect between fellow poets, in which an educated and a self-educated man enjoyed a friendship that surmounted any false social assumptions.⁶⁵

Clare did not regard the patronage he received as a reason for obsequiousness on his part. His relationships with his patrons generally, with a few exceptions, became more personal than financial. There is no evidence of greed in his acceptance of their support, rather the reverse, and, as his exchanges with Radstock illustrate, he maintained his determination to preserve a sturdy independence. In this he clearly broke the mould of what was expected of a client in such a situation. As a writer and as a man he had his personal integrity to preserve. Striving to serve two masters, and with his personal and professional obligations at odds, he was in a situation that was to develop to his disadvantage later in his career.

3.3 Octavius Graham Gilchrist (1779-1823)

Among Clare's friends and associates in Stamford whose conversation and opinions could have influenced him were those who were connected, either directly or indirectly, with newspapers. Octavius Gilchrist was one. The son of a Surgeon Lieutenant in the Dragoon Guards, Gilchrist studied at Magdalen College, Oxford, but left in 1801, at the age of twenty-two, without completing his degree, to help an uncle and aunt who owned businesses in Stamford and Peterborough that comprised malting, milling, and retail grocery outlets.⁶⁶ Some of these facts were confirmed retrospectively in a letter dated 1872 from Justin Simpson addressed 'Gentlemen':

Mr G certainly came to Stamford to conduct a grocery (but princely) business for an uncle whom he succeeded thro' the kindness of a relative. He paid the money back & made 11,000 £ by the business which he left to a brother. His library made 1400 guineas & was a six days sale. When his uncle died the business was to be conducted by himself & brother Alfred. They afterwards quarreled, parted, & the latter went out of the business. It had been conducted by two brothers Thomas & Joseph Robinson, the latter being very wealthy was a kind of sleeping partner. [...] Martin came to my father who gave him some particulars, he then went to an old lawyer (a [?bear]) now dead who gave him the garbled statement published by him in his life of Clare. The lawyer & Mr G were never on good terms as Mr G was editor of a paper whose politics (liberal) were at variance with his, besides he was guilty of a dirty action at a sale. My father bought a lot of books in which was a rare first edition of a scarce work for his uncle, & when the lot

came home it was missing, nobody else being in the room but the [?vessel] of the law. A deal of unpleasantness arose out of the affair hence Martins ex parte statement.⁶⁷

These comments, if correct, give some insight into Gilchrist's tendency to become involved in controversy.

Gilchrist spent the rest of his life in Stamford, and married, in 1804, a Miss Elizabeth Nolan of London.⁶⁸ Two of her sisters also married Stamford men, the Simpson brothers, and Clare became friendly with at least three of their sons.⁶⁹ A brother, Horatio Thomas Gilchrist, came to Stamford in about 1806, also becoming a miller.⁷⁰ Records show him registered as 'gentleman', applying for a game licence, and as owner of a farm at Tinwell, outside Stamford.⁷¹ The families became well established on the local stage, both Octavius and Horatio becoming aldermen; Horatio was Mayor by 1828.⁷² They appear to have been a comparatively wealthy family, their aunt Mrs, Robinson, for example, had owned silk mills in the town which she was selling in 1802.⁷³

Octavius Gilchrist soon became a prominent figure in the social life of Stamford. By 1804 he was a steward at the Assembly Rooms, an office he filled at regular intervals, notably on prestigious occasions.⁷⁴ He also became a member, later a delegate, of the Stamford/Oakham Navigation Project, a project no doubt likely to affect the future prosperity of local businesses.⁷⁵ It was not long before he was also involved in political controversy. Newton and Smith point to the fact that when the first contested election for seventy-five years occurred in 1809, as mentioned in chapter 3.2, Gilchrist was active in election preparations. The *Mercury* records that he intervened in proceedings on the hustings, an incident for which he subsequently apologised. In Newton and Smith's opinion it was the ultimate success of the Burghley candidate that involved Gilchrist in the establishment of a newspaper that would counter this Burghley influence in the town.⁷⁶ This venture, in partnership with John Drakard, has already been mentioned in section 3.2. Described by O'Leary as 'an outspoken radical, whose chief interest was waging war on the Tories',⁷⁷ Drakard launched *Drakard's Stamford News* with an advertisement in the *Stamford Mercury*, next to an announcement that the *Mercury* itself would also issue a new paper on the same date, the *Stamford and Boston Gazette & Midland Counties Argus*.⁷⁸ The *Gazette* supplied the same news items as the *Mercury* but was also used as a medium for responding to attacks on it by the *News*. This inevitably led to hostility, that built up between the two papers and their editors. The second issue of the *News* published a letter from Gilchrist referring to, and refuting, an accusation 'that he has control of the newspaper, printed by our friend John Drakard'.⁷⁹ By January 1812 a two and a half column article in the *News*

entitled 'Scurrility' gave prominence to the tension that existed between that paper and the *Mercury*:

That we have been again attacked by the Newcombs is known to many. We are anxious to shew who have been the original aggressors. WE never called out fye for shame against the 'scurrilous Editor' when he called us blackguards, thieves, and traitors [...] We have been, as we have shewn, from the very commencement of our journal, attacked by the Newcombs as traitors, jacobins, and blackguards.⁸⁰

The Newcombs finally made a direct accusation concerning the editorship which resulted in a duel in London in 1812 between Richard Newcomb junior of the *Mercury* and Gilchrist, in which no one was injured. A second duel took place some three months later in which the outcome was the same.⁸¹ O'Leary claims that Gilchrist was given authority to supervise the *News* when the first official Editor (John Scott) was absent and took the opportunity to stir up controversy whenever possible. He wrote articles, using the term 'Ed' after his contributions which gave rise to the rumours that he was, in fact, the Editor.⁸² It is clear that Gilchrist was a man of very definite convictions who did not flinch from dispute.

The first meeting between Clare and John Taylor of London, who was to become his publisher, took place in Stamford in 1819 as the result of an introduction by Edward Drury, Taylor's cousin. This led to Clare's being invited to Gilchrist's house to meet Taylor again, an incident later recorded in his poem 'The Invitation'.⁸³ In 1820 in the *London Magazine* Gilchrist presented Clare to the reading public. From today's distance his account appears condescending, drawing attention as it does to the poet's humble origin, 'poetry herself does not supply a more lowly descent', publicly presupposing (no doubt correctly) that Clare had never drunk wine or set foot on a carpet prior to his visit to the Gilchrists' home, and stressing his father's dependence on parish relief. Subsequently Gilchrist himself found it advisable to explain his motives for writing in this strain: 'I thought it expedient to praise as little as might be, because people dont like to have their judgement anticipated', Taylor, however, accepted the critique as 'calculated to be of essential service in promoting the sale of the Poems'.⁸⁴ Gilchrist's subsequent interest in Clare and the kindness he was shown by Gilchrist and his wife could indicate that he had genuinely acted in what he saw as the poet's best interests. Gilchrist and Clare became close friends during the three to four years of their acquaintance. It was Gilchrist who invited Clare to accompany him to London in March 1820 and escorted him on a sight-seeing tour: 'To see most of the curiositys we went to westminster abbey to see the poets corner

and to both Play houses were I saw Kean and Macready and Knight and Munden and Emmery.’ He also introduced Clare to his brother-in-law, a London jeweller, who took him to Vauxhall pleasure gardens.⁸⁵ On Clare’s second visit to the capital in 1822 Gilchrist was ill but joined him later, introducing him to William Gifford, Editor of the *Quarterly Review*, and to John Murray, the publisher.⁸⁶

During their acquaintance the two men corresponded regularly, and Clare was often invited to Stamford for lunch, or to stay the night. In what could be his first letter to Gilchrist, dated late December 1819 by Mark Storey, he acknowledged the loan of ‘Wordsworth’ and requested the loan of a volume of Byron’s poems; he was lent two volumes.⁸⁷ It is feasible that he was loaned many more books and may have had free access to Gilchrist’s considerable library. Gilchrist certainly presented him with a copy of *The Dramatick Writings of William Shakespeare*.⁸⁸ By September 1820 Clare was confidently expressing to him his opinion of a local poet and, in what was now an easy relationship, revealed a social gaffe he had committed by a failure to recognise the Marquis of Exeter in Drury’s shop.⁸⁹ Later he appeared to realise that social life with Gilchrist in Stamford could prove oppressive and, for him, dangerous. By December 1820 he was commenting to Taylor that he had not called on Gilchrist for three months or longer: ‘My neglect is that I am quite weary of gossiping tho he is the most entertaining one for companys sake that I find in this quarter being the only literary man in our dark little wood’,⁹⁰ but subsequently describing him as ‘A very hearty fellow & an exquisite hand at punch making’.⁹¹ After some Christmas festivities he again confided to Taylor: ‘I have been to Mr G[ilchrist]s & as to the morning headache you are a good prophet but when a man has had expierience in merry makings he knows how to judge for a croney’.⁹² By March 1821 his tone had changed: ‘This moment I am interrupted by an invitation from Mr Gilchrist in a short note—no I shall not go this time I am in no kip for travelling & am sick of Stamford I have done it over & over & 20 times over—things you know get wearisome at least I know wives & bad fortune does—’, followed, a week later, by:

I have seen O[ctavius] G[ilchrist] having started on Tuesday on urgent invitations for that purpose & according to custom staid 2 days in the town & made myself confoundedly drunk[...] I hate Stamford but am dragged into it like a Bear and fidler to a wake—people that advise me to keep at employment soberly at home are the first that tempt me to break from it⁹³

It is probable that this criticism was levelled at Gilchrist who had written, that same month, to upbraid Clare for intemperance: ‘Is not the head-ache the denunciation threatened in scripture, — ‘woe unto them that drink strong drink?’ When will you leave off these sad doings, John Clare, John Clare!’⁹⁴ It is not known what literary or other company Clare met at these gatherings but the probability is that they were groups of interesting people. A letter from Justin Simpson concerning Gilchrist’s friendship with Clare confirms this: ‘The acquaintance last as long as Mr G lived & thro’ him he was introduced to many of the litterati of the day as Mr G’s house was open to all literary men & was much visited by them’⁹⁵

Gilchrist’s literary interests were wide-ranging. He was an antiquary and was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries at the early age of twenty-four.⁹⁶ He was also the owner of a considerable and valuable library. Apart from his sporadic editorship of the *News* Gilchrist is credited with the authorship of several works, notably *Articles on Various Subjects* (1803), which included *Essays relating to the Rise and Progress of the British Stage, and of the respective merits of the Elder Dramatists, The Elizabethan Dramatists* (1805), and *Rhymes: Verse and Prose*. He also left an unfinished work in defence of the character of Pope.⁹⁷ Bearing in mind his (presumably) Scottish origin, it is interesting to find, in *Verse and Prose*, the following:

RHYMES

To a Friend
In the Anglo-Scottish Manner.

I send thee, *Tam*, a wee-bit present,
And, tho’ it binna cock nor pheasant,
I trust it wonna prove unpleasant,
 Tho’ fain i’d mend it;
But that thou may’st na think the less on’t
 Thy *frien’* doth send it.⁹⁸

Clare, of course, also wrote in the Scottish idiom and this may well have been an interest inspired by or shared with Gilchrist.⁹⁹

In 1806 W. L. Bowles, a cleric, had published ten volumes of the *Works of Alexander Pope*, in which he censured the poet’s moral character and criticised his poetry. Gilchrist wrote

in defence of Pope's character and, in his first letter to Bowles, (there were three), quoted a number of Clare's sonnets.¹⁰⁰ This irritated the poet and provoked his criticism;

Mr O[ctavius] G[ilchrist] has gibbeted me in his answer to Bowles on high ground as a sonneteer I wish he had said less twill raise a nest of wasps & bring an old house over ones head & I expect ye will see a blackguard letter in the 'London' or 'New Monthly' from the Northamptonshire Peasant to L[ord] B[yron] who has doubtlessly mediated a stripe on my shoulders with his cane ere now from O.G's pamphlet¹⁰¹

This controversy caused considerable comment in literary circles according to Nicholson.¹⁰² In Mark Storey's opinion: 'Gilchrist was a controversialist, and is now best known for his *Letter to the Rev. William Bowles* (1820), which indirectly drew Clare into a debate on the merits of Pope's poetry.'¹⁰³

In the exchanges that ensued it is obvious that Gilchrist resented Bowles's allusions to his connection with the grocery trade, which portrayed him as living in a romantic reverie until, in his imagination, his very pipe became the pipe of Theocritus, the shop's ledger was Virgil's Georgics, the green canisters were transformed into green trees, the shop boy an Arcadian shepherd, and the stock of brown treacle became more attractive than the Cumberland lakes.¹⁰⁴ That the correspondence then became personal and acrimonious is illustrated in Gilchrist's response: 'Can "gentlemen" do other than turn with disgust from Mr. Bowles's vulgar slang about dingy shopboys, groves of green canisters, and lakes of brown treacle'. He also took up the cudgels in defence of Clare:

Poor John Clare, what is his offence[...] Is it Clare's only crime that Mr. Bowles believes ME to be the lad's reviewer in the Quarterly; or is it that the Northamptonshire poet has burned no incense under the nose of this brother sonneteer; or, which is yet more likely, being neither rich, nor high in honour in the literary world, his celebrity could not confer that sort of distinction which Mr. Bowles so sedulously covets [...] Mr. Bowles's sneer at 'the products of a certain poet of nature' is altogether senseless. The problem is, that Mr. Bowles knows nothing of these products, beyond what he has gathered from the Quarterly.¹⁰⁵

Clare expressed his own opinion of Pope's poetry:

Looked into Pope I know not how it is but I cannot take him up often or read him long together the uninterrupted flow of the verses wearies the ear—there are some fine passages in the Essay on Man—the Pastorals are nick[n]amed so for daffodils breathing flutes beachen bowls silver crooks and purling brooks and such like everlasting sing song does not make pastorals his prologue to the satires is good—but that celebrated Epitaph on Gay ends burlesqly ‘Striking there pensive bosoms etc’

but it is not known what he said to Gilchrist on this subject as this entry in his Journal was made some sixteen months after Gilchrist’s death.¹⁰⁶ It has also been suggested by Billing that Gilchrist was responsible for the manner in which ‘The Origin and influence of the Burghley family’ was presented in *Drakard’s History of Stamford*:

The reputation of the Cecils had not reached the rank of the old and established gentry of the country, when William Cecil [...] was directed by his better fortune to become a courtier[...] The merits of this man, much better known by the title of Lord Burghley, have been so extravagantly magnified [...] that superficial enquiries [...] have been misled to treat his name with a veneration which is never due to talents unsupported by distinguished virtues.

The great secret of this man’s superiority and success [...] seems to have been comprised in the sinuous dexterity with which he worked his way to the highest authority of a subject.¹⁰⁷

There is a similarity in style between this and the manner in which the *News* was originally presented.¹⁰⁸ The subject of Gilchrist’s style was also commented on in Dibden’s *Literary Reminiscences*:

The late Mr. Octavius Gilchrist of Stamford in Lincolnshire, was doubtless, considering his education and limited society, a very extraordinary literary character. He was a grocer in a large scale of business, and always appeared to love books very much better than the material of his trade [...] Mr Gilchrist was a great ally of Mr. Gifford’s, whom he appeared to me at once to fear and to respect. He had furnished materials, if he did not concoct entire articles for the *Quarterly Review*, -although at total variance with that publication in political principles. He was quick, sharp-sighted Critic with a real love of poetry, and if I remember contributed an Article to, if he were not the Editor of, a

periodical magazine called the *Registrar*—in which there was a brilliant comparison between Thomson and Cowper as deliniators of rural scenery and country life. Mr. Gilchrist's fault lay in an affectation of classical knowledge—in an ambition of quoting Greek where its introduction was manifestly inapposite. But his 'great horse' to ride upon was Shakespeare, and I had good reason to know that he was sedulously employed in furnishing the 'raw material' for Mr. Gifford's intended review of Boswell's Edition of Malone's Shakespeare.¹⁰⁹

In his obituary it is stated authoritatively that Gilchrist wrote for several publications.¹¹⁰ It becomes evident that he was a reluctant or unenthusiastic grocer which, when his multifarious interests are taken into account, is hardly surprising.

Gilchrist 'fell a sacrifice to some consumptive complaint' and died in June 1823.¹¹¹ The sale catalogues of his estate published after his death give further insight into his major interests. His furniture and effects were advertised in the *Mercury* with prominence given to a collection of Roman urns.¹¹² A forty-three page catalogue and several pamphlets heralded the sale of his library which, according to these pamphlets, was held in a Pall Mall saleroom in London over a period of five days. One thousand three hundred and twenty-three books were involved, many described as 'rare' or 'scarce'.¹¹³ Billing has recorded that his library had once contained 'a Caxton, *The Life of our Lady*, which he sold to Lord Spencer for £100', and added: 'A great lover of poetry, Gilchrist became a warm friend of the Helpston poet, John Clare, who frequently visited him.'¹¹⁴ Nicholson quotes Gifford's description of his friend:

His last labour of love was an attempt to rescue Pope from the rancorous persecution of his editor, the Rev. Mr. Bowles [...] Mr. Gilchrist was a man of strict integrity; and in the extent and accuracy of his critical knowledge and in the patient industry of his researches, as much superior to the Rev. Mr. Bowles as in good manners.¹¹⁵

His death was recorded in the *News*: 'The name and character of Mr. G. will, we are assured, long survive in the affectionate memory of his fellow-townsmen, to whom the unaffected simplicity of his manners and the cheerfulness of his disposition, rendered him at all times an agreeable associate.'¹¹⁶ Clare wrote with regret at the loss his friend: 'Poor Gilchrist is done I could not have thought it would affect me so much',¹¹⁷ and later: 'Poor Gilchrist was the only man of letters in the neighbourhood and now he has left it a desert'.¹¹⁸

The Gilchrist/Clare relationship was complicated. On the one hand was a comparatively wealthy man, well-known in London and courted as a social leader in his provincial circle, well-educated, literate and articulate, prepared to be a caring and instructive supporter for the poet, but inclined to be pedantic, verbose, and a somewhat self-opinionated, overbearing critic. Elegance and good-living were apparently his accustomed way of life. On the other hand we have a struggling poet, hard-pressed to make ends meet in providing for a young family and elderly parents, whose financial and domestic burdens were likely to weigh more heavily on his mind than the subjects paramount in Gilchrist's list of priorities, finding endless literary controversy a boring and pointless business. Clare was under some pressure. He was being drawn in to a section of the middle-class social scene of Stamford that was foreign to him. Impressed by the hospitality he was offered and without doubt enjoying it, he would also have been impressed by the literary knowledge and social graces of his new acquaintance, two areas where he had much to learn. Gilchrist enjoyed the company of a drinking companion and probably the novelty of a rustic genius with an undoubted gift. He was an educative force and Clare owed a considerable debt to a man who could introduce him to a wider world where books and conversation predominated and to whom the art of conducting, and winning, a literary dispute was a personal and all-important challenge.

3.4 John Taylor (1781-1864)

Clare's association with John Taylor exceeded that of the publisher/client relationship and developed into a working friendship, usually close, but cool when financial difficulties developed. Taylor slipped into the role of mentor and literary adviser to the poet almost by default and guided him through many of the problems that arose during the ups and downs of his career and private life. Mark Storey points out that Taylor was Clare's most regular correspondent apart from Mrs Emmerson, and it is chiefly through their letters that Taylor's influence can be traced.¹¹⁹

John Taylor's education included some years at two Grammar Schools, Lincoln, where Chilcott states that he met the future artists William Hilton and Peter de Wint with whom he remained friendly for many years, and at Retford, Nottinghamshire.¹²⁰ He then entered his father's business of bookseller and printer in Retford as an apprentice, learning the trade, reading widely, and writing poetry. By December 1803 he had moved to London to work for the bookseller James Lackington. He soon transferred to the publishing firm of Vernor and Hood, working for Thomas Hood, the father of the future poet. During this time he 'contributed a few Articles of poetry to the poetical magazine'. He learned every aspect of the book trade and assisted in the publication of Robert Bloomfield's poetry.¹²¹ At this time he also took French lessons and read Greek with his future partner James Hessey. In 1806 he formed a bookselling and publishing partnership with Hessey; a small shop was opened in Fleet Street.¹²² Over the years the firm of Taylor and Hessey published the works of Cary, Carlyle, Clare, Coleridge, Cunningham, Darley, de Quincey, Hazlitt, Hood, Keats, Lamb, and Reynolds, no mean

achievement for a small firm.¹²³ Taylor's interest in poetry was maintained as he continued to read extensively, particularly the works of Spenser, and to study Christianity, linguistics, economic theory, and phrenology among other subjects.¹²⁴ Intrigued for some years by the identity of a letter-writer, 'Junius', he wrote a short pamphlet on this subject followed by a book based on literary analysis, comparing the writer's style with that of one Sir Philip Francis. His research into the styles of these two writers, illustrative of his sensitivity to language, was employed to the full in his later association with the work of John Clare. Taylor not only wrote on the Identity of Junius in 1813, 1816, 1817, and 1818,¹²⁵ but later on such subjects as Money, Currency, Paper Money, Taxes, the Greek Article, the Emancipation of Industry, The Labourer's Protection the Nation's Remedy, Free Trade, and The Great Pyramid, in over thirty papers and books.¹²⁶ He was opposed to the currency policy of the Peel government and it is said that his house later became a meeting place for supporters of currency reform.¹²⁷ This was a subject on which Clare, by 1830, expressed very definite views although there is no evidence to suggest that these resulted from Taylor's influence.¹²⁸ This diversity of interests stayed with Taylor and such natural curiosity may have contributed to his tendency to undertake a wide variety of commitments in later life.

In 1817 he met the poet John Keats, whose first volume of poetry had just been published. Despite the fact that it had not sold well Taylor and Hessey decided to publish his second volume, an adventurous decision.¹²⁹ A letter from Keats to Taylor in February 1818 illustrates the fact that Taylor was taking a keen personal interest in the poetry itself. Keats's acknowledgement of an alteration to his work: 'Now I will attend to the Punctuation you speak of— [...] I am extremely indebted to you for this attention and also for your after admonitions—'¹³⁰ is an early example of the publisher's extending his work to include that of editor, a decision that was both well-intentioned and short-sighted, as it was to lead to serious problems of overwork in later years. The work did not sell well.¹³¹

Taylor's commitment to Clare's poetry during the years 1819-1832 and the extent to which it contributed to his workload as publisher, can be traced by examining details connected with the publication of his first three volumes. The manuscript of the early poems was drawn to Taylor's attention in 1819 by his cousin Edward Drury, the Stamford bookseller and printer. He decided to publish the work and *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* appeared in January 1820.¹³² Attention will be drawn to the dispute over certain lines in these poems which involved Taylor, Clare, and his patron Lord Radstock in chapter 3.5. Clare lost any early euphoria over patronage that he may have had and wrote to Taylor in December 1820:

I must keep his lordship yet & with all his weaknesses I cannot help but feel gratfull for what he has done for me tho I may feel more at liberty when the next vol is come out & you have mentioned him in the introduction he will then I conjecture have his lookd-for-reward & gradually withdraw himself from me to seek another novelty [...] I wish to keep peace & to keep all the friends I have met with [...] yet when it can no longer be endurd I shall be happy to confess I prefer T. & H. to the multitude—but when vanity even if it was on a sign post sees her name & tittle tattle generously recorded good bye patronage & with a welcome I say¹³³

He was sufficiently astute to realise that the opinion of an experienced and professional publisher who was also a scholar was of greater financial and literary value to him than the support of an influential and well-intentioned amateur. However, Radstock's threat to disown Clare if the lines he objected to in 'Helpstone' and 'Dawnings of Genius' were not withdrawn led Taylor to comply and they were omitted from the fourth edition.¹³⁴ The publisher appears to have done this against his better judgement, having written to Clare that he was 'Inclined to remain obstinate, and if any Objection is made to my judgement for so doing I am willing to abide the Consequences'.¹³⁵ By January 1821 the work had gone into a fourth edition. For his part, Drury was highly critical of the concession and critical of his cousin as well: 'In the 4th Edit [...] the lines in Helpstone are cut out & mutilated to meet old Lord R's wish—thus it is with Taylor always, "firm in counsel but weak in purpose & doing"'.¹³⁶ A publisher could not hope to please all men at all times, as Taylor was to discover.

Clare's eagerness to press on with the publication of a second volume was not checked by Taylor's warning that public expectation was invariably high: 'In Authorship you will find, if you succeed now, that greater things will be expected from the next Work, & so on successively'.¹³⁷ His publisher had other commitments (discussed on pp.7-8) as well as attention to Clare. He could not discard these but unwisely added an involvement in every aspect of his client's life as well as his work. In Olive Taylor's opinion 'The business of editing his poetry was no light task', and this great contribution to Clare's work cannot be overlooked when Taylor's career is considered.¹³⁸ As early in their association as January 1820 a detailed outline for Clare to use in a new work *Week in a Village* or *Ways of a Village* was being drawn up. Clare had envisaged that the title of this new volume would be *The Peasant Boy*: Drury had suggested *Village Minstrelsy*. Taylor's option, *The Village Minstrel*, was accepted and his original plan was later used for *The Shepherd's Calendar*.¹³⁹ However, by 1821 Taylor was unwell. Corrected proofs were returned to Clare with an appraisal of the poems, which covered the content, the

metre, the ‘Superfluous syllables’, the ‘Provincialisms’, and the title, with a detailed letter, correcting lines and words and mentioning his own illness.¹⁴⁰ A few weeks later he wrote in greater detail: ‘My Indispositions are not very violent, but I fear they proceed surely as well as slowly in their undermining attacks’.¹⁴¹ Despite these symptoms he did not relinquish what he saw as his responsibilities. Clare responded with ten letters in less than five weeks, indicative of the extent to which he had come to rely on Taylor’s judgement.¹⁴² A letter of January 1821 gives details of the strain that the publisher was under:

If you knew half the harrassing life I lead here in the Discharge of the many Duties which devolve on me as Book Seller, Publisher, Editor, Author, & printer’s Devil to the *London Magazine* you would not only excuse the Delay which has taken place in bringing out the *Introduction*, but you would pity me. I believe I must give it in some Day¹⁴³

Clare’s advice to his mentor, when he finally heard of his illness, was remarkably perceptive:

I must tell you if you dont give something up you will dye without joking—why the devil cant you sit in your chamber with as much indolent pomposity as the Albemarle Bookseller does—why need you trouble yourself about Mags &c &c while Editors are employed for that purpose—take my advice get a wife & be happy & let the world wag as fate wills it—¹⁴⁴

He had become sufficiently accustomed to Taylor’s amendments to the extent of virtually anticipating that his work would be edited. The validity of the corrections was accepted:

—Your alterations in ‘Solitude’ are capital & the poem is now one of the best in the Vols:-your omissions in the ‘Woodman’ are very good & the poem reads now uncommonly well so besure dont take them in again—your omission of the verse in sunday is after a second thought very appropriate & very just—your wishing to make one verse of the 2 is right—so besure send me a copy of the 2 verses & the way you woud have them done your assistance in such things I find very nessesary & I in fact will not do without it—so in future when you want any alterations youll know how to get them—your omissions in the other poems are capital¹⁴⁵

He emphasised this: ‘Dont you complain of me not writing latly for you have got idle in not making the corrections—’.¹⁴⁶ Later he endorsed his approval again: ‘You rogue you, the pruning hook has been over me agen I see in the vols but vain as I am of my abilities I must own your loppings off have bravely amended them’.¹⁴⁷ Taylor himself had become absorbed with the poetry and attempted to explain this:

I have attended to your Wishes which are the same as mine, so make yourself perfectly easy—I fancy you are at my Elbow prompting every Thought when I am correcting, and in fact I merely hold the Pen—thus it is that what I do to the Proofs is so like what you would have *done* that when done it hits your Ideas exactly. —¹⁴⁸

The publication of this second volume led to further controversy with Radstock over ‘radical Slang’¹⁴⁹ and irritation from Clare.¹⁵⁰ *The Village Minstrel* appeared in September 1821. It did not sell well but achieved a second edition by May 1823.¹⁵¹

By July 1823 *The Shepherd’s Calendar* was under discussion, the title having been suggested by Taylor.¹⁵² At times the publisher can be seen acting as advisor and tutor as well as editor, with Clare asking for ideas for the content:

Any other things that you may think would [make] tales or any pictures you may have noticed in the months of rural scenery woud be very acceptable to me now you know better than me what will suit & I am certain a man of your taste has not let them pass bye without notice¹⁵³

He is guilty of overloading a busy man with unnecessary detail, no doubt through ignorance of business procedure, such as requesting in the same letter ‘a blank book rul’d’ to be included with his next copy of the *London Magazine*.¹⁵⁴ On a previous occasion he had ordered a brass seal, with a minute description.¹⁵⁵ Such details are illustrative of the extent to which Clare depended on Taylor and the minutiae with which the publisher was burdened, and permitted himself to be burdened. He was, by this time, filling the multiple role of bookseller, editor and critic as well as publisher. Progress in the business of publishing the work continued slowly. By 1825 Harry Stoe Van Dyk was assisting Taylor but there was further delay. Clare became ‘Far from satisfied with the neglecting manner that has been going on latly’.¹⁵⁶ Taylor indicated that he, personally, had lost interest in the work, despite having devoted hours to considering it.¹⁵⁷ Clare lost patience:

I am all anxiety about the book tho I almost fancy now it will never come out at all the words that have been spent about it are idle ones & proves that promises & performances are not near neighbours by a wide difference ¹⁵⁸

Some delay was due to Taylor's workload, the rest to the state of Clare's manuscripts. Taylor had no scruples in pointing this out:

I must now as frankly tell you, that for the principal part of the Delay & for the present total Stop again, you are alone responsible—Look at the Vol. of MS. Poems which I now send you, & show it where you will, & let any of your Friends say whether they can even read it.—I can find *no one* here who can perform the Task besides myself. Copying it therefore is a Farce [...] But suppose I attempt to do this, here I encounter another Difficulty:—the Poems are not only slovenly written, but as slovenly *composed*, & to make good Poems out of some of them is a greater Difficulty than I ever had to engage in with your former Works,—¹⁵⁹

The amount of editing that was necessary had become excessive:

In the Parcel you will find a Letter which I wrote under a Feeling of some Irritation, at perceiving how freely I was censured for the Delay of the Work, when in truth had I done what any other man would under such Circumstances I should have declined having any Concern with it.— [...] I can however proceed no farther—& you must now put your own Shoulder to the Wheel or the Work will never come out.— [...] I feel I must confess a little sore at having had more imposed upon me than it was possible for me to perform. [...] For the future, —so long as you send me for my Judgement Poems as good as *you* can write in a Hand that any *other* Person can read I will cheerfully undertake to edit— but I never will again attempt to lick into Form such uncouth Cubs as some which I have tried at in the MS. now returned to you—¹⁶⁰

Clare's response was a model of reasonableness: 'As you say that the delay of the books coming out now rests with me I will do my utmost to prevent it for a design however difficult cannot exist till it is compleated & talking about beginning a journey will never get to the end of it'¹⁶¹

This was followed with a qualified offer to alter lines that needed correction:

The ‘Tales’ I think you can deal with better than I as they want nothing but pruning [...] but I do only suggest I leave the matter entirely to yourself to do as you please & am always ready to help you out as well as I can I hope I have not made you wait for anything for I have taken more time to be more correct¹⁶²

A tacit apology was also written in to these lines. There was further acceptance of the criticism: ‘I hope I shall not only make better MSS in future for you but better poetry at least I will try the best I can & I do assure you all that I now write undergoes severe discipline’.¹⁶³ Both Clare and Taylor were ill at this time but never the less by implication the load remained with the publisher. There has since been considerable criticism of Taylor’s editing of this particular work. Chilcott, for example, sees him as ‘The unfortunate mediator who was attacked both for allowing radical and “indelicate” sentiments to remain, and for expunging them’.¹⁶⁴ *The Shepherd’s Calendar* was finally issued in April 1827 but only sold poorly.

The fourth volume of Clare’s poetry *The Rural Muse*, originally intended as *The Midsummer Cushion*, was edited by Mrs Emmerson and Taylor and published by Whittaker and How in 1835. It was not successful.¹⁶⁵

It is clear that Taylor’s concerns extended to detail that was far beyond the usual brief of a publisher. In addition he maintained his involvement with his family. Olive Taylor gives an example of this side of his nature from letters he wrote to his younger brother around 1802:

Full of good advice and helpful counsel, and he directs the younger lad’s studies, earnestly exhorting him to keep up his Latin, and sending down books for his better edification.¹⁶⁶

He was by instinct a teacher, with care for and interest in the well-being of others. In Clare’s case he worried about the poet’s health over the years, insisting on his having the best medical advice that was available.¹⁶⁷ He also collected subscriptions donated for him:

The Notice which he has excited [...] has provided for him a settled Income already amounting to 25£ a year, viz: 100£ from us, 100£ from Earl Fitzwilliam—and 15£ a year for life from the Marquis of Exeter.¹⁶⁸

and advised on the best method of investing the money,¹⁶⁹ as well as the manner in which gifts from patrons should be acknowledged.¹⁷⁰ By May 1820 Clare was addressing him as ‘chuckey’,

an appreciation of the care with which he was enveloped as by a mother hen; a degree of friendly mockery can also be detected.¹⁷¹ The additional zeal of Mrs Eliza Emerson on Clare's behalf only contributed to the problems that Taylor had to accept on his protégé's behalf.¹⁷² Edward Drury's early failure to pass on to Clare all Taylor's comments and alterations added further complications and misunderstandings.¹⁷³ The publisher was also concerned over what he saw as Clare's excessive fondness for alcohol and advised him to avoid Octavius Gilchrist's hospitality. On the death of Keats in March 1821 he took the opportunity to deliver another lecture:

One of the very few Poets of this Day is gone—let another beware of Stamford. I wish you may keep to your Resolution of Shunning that place for it will do you immense Injury if you do not—you know what I would say—¹⁷⁴

Some of his involvement was self-imposed. In March 1821 Clare wrote: 'My two favourite elm trees at the back of the hut are condemned to dye' and Taylor even undertook an attempt to save the trees.¹⁷⁵ He did, however, manage to extricate himself from any participation in Clare's attempt to rescue his Helpstone friends, the Billings brothers, from a mortgage closure on their property.¹⁷⁶ The extent to which he was prepared to sympathise with Clare's religious interests is discussed in Chapter Six. At Clare's request he also co-operated in the preparation of his will but only complied to the extent of putting the matter in the hands of a friend, the company's unofficial solicitor, Richard Woodhouse.¹⁷⁷ Altogether, Taylor's care for his writers' general well-being, as well as their success, expressed through the liberal allocation of his time, is that of a generous man and a genuine scholar, perhaps misguided at times, dedicated to the production of the perfect article but controlled in this by the instincts of the trained bookseller/publisher with knowledge of what was then acceptable to the reading public.

In 1821 Taylor and Hessey had bought *The London Magazine*.¹⁷⁸ This represented a third responsibility for Taylor who, in addition to his general work with the firm and his voluntary task of editing Clare's poetry, decided to edit the magazine himself. Thomas Hood junior was appointed as 'a sort of sub-editor'.¹⁷⁹ 'Magazine dinners', introduced by Taylor, served to unite the contributors into a cohesive group who tended to support and encourage each other.¹⁸⁰ They referred to themselves as 'The Londoners'. Clare recorded his impression of Taylor after his first visit to London in 1820 having attended one such dinner:

Taylor is a man of very pleasant address and works himself into the good opinions of people in a moment but it is not lasting for he grows into a studied carelessness and

neglect that he carries into a system till the purpose for so doing becomes transparent and reflects its own picture while it would hide it—he is a very pleasant talker and an excessive fluent on Paper currency [...] he assumes a feeling and fondness for poetry and reads it well—[...] he professed a great friendship for me at my first starting and offered to correct my future poems if he did not publish them [...] he wrote the Introductions to both my Vols of Poems—his manner is that of a cautious fellow who shows his sunny side to strangers he has written some pamphlets on politics and the Identity of Junius a very clever book and some very middling papers in the *London Magazine* and bad sonnets [...] he never asks a direct question or gives a direct reply but continually saps your information by a secret passage coming at it as it were by working a mine like a lawyer examining a witness and he uses this sort of caution even in his common discourse [...] he sifts a theory of truth either true or false with much ingenuity and subtlety of argument [...] to sum up his character he is a clever fellow and a man of Genius and his Junius Identified is the best argument on circumstantial Evidence that ever was written ¹⁸¹

However, by early 1822 Lamb was grumbling that his fellow contributors were falling away.¹⁸² Taylor was concerned that circulation of the magazine did not increase.¹⁸³ By 1824 he was very ill and collapsed in 1825.¹⁸⁴ Olive Taylor writes: ‘Later in the year John Taylor was dangerously ill with what was then called “brain fever”’. The partnership of Taylor and Hessey was dissolved and the *London Magazine* was sold. Hessey retained the retail trade in Fleet Street and Taylor eventually resumed his publishing work, but at a less stressful level.¹⁸⁵ In a letter to his brother Taylor had to admit that their financial results had been described as ‘the forerunner of “complete insolvency”’.¹⁸⁶

Undoubtedly he had carried too heavy a workload for one man. In King’s opinion ‘Taylor had overburdened himself with a mass of petty details that should have been left to a business manager’.¹⁸⁷ There could be no such appointment in a small firm. Chilcott points to the fact that Taylor had no reader, only Hessey or Hood to refer to and occasionally Woodhouse or Reynolds: ‘He acted as adviser, letter-writer, business manager, transcriber, editor, and publisher, as well as the host and friend of many writers.’¹⁸⁸ Hood had left in 1823.¹⁸⁹ Taylor was thus fully extended in his dual role as partner in the printing and publishing company he had founded and, from 1821 to 1824, as principal editor of the *London*, having added, voluntarily, his work in relation to Clare’s writings. Some years previously, when Hessey had married:

He accordingly shouldered the two-fold burden of housekeeping and publishing, always on the premises, and unable to get away from the atmosphere of business or the importunity of chance callers. Meanwhile his brain was teeming with theories of his own on many subjects and the cares of business began to press heavily upon him.¹⁹⁰

There was, and is, an abundance of criticism of the *London*. In Hazlitt's words: 'It wants a sufficient unity of purpose and direction. There is no particular bias or governing spirit, which neutralises the interest. [...] all is in a confused, unconcocted state.' In Chilcott's opinion the policy of judging literature on its literary merit rather than by a code of political allegiance was praiseworthy but uninteresting, at a time when both political interest and unrest were high.¹⁹¹ As we have seen, Clare had detected in an early encounter, that Taylor was 'a cautious fellow', and this caution may have contributed in some way to the impression of indecision on his part.¹⁹² Bauer goes further than this and finds him timid, lacking in downrightness and, as an editor, unable to hold his contributors.¹⁹³ It seems that the contributors were themselves unsure who was the editor of the magazine, Taylor, Hessey, Hood, Reynolds, or possibly Woodhouse?¹⁹⁴

As a publisher Taylor was compelled to be selective but in his time he was constrained in this selection by the current political climate. He was well aware of repressive government legislation against seditious writings. E. P. Thompson notes: 'A major assault had commenced against the "seditious" and "blasphemous" press. Scores of prosecutions, against publishers or news-venders, had been instituted by the private prosecuting societies or dealt with by summary jurisdiction.'¹⁹⁵ The moral and evangelical conventions of others with views similar to those of Radstock and Mrs Emmerson, which irritated and frustrated him, also had to be considered. He was sceptical about the censorship he had to enforce at Radstock's behest. As he wrote to Clare in 1820: 'When the Follies of the Day are past with all the Fears they have engendered we can restore the Poems according to the earlier Editions.'¹⁹⁶ He was on a diplomatic tightrope in this situation. It would have been unwise for a tradesman, as Taylor was, to engage in public dispute with a member of the upper class. He was also a bookseller with the taste of a reading public to consider. That taste was changing as education slowly improved and reading became more popular. It was apparent that poetry was no longer acceptable. He had told Clare in 1827: 'The Season has been a very bad one for new Books, & I am afraid the time has passed away in which Poetry will answer.'¹⁹⁷ In matters of choice the public was dictating, interest now focussed on education and/or Reform, Taylor finally followed this lead and on his return to health formed a new company, Taylor and Walton, official publishers of educative books to the University of London.¹⁹⁸ The former partners remained on friendly terms and as loyal friends to their former

contributors. They had, in the past, extended considerable financial support to Keats, described by Taylor in a letter of 1820 to his brother: ‘Advancing him so much as will carry him to Rome and back again, for he has no one else to look to.’¹⁹⁹ Moral and financial support was also given to Hazlitt and to De Quincey, illustrative of the generosity of a small firm in financial straits itself. Their assistance to Clare has already been discussed, and this care continued. Having retired from publishing in 1853 Taylor continued to read extensively and write on a wide range of topics. Ten books and pamphlets are attributed to him in this period on such wide-ranging subjects as political economy, the Bible, and the Great Pyramid.²⁰⁰

The overall picture is that of a man working under extreme pressure, with financial difficulties as well as with dilemmas of his own making. Some of these were attributable to a desire to publish what he judged to be the highest quality poetry and prose, at times leading to financial loss, others from his conviction that struggling writers should be helped whenever possible. Yet he was un-businesslike and when Clare finally received his final statement of account in 1829 it was long overdue.²⁰¹ He was a perfectionist and in many ways it was this meticulous attention to detail that led to the stress and overwork that finally caught up with him. His aim was to publish only the best of contemporary literature but many of his contributors had not been able, or were not prepared, to work to his high standard of accuracy. His kindness and interest also led him to shoulder many of their personal problems himself, as in the cases of Keats and John Clare. Taylor died on 5 July 1864 at the age of eighty-three, some seven weeks after the death of his protégé John Clare.²⁰²

The lives and careers of John Taylor and Clare together supply us with a microcosm of the age in which they lived, showing in some detail the political, financial, religious, and social pressures that were brought to bear on the average man at that time. Taylor himself as scholar, publisher, bookseller, teacher, editor, friend and literary patron of emerging writers, and Clare the poet, farm worker and poor man, can be seen against the background of a government preoccupied with fear of the possible corrupting influence from the French Revolution and of their increasing repression for this reason, coupled with considerable unease among the higher ranks of society in the face of any discernible signs of dissatisfaction among the lower orders.

3.5 Admiral of the Fleet the Hon. William Waldegrave, first Baron Radstock (1753-1825)

A brief survey of Lord Radstock’s social background and service career provides us with some insight into the character of the man with whom John Clare had to contend. Born in 1753, the Hon. William Waldegrave entered the Royal Navy aged about thirteen and was given his first command at the early age of twenty-two. He had a distinguished service career and was

appointed Governor of Newfoundland in 1797, by which time the naval mutiny of the Nore had reached that area. Under his command a mutiny was put down at sword point, Admiral Waldegrave threatening to order shore batteries to sink the ship, H.M.S. Latona, and all hands, with red hot shot if there were any further trouble. Prouse states that, nevertheless, ‘the fire-eating old sailor was most sincere, religious and in private life, the kindest and most benevolent of men’. Here, then, was a man who, born the younger son of the Earl of Waldegrave, was trained for positions of power, became the first Baron Radstock in 1800, a full Admiral in 1802 and was created a G.C.B. in 1815.²⁰³ He would not have been accustomed to insubordination.

Radstock was also an Evangelical, one of a group of influential and wealthy men drawn in by William Wilberforce and his followers in 1785 to support a crusade designed to replace corruption and profligacy by what was considered the true religion.²⁰⁴ Wilberforce was a pragmatist and had, as Brown observes, appreciated at an early stage in his campaign that an idealistic approach would not prove effective and that worldly ways and means were needed in order to reform the world. He set about winning over the ruling class, including property owners and members of the Established Church, whose influence largely established the moral tone of the majority of people, in support of a movement that grew rapidly.²⁰⁵ In time his followers infiltrated the key positions in churches, hospital boards, and many of the numerous charitable societies that grew up during the 1820s. Radstock had become involved in the movement. Brown records that he was also a member of eighteen societies, president of one, vice-president of four, governor of three and on the committee of two.²⁰⁶ By 1816 he was the author of a religious tract which ran to twenty editions.²⁰⁷ His deep religious commitment, coupled with service training and experience, would have brought with it a determination to ensure that those he considered in need of instruction were not left in ignorance of the path they were to follow.

The Admiral was forty years older than Clare. He was born in a generation where social position would have affected his opinion of the independence that Clare sought for himself as a poet, together with what he saw as his right to freedom of thought and expression. Thus the patron, anticipating respect and deference, was confronting a client wishing to achieve certain rights for himself. Independence was not a state that Radstock would readily have accepted as suitable for the lower orders. On occasions, however, the older man’s judgement, based on experience, was put to good effect. Before meeting Clare, Radstock started a subscription for him²⁰⁸ but then wrote to a friend, Captain Markham Sherwill, expressing concern at what he considered to be the excessive generosity of some subscribers, illustrative of the opinion he had of money donated over-freely to those who, in his judgement, were unused or unable to handle such largesse:

I consider the money so generously lavished by Lord Milton and his father, upon John Clare as so dangerous a temptation, that I tremble for the Consequences. Had his Lordship settled the poor fellow in a comfortable Cottage rent free, and added to that liberality a cow and a few pigs; his Lordship would, in my humble opinion have acted more wisely [...] In the meantime, I have requested Mr. Taylor to write to his friend Drury to keep a watchful eye on Clare that we may have the better chance of keeping him within bounds.²⁰⁹

This was, in fact, practical advice, which was taken. A trust fund was established by Taylor in September 1820 which gave control of the income to trustees, an arrangement which Clare was to resent bitterly in 1832 when he needed a capital sum to stock his smallholding in Northborough. His situation was comparable with that of Ann Yearsley, a similarly self-educated poet, who was unable to gain access to the trust funds set aside for her by her former patron Mrs Hannah More.²¹⁰ Radstock's attempts at control over his protégé's social and religious life were not so successful.

Clare described his first impression of Radstock, whom he met during his first visit to London in March 1820, in his *Autobiography*:

Lord Radstock at first sight appears to be of a stern and haughty character but the moment he speaks his countenance kindles up into a free blunt good hearted man one whom you expect to hear speak exactly as he thinks he has no notion of either offending or pleasing by his talk and care[s] as little for the consequences of either there is a good deal of the bluntness and openheartedness about him and there is nothing of pride or fashion he is as plain in manner and dress as the old country squire a stranger would never guess that he was speaking to a Lord and tho he is one of the noblest familys in England he seems to think nothing [of his position] [...] his Lordship is a large man of a commanding figure [...] his Lordship has only one fault and that is a faith that takes every man [at his face value] he and Lord fitzwilliam are the two [best patrons I have had]²¹¹

After this visit he sent his 'Sonnet on Leaving London' to Mrs Emerson, which included the lines:

Ive seen prides haughty ways & found em vain

I've seen the world found nought that I could wish²¹²

This brought a reproachful response from her that was also a warning:

You should feel happy that such *comforts* have been *provided* for you, and by such *exalted* persons! [...] I have not ventured to send your 'Sonnet on Leaving London' to his Lordship, for I knew it would *displease* and *distress* him to hear you indulge such sentiments and regrets after all he has been doing to serve you [...] I know also that *considerable additions* have been made by my noble friend, to the funds in Mr. Taylors hands for your benefit [...] Let nothing then, in the shape of reproach against the higher orders enter your heart, or flow from your pen.²¹³

Clare was not proving either deferential or grateful as, apparently, was required. As Shiach states: 'The expectation of a patron such as Radstock even as late as 1820 was one of gratitude and conformity with his wishes'.²¹⁴

By May of that year the great controversy over *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* had broken. Lines in 'Helpstone' attacked the wealthy:

Accursed wealth o'er bounding human laws
Of every evil thou remains the cause
Victims of want those wretches such as me
Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee
Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed
& thine our loss of labour & of bread

'Dawning of Genius' was also criticised for the same reason:

In those low paths which poverty surrounds
The rough rude ploughman of his fallow grounds
Those nessascery tools of wealth & pride
While mould & sweating by some pasture side
How oft he'll stoop inquisitive to trace
The opening beauties of a daises face²¹⁵

Radstock was outraged. In a letter of complaint addressed to Mrs Emmerson he stressed the help and encouragement that he had given to the poet:

If you are detirmined to serve poor Clare—*you must do your duty!* you must tell him – to expunge certain highly objectionable passages in his 1st Volume—before the 3rd Edition appears—passages, wherein, his then depressed state hurried him not only into error, but into the most flagrant acts of injustice; by accusing those of pride cruelty, vices, and ill-directed passions—who, are the very persons, by whose truly generous and noble exertions he has been raised from misery and despondency [...] It has been my anxious desire of late, to establish our poets character, as that, of an honest and upright man—as a man feeling the strongest sense of gratitude for the encouragement he has received—but how is it possible that I can continue to do this if he suffers another Edition of his poems to appear with these vile, unjust, and now would-be ungrateful passages in them?—no, he must cut them out; or I cannot be satisfied that Clare is as honest and upright as I could wish him!—tell Clare if he still has a recollection of what I have done, and am still doing for him, he must give me unquestionable *proofs* of being that man I would have him to be—*He must expunge, expunge!*

Strong words and interesting comments. Orders had been issued to both parties. Mrs Emmerson was to ‘do her duty’. To whom? Perhaps it was to her ‘senior officer’, the titled naval man addressing her, or as a fellow member of the upper class, or possibly as a fellow member of the Evangelical sect. She certainly rallied to the call and added her comments on passing the message to Clare:

Let me now entreat you, as a true friend—as a sister—to write immediately to Mr. Taylor, and desire him *from yourself*, to expunge the objectionable lines—you have them marked in the Volume I sent you—for alas! they were named to me but too soon after your poems were published—as conveying ‘*Radical and ungrateful* sentiments’, [...] And now let me tell you, that I have ventured to pledge myself to our noble friend!—that you will readily make the alterations required—Oh yes, you have a just and noble soul! you cannot deny that to others, which you have so often sighed for yourself—*Justice!* Ask your heart, your understanding—your Genius, and they will all exclaim! *Gratitude* should be now your theme.²¹⁶

With experience, his publisher John Taylor, urged caution. Although convinced that excisions were not necessary, Taylor, who was doubtless well-versed in the authoritarianism of the wealthy and influential, advocated prudence and advised that they should be made: ‘Set is to be made against you if they are not’, a warning that clearly indicated how he considered Clare would be disciplined.²¹⁷ Clare reacted with anger and exasperation as quoted in section 3.1 p.- and also threatened an intention of showing his independence at a later stage. He reluctantly instructed Taylor to omit the eight lines in ‘Helpstone’ and those in ‘Dawning of Genius’ to which Radstock objected and these were expunged from the 4th edition.²¹⁸ Like Clare and Taylor, Drury also considered that Radstock’s interference generally was excessive:

Lord Radstock and Mrs Emmerson have blundered about Clare’s writing songs and have charged the poor fellow with ingratitude and other heinous crimes, such as deserting his publishers etc. Though, for my part, I think it is really interfering too far to charge a man with so base a vice as ingratitude until you can put the charge home to him. I shall never be able to get any Verses to the old Lord if he will not keep quiet. If he would leave Clare off for a few months there would soon be a feeling of ardent gratitude manifest in the man.²¹⁹

If Radstock, accustomed to instant obedience from those under his command during his service in the Royal Navy, expected the same degree of disciplined subservience from the (supposedly) simple countryman from an obscure village, he made a serious misjudgement. His later plans to introduce a legal agreement to regularise the poet/publisher relationship further alienated Taylor, who referred the matter to Clare, added that he had foreseen this eventuality in Radstock’s ‘gradual Usurpation of Authority from the Commencement’. Radstock’s action was no doubt intended as a safeguard on the part of a man-of-the world aiming to protect his protégé from his publisher, and was well intentioned. Taylor replied formally that he would consult Clare to ascertain whether it was his wish that he should treat with him or with Radstock, and advised the poet: ‘But I would not have you quarrel with him on the present occasion: he perhaps means you well, and would call you ungrateful. ‘Verily they have their Reward’ who bestow kindness for the sake of Return.—’²²⁰ For his part, Clare was sufficiently astute to recognise the danger to his own expectations if this argument were pursued. In his turn he advised Taylor to take these into account on his behalf.²²¹ Taylor himself had both his professional integrity to maintain and a new writer in need of encouragement and protection: he was also cynical about Radstock’s patronage.

Clare needed such protection from his patron. A week later Taylor wrote again to confirm the payment of Bank dividends:

It is pleasant to receive £20 a year, without feeling obliged to anyone. After being required to feel grateful, and being told that you never can make an adequate Return, this Consciousness of having nobody but God to thank, is a thousand fold sweeter than ever. When L[ord] R[adstock]'s voracious Appetite is satisfied, you will feel independent, but I fear he will not be content till he is acknowledged your supreme Friend, & pre-eminent Patron.²²²

Radstock's reaction to any sign of radicalism on the part of his protégé is understandable. A period of repression had begun in Britain in 1792 when he was at the height of his naval career. Thomas Paine published *The Rights of Man Part 2* in 1792 and had been compelled to flee to France to avoid a charge of subversion: the book was banned and its readers, when discovered, were harassed.²²³ December 1795 had seen the passing of the Two Acts, followed by the Six Acts in 1819 indicative of the alarm felt by Pitt's government at the increasing Jacobin agitation up and down the country.²²⁴ Radstock himself would have been alerted to impending trouble by knowledge of the naval mutinies in 1797 at the Nore and Spithead. If E. P. Thompson's contention is accepted: 'In the 1790s [...] the counter revolutionary panic of the ruling classes expressed itself in every part of social life; in attitudes to trade-unionism, to the education of the people to their sports and manners, to their publications and societies, and their political rights.'²²⁵ then no-one living in or near London around 1806-08 can have been wholly ignorant of the fact that certain book shops had become the headquarters for political debate, that Radical debating clubs were springing up and, by 1816, Spencean club meetings were, in effect, tavern debating clubs where the education of members took the form of debates that were politically explicit and where a supply of radical knowledge in broadsheets, posters, pamphlets, and handbills, was available.²²⁶ It would not have been difficult for Radstock, a former Naval Governor of Newfoundland, to maintain sufficient contact with government circles to receive the information that, for example, Thomas Evans, leader of the Spencean Society, was under surveillance in 1817 and was imprisoned for twelve months the following year on suspicion of high treason or to be aware that the Watsonites had planned to capture the Bank and the Tower of London.²²⁷ None of this directly affected John Clare, but it alerted his patron to the fact that this was the political atmosphere in the London that his protégé was entering for the first time, albeit briefly, in March 1820. Taylor himself, a commercial printer, would also have been aware

that sedition constituted any action that amounted to incitement of others to discontent, and that government agents and informers were watching for the publication of any literature, or speeches, that might do this. Aged thirty-nine at the time of this controversy, he would have recalled that ten years earlier William Cobbett had been heavily fined and imprisoned for seditious libel in a newspaper article²²⁸ and John Drakard of Stamford even more harshly treated a year later for an article in the *Stamford News*.²²⁹ Their crime, criticism of the flogging of soldiers, was interpreted as stirring up discontent in the armed forces at a time when fear of a French invasion was rife up and down the country. Clare's comments in the two poems already discussed, drawing attention to the discrepancy between wealth and power on the one hand and poverty, hunger and unemployment on the other, could have been interpreted as similar incitement to disaffection. Chilcott observes that Clare had waved the red flag; Radstock's trump card was the threat of public denunciation for radicalism.²³⁰ This draws attention to the serious alarm in Government circles at the danger of possible revolutionary contagion from across the channel.

Clare would have been well aware of the degree of deference and therefore obedience, expected from him in any dealings with the aristocracy from knowledge of prevailing tradition in his village. That he was following his father's example in this is illustrated in the account in his *Autobiography* of the search for work in the Burghley gardens in his youth:

One circumstance in appearing before the Master of the garden will show the mistaken notions of grandeur and distinction in a clown that has not seen the world my father as well as myself thought that as he appeared with white stockings and neckcloth and as he was under such a great man as a Marquis he must certainly be homaged as a gentleman of great consequence himself so with all humiliation to his greatness we met him with our hats in our hands and made a profound Bow even to our knees²³¹

Newby comments:

Where the agricultural worker's subordination was a total one, across all his many roles, he would 'know his place', because the pressures of personal dependency would be ubiquitous. Any possible doubts as to his 'place', any possible ambiguity deriving from his multiplicity of social roles as to their normative regulation, could be extinguished and from none of his social relationships would he be able to 'learn to question the appropriateness of his exchange of deference for paternalism'.²³²

Clare's feelings of social inadequacy remained with him. After a failure to recognise the Marquis of Exeter in Stamford in 1821 he commented 'My senses always leave me when I get before these great men'.²³³

It was largely Radstock's commitment to Evangelicalism that formed the basis of the force with which he attempted to dominate Clare's thinking. Brown has summarised the basic Evangelical principles which developed into a vast reform movement. He claims that 'their only objective was to have a nineteenth century peopled by Evangelical Christians leading moral lives of a puritanical kind'.²³⁴ This is confirmed by the consistency with which Radstock pursued his attempts to supervise and control Clare's religious beliefs and which took the form of plying him with the literature that he personally considered 'suitable'. Thirteen of the books that he presented to Clare contain homilies written by him. Typically, in Erskine's *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion* he explains that it is given not only as evidence of his high regard for the poet and his delight in his work: 'But still more from the conviction that the author will duly appreciate the book now given to him and think by its constant study it will so enrich and expand his mind as to open to him the gates of an earthly paradise'.²³⁵ *An Apology for the Bible* by Richard Watson bears an inscription from Radstock, with the hope: 'It will be found worthy of your most serious perusal for more reason than one. God grant that it may produce the desired effects!'²³⁶ Watson, late Lord Bishop of Llandaff, had written the *Apology* in response to Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man Part 2*, a work which Radstock had doubtless found highly controversial and which would account for this exhortation. In a similar homily on the flyleaf of *The Christian Institutes* by Francis Gastrell he stated:

This invaluable little book is presented by Admiral Lord Radstock to John Clare in the ardent hope that God will give him the grace so to study it, that it may prove the means of rendering him happy, and highly respected in this world, and ensure to him eternal happiness in the next through the merits & mediation of our only Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord. Beware, beware, beware of Enthusiasm, it being the most dangerous enemy that true Religion has to encounter. 17th February 1820.²³⁷

Radstock was pressing his personal convictions on his reader with missionary zeal, in an attempt to ensure that Clare followed the rules that he wished to lay down for him. The 'enthusiasm' or emotional religion to which he was referring was, of course, the conduct of the Primitive Methodists, an extreme dissenting sect, whose form of religious observance had earned them the

title 'Ranters'. Evangelicals were ever-anxious to dissociate themselves from Methodists and other dissenting sects.²³⁸ A year later Clare wrote in his *Autobiography*:

The 'free will 'of ranters,' new light' of methodists, and 'Election lottery' of Calvinism always heard with disgust and considered their enthusiastic ravings little more intelligible or sensible than the bellowings of Bedlam. In politics I never dabbled to understand them properly[...]the Murder of the French King many years ago[...]cured me very early from thinking favourably of radicalism.²³⁹

By expressing his views in writing on these two subjects, religion and politics, he was astutely putting on record his response to his patron's advice and again asserting his own right to think for himself. Radstock also provided him with a copy of *The Whole Duty of Man, laid down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the use of All, but especially for the Meanest Reade. (necessary for all Famillies)*. Among the subjects covered in this book are Anger, Adultery, Almsgiving, Bargaining, Brawling, Chastity, Diligence, Drinking and Eating.²⁴⁰ Clare did not lack moral or religious advice and instruction.

Similar situations where patronage had been involved were, apparently, not uncommon at that time when an anonymous comment contained in an article on 'Clare the Peasant Poet' in the *Quarterly Review* of 1857 is considered: 'Patronising was then in vogue, and to catch a real unsophisticated peasant poet fresh from the country, and transplant him all a' growing into the hotbed of London life, was truly refreshing to the Lydia Whites and Leo Hunters of the period.'²⁴¹ This is hardly a true comparison with Radstock, however, who was no Leo Hunter but an evangelical aristocrat deeply concerned about traces of any radical sympathies or revolutionary tendencies in the country. He was clearly anxious that his protégé should conform to the religious ideals of the Establishment and the Evangelical movement while, at the same, time wishing to represent himself as a father-figure, albeit on his own terms. Such overwhelming interest in the content of the verse and the character of the writer were tedious subjects for both Taylor and Clare. Collins states that patronage, although well-meaning, had done more harm than good and was over by 1820.²⁴² Taylor's opinion, quoted earlier, that although Radstock laid claim to being Clare's greatest friend and patron, his main objectives were gratitude from the poet and public acclaim for his generosity, was probably an unjust comment made in the heat of the moment by a sorely-tried man. Radstock may have been carrying out what he considered no less than his duty to the lower orders as a member of the aristocracy, or acting with a genuine religious conviction. The word 'gratitude', redolent as it was of beneficent donor and needy

recipient, was of itself suggestive of charity and was becoming offensive. Paternalism was becoming oppressive. On this subject Newby observes:

Nor were the effects of charity always those that were intended. What Owen calls ‘undue condescension and immoderate nosiness’ could produce results entirely contrary to those desired. ‘Let it never be forgotten’ wrote one nineteenth-century adviser on these matters ‘that the lower classes are extremely sensitive to the spirit in which they are treated, and that the moral influence of charity depends infinitely more upon the manner of the donor than upon the value of the gift [...]’ Burn sums up the situation ‘The shadow of the Big House loomed over a society which was becoming more and more hierarchial yet it was, almost certainly a misfortune for the labouring man if there was no one [...] to cushion him in time of need. One can only guess at the proportion of cases in which benevolence demanded the reward of obedience or conformity’.²⁴³

Despite early elation at his recognition by the aristocracy, Clare, during this difficult period of adjustment and controversy, was soon cynical on the subject of patronage, even alluding in a letter to Hessey, to Johnson’s famous comment to the Earl of Chesterfield: ‘Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached land, encumbers him with help.’²⁴⁴ He was not ungrateful and in many ways had little cause to be. Commenting in 1820 that Radstock was sending him five or six newspapers each week, he wrote: ‘Tis impossible to feel otherwise than grateful for the many trifling troubles he takes in my behalf weak as some actions may appear such trifles as these (whatever the simple design may be) warms & binds him closer in my esteem and affections’.²⁴⁵ He readily acknowledged his indebtedness to the Marquis of Exeter, Lord Milton, Lord Fitzwilliam, and Earl Spencer of Althorp, among others, who had been supportive and generous with money, with time and with interest.²⁴⁶ The introduction to their mansions had, however, given him an insight into the lifestyle of another world. He did not appear to covet it, ‘Show of wealth and pomp of luxury are shadows that never come under the dominion of my wishes’ he wrote in 1832,²⁴⁷ but at the same time he may have found it difficult to reconcile their wealth and luxurious living with his own great gift and straitened circumstances. His gratitude was heartfelt but even by 1820 he had become worldly-wise and that gratitude had become tinged with suspicion. Clare’s dilemma was the practical necessity for dependence and his instinctive urge for independence, as he expressed to the Revd Charles Mossop:

I am terribly troubled & I cannot help feeling that the writing for & the hunting about & the other appendages due in apologies & thanks repeated & expected as eternally as the tickings of a clock are of more trouble than the profits worth in fact my spirit works up with independent feelings but she is such a cripple that she cannot overtake them just yet—²⁴⁸

Collins suggests that patronage would have been more acceptable had it been termed ‘influential friendship’ as, in his opinion, patronage itself did more harm than good and that, in accepting it, the recipient was acknowledging failure. He opines that popularity had disrupted Clare’s life and that it diminished as his poetic merit increased.²⁴⁹ There is little doubt that during the five years of Radstock’s involvement with the poet his influence made an impression that drew Clare’s attention to many of the pitfalls that were to be encountered in a social, political, and literary life. Although Radstock finally achieved his object in censorship of the early poems in Clare’s first volume and subjected him to a barrage of suitable books, newspapers, homilies, and carefully selected correspondents, his attempts to dominate him were not successful. Instant subservience was not forthcoming from the poet. He also irritated Clare’s publisher, which was not helpful. Radstock can be seen as an elderly well-intentioned man, generous in his own way, attempting to intervene in a literary world that was foreign to him and misjudging the situation from his vastly different viewpoint, deeply influenced by both his social position and his strong religious commitment.

3.6 Mrs Eliza Emerson (1782-1847)

During Clare’s first visit to London in March 1820 he met Mrs Eliza Emerson, wife of Thomas Emerson, a London art-dealer or picture importer. Mrs Emerson had already discovered *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, which had been published on 16 January 1820: she wrote a poem to Clare (dated 30 January 1820) which was published in the *Morning Post* and presented Lord Radstock with a copy together with a volume of the poems.²⁵⁰ These events are set out in what was apparently her first letter to Clare:

Your Volume of Poems, fell into my hands a few days after they were published. I read them with attention, and delight; and felt most desirous to give them publicity and patronage! happily for you, and for your poems, I solicited to have the honour of presenting a volume of them to a Noble! and most benevolent friend—accompanying them with a short address,(the effusion of my own heart) wherein, I entreated the

patronage of *you*, and *your productions*! How far your exalted Patron—has interested himself for you, and has succeeded I need not explain: nor need I endeavour to impress on your mind the real benevolence of his Lordships character—the beautiful and devout volumes, which he has presented you, with, will best convey his nature to you; and would in *itself*, be sufficient to *register him in your heart*, independant of his warm exertions to foster your superior genius—and be the means of removing you, in time, from that lowly situation of which you so often, and so feelingly complain [...] ²⁵¹

Your, extraordinary patronage, will I hope remove from your mind those prejudices against the Great!—which your humble station had made you *too keenly* feel: you are now my friend—convinced that, Greatness—goodness—Kind heartedness and benevolence! dwell pre-eminent in the bosoms of the Rich, and Great.— ²⁵²

The second paragraph of this letter is interesting in that it tells us either that she had herself identified controversial lines in this work that attacked the wealthy, or her attention had been directed to them. At this stage she was prepared to describe Clare's comments as 'prejudices'. The letter is dated 21 February 1820, before they had met, which was not until early March 1820.²⁵³ Despite any misgivings she may have had, she had presented the volume to Lord Radstock, There had apparently been some critical and concerned discussion about Clare's comments with someone however, as she later made clear to Clare: 'You have them *marked* in the Volume I sent you—for alas! they were named to me too soon after your poems were published—as conveying "Radical and ungrateful sentiments"',²⁵⁴ but we are not told who this anonymous critic was. It seems that Radstock himself had not reacted immediately for in March 1820 he had written to Lord Milton, speaking of Clare 'in the highest terms' and requesting a rent-free cottage and land for him,²⁵⁵ and as late as 25 April 1821 had spoken favourably of the poet's political opinions to the Bishop of Peterborough.²⁵⁶

Clare had his first warning of the opposition and criticism that he was likely to encounter when he received Eliza Emmerson's letter of April 1820, after sending her his 'Sonnet on Leaving London' (quoted earlier) on the completion of his first visit to London. Her reaction was predictable in a world where patronage anticipated gratitude. The reproach it contained was merited if criticism of the kindness and hospitality he had received in London was the sole cause for complaint. But Clare had also expressed an opinion of the falseness of social life as he had seen it and such comment was clearly unacceptable, as she made clear. This was not only a reminder that gratitude and deference were due from him but also that he was not expected to criticise the lifestyle of his superiors. It was not until May 1820 that the storm broke and, on

Radstock's instigation, Eliza Emmerson sent her strongly-worded letter to Clare over the unacceptable lines in 'Helpstone' and 'Dawning of Genius', already discussed in section 3.5 of this chapter. This letter amounts to a powerful and somewhat insidious plea to a man eleven years her junior whom she had only recently met.²⁵⁷ The hand of Radstock can be detected behind it. In a letter to Taylor some three months later the poet did not hesitate to express his opinion of the criticisms of his work that he had had from these two patrons:

I always told you to act as an Editor you may get above such insinuating bother I must knock under for my own advantage If E[liza] E[mmerson] & L[ord] R[adstock] had found me out first & Edited my poems what monsters woud they have made can it be possible to judge I think praises of self & selfs noble friend & selfs incomparable poems undoubtedly shovd into the bargain woud have left little room for me & mine to grow up in the esteem of the public²⁵⁸

On close examination this is a fascinating passage. Clare is speculating on the probable disfiguration of his work at the hands of Mrs Emmerson and Radstock had they been in Taylor's position. He envisages his poems shaped and possibly twisted in such a way that they would emerge as enormities he would not recognise, his message stifled, his descriptions no doubt embellished by Mrs Emmerson. Here Clare's power of keen perception is at its most acute. It is obvious to him that he must knuckle under; ('knock under' is his expression): clearly he understands why this is necessary and is complying, but with an ill-grace. His clever repetition of the word 'self' indicates his opinion of Eliza Emmerson's self-approbation. Such lack of humility on her part appeared tasteless and unattractive to him; any early euphoria over his patronage had begun to wear thin. Radstock, having apparently embraced the Evangelical campaign for national righteousness with enthusiasm, would have felt committed to take a firm line against any evidence of radical tendencies, anti-monarchism, religious deviation, or obvious vice, in anyone, most of all in a protégé. Attention has been drawn to his authoritarian stance in section 3.5 and it is clear that he intended to use all means at his disposal to achieve his end, in this case censorship of Clare's poems.²⁵⁹ Eliza Emmerson, a literate and attractive woman, was undoubtedly the ideal tool for him to employ in the production of a moral, law-abiding, and subservient poet, portraying the happy and grateful peasant. Clare resolved this immediate problem by submission to the peer's wishes, which left a resentful publisher and a cynical, enraged poet in its wake. On 27 February 1823 she was still stressing the need for gratitude: 'You have rec^d a Letter from our noble and dear friend! who tells me he has given you some

serious advice for your *real* advantage—No one is so *capable* & so *willing* to render you every assistance—as your *first* and *kindest patron*—attend to him I beseech you!’²⁶⁰ A month later she reminded him ‘His generous noble heart overflows with anxious zeal for your welfare.’²⁶¹

Admonitions and criticism were intermingled. In an undated letter, quoting Clare’s sonnet ‘To Rural Life’, which she wished to re-name ‘Nature’s Child’, she added:

I have also [...] to ask pardon for having made some few grammatical alterations, also altering some few of *your words* [...] My only object has been to give a little polish to it, and do away with the idea of its conveying anything personal to the *higher orders of society* [...] but more particularly to your *zealous friends* [...] Lord Radstock has written a second letter to Lord Milton on your account; soliciting his Lordship’s benevolent grant of a cottage & a piece of garden ground for you ²⁶²

Excessive use of the word ‘noble’, invariably used to describe Lord Radstock, is characteristic of her prose and again calls in to question the interpretation that is intended in this context. Ever conscious that she was writing to Clare, she may have tried to impress upon him the true nobility of his patron’s character, his high values and ideals. Alternatively the emphasis may have been intended to stress the traditional sense of the word, to ensure that the deference due to one of high birth and exalted rank was made absolutely clear. Details of Radstock’s family, referred to in section 3.5, may have been generally known.

This lady was a dominant personality, apparently an indefatigable worker once committed to a project, as her future efforts on Clare’s behalf indicate. Her plans to further his interests are set out in the lines above, and subsequent letters support this. Clare comments in a letter to Hessey in December of 1820 on the interest taken in his work by the Bishop of Bristol: the Emmersons had been in Bristol just prior to this and Mark Storey surmises that Eliza had brought Clare to his notice.²⁶³ She presented Clare with books which were, no doubt, considered suitable and improving.²⁶⁴ There can be some acceptance of the fact that she was motivated by compassion for Clare’s humble situation in life compared with the outstanding quality of his verse, as she had said. Nevertheless, she staked out her claim for recognition as his first friend, patron and adviser while at the same time underlining the value of other well-connected patrons:

You have *noble* and *sincere friends* who have *hearts* and *understandings* to *appreciate your real worth*, and who will never neglect your welfare, while you have the want and *wish* of their protection [...] you may rely on my friendship to serve you, in *thought*, *word*

*& deed, my advice, or opinion you shall have to the best of my abilities—and my sympathy shall always attend you!*²⁶⁵

Thus her interest was initially established as friendship and, as transpired later, an imagined right to make alterations and corrections to his work. A year later the poet wrote to Taylor:

Never hear from Lord R[adstock] & Mrs E[mmerson] now not a single line they are about weary & so am I so god send they may find out a new ‘child of Nature’ to foster & flatter whose name is rather fresher then mine & who has not yet known the world to give it its proper value—for he’s such likes darling wonder no longer then when he knows not that flattery must be fed at his own expence—²⁶⁶

It had taken a very short time for an unworldly countryman to see through the artificiality of the social world.

It is understandable, during a period of government panic over the dangers of radicalism and revolution, that a major concern for both these patrons should be Clare’s religious affiliation. This is apparent in a letter he received from Thomas Bennion, Taylor’s head clerk or porter. He mentioned that Mrs Emmerson was concerned that Clare had made an error of judgement in conversation at a ‘Londoners’ dinner party and had offended the Revd H. F. Cary: ‘by saying you wish’d the churches where all in ashes and the parson’s sent to beg their bread [...] she was very sorry to think you was so strong a deist i told her you was but a very little way inclined to deisem’.²⁶⁷ The choice of books by Lord Radstock and Mrs Emmerson on Clare’s behalf and the homilies with which they are inscribed are a further indication of this concern. Strong-minded as she was, and convinced of the rightness of their cause, Mrs Emmerson was no doubt spurred on by Radstock to enforce his Evangelical precepts. By extension, political matters also came under their joint scrutiny. By way of encouragement she reported to Clare in April 1821 that Radstock had discussed his political principles with the Bishop of Peterborough by reading him a letter from Clare to her: ‘On the subject of the Q..s conduct, and your sentiments of Loyalty and attachment to your King and constitution, with which, the Bishop expressed himself much pleased.’²⁶⁸ In December 1820 Clare himself wrote to Hessey expressing his loyalty to King and country and his opposition to any innovations as far as religion and government were concerned. He also claimed his right, as an Englishman, to liberty of conscience in illuminating his windows in honour of the Queen, in a personal wish for peace and unbroken windows. In the same letter he added that, in reply to a direct question from Radstock, he had written: “‘If the King of

England was a madman I should love him as a brother of the soil” in preference to a foreigner who be as she be shows little interest or feeling for England’.²⁶⁹ He had no wish even to be considered a Radical, whatever his personal political views, and was careful to put these sentiments on record.

As self-appointed literary critic and adviser to the poet from an early stage in their acquaintance, Eliza Emmerson was expansive. In April 1820, after commenting: ‘But the ‘Lodge House’ is not to my taste: [...] it is laboured and incoherent, has very little to interest, and much less to delight’, she added her praise of ‘Solitude’, in which she found ‘sweetness, simplicity and pathos’. She continued:

I find a charm in the uncultivated language of Clare, which I look in vain for among our more learned Poets. There is a loveliness, and tenderness of feeling, joined with a comprehensiveness of thought, and originality of expression, with which I am delighted: he leads me on thro’ every scene of nature with him; I am the companion of his wanderings, and identify every object of his contemplation! [...]—it enchains the heart of those who are admirers of its sweet original!²⁷⁰

Apart from certain truisms in this statement there is a claim to a personal relationship that is surprising for those times and at such an early stage in their acquaintance, also bearing in mind the distance that etiquette and social conventions would have dictated. This theme was continued in September 1820 with the comment in praise of his sonnets:

Your ‘Peasant Boy’ is uniformly sweet and simple:—your ‘Solitude’ is very lovely and poetical: your ‘Thunder Storm’ truly natural, and sublime! but your *Sonnets*—ah, there my dear friend—*you stand alone*, you are yourself—all simplicity—all feeling all soul—I could almost add—you are perfection for when—a *lonely feeling* is to be expressed, arising from a simple object in Nature—I have never before met the poet, who spoke so truly, and so tenderly as yourself²⁷¹

These somewhat coy advances are typical of several that are sprinkled through her earlier letters and this subject is addressed on page 9 in this section. By January 1822 an inclination to amend Clare’s text to accord with her judgement, had crept in. Of ‘Superstition’s Dream’ she wrote:

Would, my dear Clare! that I were capable of giving a *just judgement* of the merits of this extraordinary production of your mind—but I *dare not touch* upon its beauties! and, its faults are indeed so few, so trivial, that it were like pointing out ‘spots in the sun’ to name them [...] [There is] a little occasional obscurity, which even seems to add a beauty to the vision—for dreams are ever obscure), with, now & then, a repetition of nearly the same idea—such as ‘howling prayers’ wild confusion’— ‘Hope stood watching like a *Bird to fly*’ instead of which might be said ‘and Hope stood looking *to a Power on High!*’ the figure would be more powerful—²⁷²

In February 1823 she warned against the use of satire: ‘How goes on your ‘Satire’ ‘The Parish’—is it in verse or prose? though, in any form, I almost hate the name of Satire—however ably indulged, it is an *unamiably* use of abilities, and often serves to destroy our better faculties & feelings.’²⁷³ A month later she was able to comment ‘I like your ‘Parish’ very much, it is powerfully written— [...] it will be a valuable addition to your stock—but *not* for present publication.’²⁷⁴ No doubt she was concerned that Clare should avoid further confrontation with Radstock. By December 1825 Clare was remarking to Hessey that he knew the lady was ‘rather full of officiousness.’²⁷⁵ Her comments continued over the years. In November 1830 she wrote: ‘What a train of lovely visions she [your Muse] hath brought unto me—“Summer Images” yea, in all their glowing beauty, in all their native freshness, and simplicity of attire: truly this muse of thine, is a most *bewitching sort of modeller*—’²⁷⁶ She may have hoped for some response to this. Perhaps it had come into her mind, or her wishes, that she herself personified his muse.

After Radstock’s death in 1825 it is noticeable that Eliza Emmerson seemed able to relax her extreme vigilance. She mellowed considerably. By 1831 she advised Clare, after reading his two political ballads ‘The Hue and Cry’ and ‘The Summons’:

Do pray avoid *political composition*, it will not serve your general interest—you cannot please both parties, you cannot serve ‘God & Mammon’—therefore, draw all your stores from the pure fountain of self-feeling [...] —I have read the ‘Hue & Cry’ it is clever—*very clever*, but, it is a weapon for your *enemies* to fight you with—many of your early noble Patrons wd *frown* upon this poem.²⁷⁷

A warning that bordered on a criticism of other, earlier opinions. Later, she added:

Very many thanks to you for the trouble of writing out your ‘Summons’ [...] yet, have I much enjoyed the *March* of the ‘Meddlesome old Man’! You have shewn him forth in honest bearing—he suffers no parley, no compliment, to turn him from his deadly purpose! The poem is very clever, the interest never relaxes until the drama is finished—it is truly a ‘lasting’ subject, [...] You are much mistaken, in supposing the ‘Hue & Cry’ was not to my ‘taste’. I should indeed be a dull student, if I did not see, & feel, *many exquisite* passages in this humourous production of your Muse—there are thoughts in it, which ought to live forever, nothing can be more lovely than this—‘The breath on a looking glass, *left by a sigh*, and many other ideas, equally poetical, & still more powerful.’²⁷⁸

Considering the political content of these poems, reviewed later in this thesis, this was a remarkable statement. By 1832 Clare had written ‘The Nightingale’s Nest’ and Eliza responded with a sonnet which contained the premise that “‘Clare’ and the ‘Nightingale’ are one!”²⁷⁹

Apparently childless herself, Eliza Emmerson was not without maternal feelings and she took Clare under her wing willingly. She took an interest in his first child, writing in September 1820 to say that she would ‘be most happy to see the fair resemblance.’²⁸⁰ In addition to the numerous newspapers she despatched to Clare she included presents for the children.²⁸¹ On the birth of his third child in June 1822 she asked to be ‘allowed to stand godmother’ and enquired whether Lord Radstock’s offer to stand godfather had been accepted.²⁸² A fond, parental interest had crept in to their patronage, in contrast to the domineering approach of the peer in earlier times, and the manner in which Mrs Emmerson was summoned to convey his instructions to the poet. The child was named after her. Her concern for Clare at times extended to supervision of his general education:

I sent off the ‘Observer’ and the ‘Times’ for you today—these I think furnish more *wholesome* politics than ‘John Bull’. In the ‘Times’ you will see an article on the ‘Constitutional Association’ of which our noble friend is a most warm patron; read it with attention, for it is very admirably written, & full of interesting matter on this subject.²⁸³

The lady was no doubt lonely and bored, with a busy husband, the nature of whose work took him all over the country and abroad from time to time, as indicated below. She was alert to any kind of response from Clare, which clearly she appreciated:

Your *kind*, & delightful letter—yes a letter full of affection, philosophy, religion, and sweet poesy! Yes, my dear Clare, our creeds, our faith, are in accord—*We are believers*, we have Hope, & trust, we *see God in all things!*²⁸⁴

This was written in October 1830.

Ill-health was a common bond. She wrote in December 1821:

I will not offer you an apology for my long silence—for *you know the cause*, and also know, that mental inability alone could have prevented me acknowledging your kind letter of 26th Nov^r. —I am still, far from being myself, & yet I am quite myself,—*Unable*, to answer your letter with any *correct judgement*—but I will do my best— [...] It now remains for me to acknowledge with every grateful feeling, that of the 19th Dec^r.—With such a kind, and skilful, physician (or ‘preacher’) as yourself, the worst of ‘horrors’, must be cured—yes, my d^r Clare, the balm of sympathy, is the ‘wine of my existence’, this, you have given to me, in the fullness of friend-ship, and confidence; even at your *own sad expence!* You have committed an Error,—and you have acknowledged it in a way to me, that makes the fault, *almost* become a virtue!²⁸⁵

Unfortunately few of Clare’s letters to Eliza Emmerson have survived but, in view of the freedom with which he discussed his own health problems with Taylor, Hessey, and Cary, for example, there can be no doubt that Mrs Emmerson must have received many more letters on this subject from him than the very full one he wrote to her in November 1832. He did remember to comment on her ailments as well: ‘It is a sad thing to feel such a debility that will neither bear rest or fatigue long together & I am truly sorry for yourself but you must cheer up & keep on & live to write my epitaph for the great stone which I once mentioned—’,²⁸⁶ An interesting aspect of their acquaintance is the extent to which Mrs Emmerson actively sought Clare out and wished to keep in touch with him. She was generous, and twice invited him to pay a second visit to London, offering to procure an inside passage for the journey.²⁸⁷ Clearly she found him attractive. On several occasions she introduced a coquettish, teasing approach to her letters, perhaps to add the more exciting element of flirtatiousness to their relationship. These overtures are noticeable early in their acquaintance, as can be judged from a letter of August 1820:

I’ve ever *addressed* you in your *own* very affectionate language—for we may unblushingly acknowledge ourselves, lovers, in poesy! [...] I read all your kind letters to

my husband, and our noble friend Lord R. and my replies to them [...] how far, you are so candid in reading mine to your ‘dear Patty’—I cannot judge.²⁸⁸

These suggestive remarks are a somewhat bold advance from a married woman to a much younger man. They had only met some five months’ previously for, presumably, brief periods on social occasions. The following year she wrote a sonnet to him, and drew his attention to it in a letter of October 1821, ‘Did you receive a Morning Post last week! there was a sonnet in it *addressed to you, by some true lover of your sweet strains*’.²⁸⁹ By December she was still writing in much the same tone:

Mr E is still in Paris, to my great regret—and will remain there two or three weeks to come—I had hoped to have seen my dear Clare! on a *visit to us* this Christmas—but *cold decorum*, will not allow me while a *widow*, to invite him:—however, in the Spring—that is after Lady Day we shall be removed to our other house, where, you shall ever be recieved with all the warmth & cordiality of *true friendship*!²⁹⁰

This approach seemed to spill over when it reached the stage of sending him a Valentine in February 1825. Clare was not impressed and wrote in his *Journal*: ‘This new thing of affections flowering in such things is a sort of fishing for Wales in buckets.’²⁹¹ With her religious and moral convictions, (and under Radstock’s nose), it is unlikely that Eliza would have permitted her relationship with Clare to develop into an ‘affair’, whatever her inclinations may have been. However, a discreet dalliance at a distance does not seem to have been unacceptable to her. The attraction between them seems to have been mutual at some stage, as Clare admitted in 1826 to Taylor:

—You will be suprised to hear perhaps that I have no correspondents or friends now but yourself I have broken with them all & neither write or recieve letters from any one I thought once that Mrs Emmerson was everything but I found that the strongest link between us was a sheet of paper therefore when I got into my mellancholy moods & ceased to write she ceased likewise & I have never had the mind to take it up again²⁹²

thereby hinting that his friendship with Eliza had been rather warmer than he had admitted previously. She undoubtedly considered herself a fellow poet and had her poems accepted for publication from time to time. Her poetic sensibility was always apparent as she strove to reach

out to Clare for a response in this field, serving up an ideological cocktail of ideas for his consumption, as in her criticisms of the ‘Lodge House’, ‘Solitude’, and his sonnets, mentioned above.²⁹³ Her arch advances and love of intrigue did not seem attractive to Clare by then and in December of that year he wrote to Taylor: ‘I like Mr. E. very much but Mrs E is too intriguing in her friendships & dwells too much on show & effect to make me feel that it is not one of the first value neither do I admire her opinions & judgements often for they are of the same kind’.²⁹⁴ It was an inconsistent relationship. By the following year he was sending her his remembrances and reminding Henry Behnes that he had promised to make a sketch of her for him,²⁹⁵ and a few months later was staying with the Emmersons on his fourth visit to London, from February until early April 1828.²⁹⁶ Mark Storey notes that Clare’s poem to her, ‘May Morning’, was published in the *Amulet* in 1834.²⁹⁷

Clare was a shrewd observer of human nature. Little escaped the clear vision of this supposedly simple countryman, as is apparent in his own summing-up of their quite intriguing friendship:

She has been and is a warm kind friend of tastes feelings and manners almost romantic she has been a very pretty woman and is not amiss still and a womans pretty face is often very dangerous to her common sense for the notice she recieved in her young days threw an affectatious [air] about her feelings which she has not got shut of yet for she fancys that her friends are admirers of her person as a matter of course and acts accordingly which apears in the eyes of a stranger ridiculous enough but the grotesque wears off on becoming acquainted with better qu[a]litys she certainly has to counterballance them she [was] at one word the best friend I found and my expectations are looking no further her correspondence with me began early in my public life and grew pretty thick as it went on I fancyd it a fine thing to correspond with a lady and by degrees grew up into an admirer some times writing as I felt sometimes as I fancyd and sometimes foolish[l]y when I could not account for why I did it I at length requested her portrait when I recollect ridicu[ous] enough alluding to Lord Nelsons Lady Hamilton she sent it and flattered my vanity in return it was beautifuly done by Behn[e]s the sculpter but bye and bye my knowledge [of] the world sickend my roma[n]tic feelings I grew up in friendship and lost in flattery afterwards²⁹⁸

Their correspondence was still continuing in 1832, by which time he had moved to Northborough, when in a letter to her he acknowledged ‘I was delighted to see your

handwriting'.²⁹⁹ Her loyalty was maintained and in 1834 she was advising him, in a sisterly/motherly manner that it was unfortunate he had not been able to meet Lord Lindsay when he had called to see him, adding: 'try to shake off these feelings! be cheerful, be yourself again!'³⁰⁰ A year later he begged her 'write to me as soon as you can'³⁰¹ and it was only a few months before his admission to High Beech that he wrote to Taylor 'you and Mrs Emerson are the best friends I have'³⁰²

If Clare provided some sort of safe haven for Eliza Emerson's emotional needs it is also evident that she had a place in his emotional life, and certainly represented a mother figure to some extent. He wrote to her quite fully at times about his general health as well as his bouts of depression, and both she and her husband became involved in his financial concerns. It was to the Emmersons that he was able to turn during a particularly severe health problem in 1828, staying with them in London for some five or six weeks.³⁰³ In providing Clare with a glimpse of the London scene as well as the experience of living, for some weeks at a time, in a well-to-do household of 'polite society', Mrs Emerson continued and expanded the social education that Octavius Gilchrist had initiated, Her feminine, more gentle approach to his political opinions must have had a restraining effect on some of his more radical work, causing him to stop to consider on many occasions. Perhaps this increased political awareness was the most valuable contribution she made to his career.

Few facts can be established about the Emmersons in later life despite exhaustive research. Mark Storey gives Eliza's date of death as 1847. A letter from J. W. Tibble in *The Times Literary Supplement* dated 5 September 1929 states that Elizabeth and Thomas Emerson moved from 20 Stratford Place, London, to Smallcombe Grove, Bath in 1837, and remained there until 1841 and calls for further information about them. This apparently brought no replies. It is possible that either, or both, of them died on a visit to France, in which case no records are available.

3.7 The Revd Henry Francis Cary (1772-1844)

When studying the life of H. F. Cary, a fellow 'Londoner', the similarities, as well as the contrasts, between his career and that of John Clare become apparent. There is little available information about Cary. His biographer R. W. King, writing in 1925, claims that his work was 'the first serious attempt at a biography of Cary since 1847' and describes the *Memoir of the Rev. Henry Francis Cary, M.A., Translator of Dante, with his Literary Journal and Letters*, which Cary's son Henry issued in 1847, as lacking in detail concerning the later and more eventful years of Cary's life.³⁰⁴

Cary was a valued friend of John Clare for some years. They met in London in March 1820 on the occasion of Clare's first visit,³⁰⁵ again in April or May 1822,³⁰⁶ in the Summer of 1824,³⁰⁷ and in early 1828,³⁰⁸ maintaining an intermittent correspondence until 1832.³⁰⁹ King quotes from the *Literary Journal*, in which Cary described this first meeting in 1820:

I spent an evening with him lately at our common bookseller's [...] He has the appearance rather of a big boy who has never been used to company, than of a clown, though his dialect is clownish enough; and like all true geniuses, he was longing to be at home again, and is now there.³¹⁰

Clare also describes that meeting:

And there sits Carey the translator of Dante one of the most quiet amiable and unassuming of men he will look round the table in a peaceful silence on all the merry faces in all the vacant unconser[n]ment imaginable and then he will brighten up and look smilingly on you and me and our next hand neighbour as if he knew not which to address first and then perhaps he drops a few words like a chorus that serve all together his eyes are not long on a face he looks you into a sort of expectation of discoursing and starts your tongue on tiptoe to be ready in answering what he may have to start upon when suddenly he turns from you to thro[w] the same good natured cheat of a look on others [...] his eyes are the heavy lidded sort whose easiest look seems to meet you half closed his authorship and his priesthood sit upon him very meekly he is one of those men which have my best opinions and of whom I feel happy with every opportunity to praise on my second visit to London I spent 2 very happy days with him at Chiswick.³¹¹

Cary's comments are those of a diarist, concise and penetrating, from an habitual observer of the human race whom, in his case, he encountered regularly during his work. He interprets Clare's shyness and gaucheness in unaccustomed company as not that of a bumpkin but of a genius. In contrast, Clare's remarks, an expansive but detailed description, are equally perceptive but are typical of a naturalist. He achieves a word-picture which he is enjoying, clearly intrigued and impressed with his subject. The two accounts indicate spontaneous mutual appreciation. Clare explained his fascination with members of the literary world in his Autobiography:

One of my greatest amusements while in London was reading the booksellers windows I was always fond of this from a boy and my next greatest amusement was the curiosity of seeing literary men of these all I have seen I shall give a few pictures just as they struck me at the time some of them I went purposely to see others I met in literary partys that is the confind contributors dinners at Taylors and Hesseys [...] they were mingld partys some few were fixd stars in the worlds hemisphere others glimmered every month in the Magazine some were little vapours that were content to shine by the light of others³¹²

Cary's upbringing and education probably resembled that of most boys in his social class at that time and were vastly different from Clare's. His father was an army officer who, on retirement, had settled for the life of a prosperous country gentleman and Cary was brought up in the country.³¹³ He seems to have been a delicate child and suffered a serious illness at an early age. Unlike Clare, he had regular full-time schooling from the age of about eight, at a private school, followed by two years at Rugby and two grammar schools.³¹⁴ He was a natural scholar and by 1788 had become proficient in Latin, Greek, and French, and had begun to study Italian. According to his biographer the 'set' he later joined at Oxford was studious and serious-minded.³¹⁵ This was a time when anti-revolutionary fervour was at its height, particularly in 1793, the year of the Terror in France. Cary was a known Whig at that time and, what were considered his 'advanced' opinions together with his friendship with Walter Savage Landor 'an even more pronounced republican,' cannot have attracted the approval of the authorities.³¹⁶ After graduation he was initially most interested in joining the Army, apparently in order to travel. His son states that he had no inclination to enter the Church, at one time finding the idea positively distasteful, being unsure of his belief and even changing his mind after starting on a clerical career, with a view to taking up law. He finally did take holy orders and was ordained in 1796. From these details we have a picture of a man who may or may not have had radical tendencies himself but who was well aware of the radical views of others. We also learn that he was a somewhat reluctant cleric who finally accepted this profession in order to acquire the salary and independence that would enable him to marry.

Cary did marry in 1796 and was appointed to Abbots Bromley, in Staffordshire, then a peaceful rural benefice, ideally suited to a classical scholar.³¹⁷ His son candidly admits that his father was never unduly worried about the finer points of religion but maintains that he was, nevertheless, conscientious in the service of his parish and a competent preacher for most of his life. He was plagued by both physical and mental ill-health even as a young man, as gaps in his *Literary Journal* are said to indicate.³¹⁸ Like Clare he was a compulsive reader, poetry being his

great passion; he also devoured books in Greek, Latin, Italian, French, English. and Spanish, as well *as* history and theology.³¹⁹ He encouraged Clare in this love of reading and poetry and wrote to him in 1822:

I was very glad to hear that your appetite for reading had come again, as I think you said, when I had the pleasure of your company here, that you had in a great measure lost it. I have found a fondness for books one of my chief comforts through life.³²⁰

He shared his philosophy on this subject again:

Your admiration of poets I felt most strongly, earlier in life; & have still a good deal of it left [...] [I fin]d the poetical part of my library enc[re]asing beyond all proportion above the rest. This you may think a strange confession for me in my way of life to make; but whatever one feels strongly impell'd to, provided it be not wrong in itself & can administer any benefit or pleasure to others, I am inclined to think is the task allotted to one here; & thus I quiet my conscience about the matter.³²¹

In the early years at Abbots Bromley he started work on the blank verse translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. *The Inferno* was published in 1804-1805 and was largely ignored.³²² Three volumes, which *included* the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*, appeared in 1814, published at his own expense, and had a similarly cool reception.³²³ In July 1819 Taylor and Hessey published a second complete edition of the *Dante*.³²³ This was received with almost universal admiration. The death of a daughter in 1807 affected his mental health, described by King as 'an intermittent paralysis of the will-power, resulting in complete helplessness'. By its intermittency and recovery between attacks he compares it with the mental health of Mary Lamb and John Clare. In order to seek medical advice removal to London was decided on, and Cary thus became an absentee from his parish, to which another living had been added, for the rest of his life, probably for better reasons than most of his colleagues in the Church.³²⁴ This was common practice among the clergy of the time, a state of affairs commented on adversely by Clare in his satire *The Summons*.³²⁵ These were difficult years for Cary. The earlier publications of his *Divine Comedy* had been disregarded, and the support of a growing family was a continuous worry. By 1811 he was able to resume work, and found church employment.³²⁶ Thereafter most of Cary's working life was spent in London. Life in a city had not initially been acceptable to him, as he reported in a letter to his wife in 1799: 'The noise and hurry are so great that they disperse all that pleasant

train of ideas which a more quiet scene would occasion [...] In short I long for the country again.³²⁷ but, of necessity, he appears to have settled there in later life. Clare was of the same opinion after his first short experience of London, writing to Taylor in 1820 ‘I send you a note to tell you of my safe arrival home & glad enough I am for I was weary of noise and bustle’³²⁸ Cary overcame his dislike of urban life, or accepted it. Typically he adopted a philosophical approach to his financial difficulties and to his lifelong failure to obtain preferment in the Church, and expressed this in later years in a letter to Clare, when discussing his family:

I have never much felt the inconvenience of straiten’d circumstances (for I ought not to talk of poverty) but as they have prevented me from doing as much as I could have wish’d upon some occasions for them. [...]. If I had given my attention as much to professional studies as I have to those of a lighter kind; if I had been as assiduous in the arts by which churchmen often rise, as I have been neglectful of them, I might perhaps by this time have been rich; but should I have been at all happier? I much doubt it.³²⁹

He is also reproaching himself, although he had admitted, in a letter dated 1823, to the self-indulgence of owning more books of poetry than others, followed by an attempt to rationalise his weakness. (n. 320).

After Taylor and Hessey acquired the *London Magazine* in 1820 there was, and still is, some confusion over whether Cary was offered the editorship. Taylor ultimately decided to undertake this himself, Cary agreeing to become a contributor.³³⁰ Taylor’s introduction of the ‘*Magazine Dinners*’ to promote fellowship among contributors was a scheme that worked well for a few years. The dinners, sometimes held at the publisher’s house but otherwise at the homes of other members of the group, took place monthly.³³¹ King states that it was in 1820 at Taylor’s house that Clare first met Lord Radstock, his early patron, and Cary, who also began some attempts to help him by bringing his poetry to the notice of influential friends.³³² Jerrold quotes from Hood’s description of Cary:

The reverend personage by the Editor,—‘with the studious brow, deep-set eyes, and bald crown, is the mild and modest Cary—the same who turned Dante into Miltonic English blank verse.’ [...] Pity it was, said Hood, that ‘such a Translator found no better translation in the Church!’³³³

Lamb also described Cary in *The Essays of Elia* ‘The translator of Dante still a curate, modest and amiable C.’³³⁴

It was a somewhat unusual friendship between Cary the man of letters and Clare, an autodidact some twenty years his junior. The empathy that developed between them, however, is discernible in their interchange of letters, intermittent though it was. Cary’s apparently spontaneous invitation in 1820 to Clare to accompany him to his home was delivered at their first meeting, and Clare was deeply appreciative ‘such things however trifling I never loose sight of’.³³⁵ That he valued Cary’s opinion can be judged from a remark to Taylor in 1821 ‘Mr Carys opinion has done me great service indeed & started my muse agen full gallop’³³⁶ The news and views that they exchanged in their letters covered a wide range of subjects. Health was, understandably, a matter ever-uppermost in Clare’s mind. He too had been a delicate child. Both men also had large families in which the children’s health was a cause for concern. To the news that a fen fever was raging through Clare’s village ‘like a plague’ and that two of his children were still in danger,³³⁷ Cary was able to respond by rationalising the situation, while offering reassurance: ‘We have had here too a disorder which our apothecary attributes to the unusually hot weather succeeded by wet. Only one of the boys (Charles) & a woman servant have had it badly. But others of us have been slightly affected. They call it the Cholera Morbus, which in plain English is the bilious disease.’ and at the same time including a gentle hint about the state of Clare’s handwriting by kindly equating it with his own.³³⁸ Whereas Clare was a depressive, Cary, in better financial circumstances and in close contact with congenial and like-minded colleagues, was able to face life more hopefully than Clare. In December 1824 Clare was explaining to his friend: ‘I have been utterly unable to write or even read this 6 or 7 weeks my mind is numbd & dead like my body & my memory is broken.’³³⁹ On this subject Cary was able to contribute interesting and helpful comments:

I dare say you may have often observed in others that when the spirits are most affected the body is least materially so. It is difficult I know to apply this to one’s own case with any advantage of comfort from the reflection, & that from the very circumstances themselves and because the affliction of the spirits will not allow it. Yet in a mind so considerative as your’s, something may perhaps be effected towards getting over the influence of dismal apprehensions.³⁴⁰

On another occasion he shared his personal conviction on health matters, writing with great sympathy when Clare was in deep distress ‘I cannot leave you any longer without such poor

comfort as a line or two from me can give', recommending 'patience & submission to a will higher & wiser than our own'. At the same time, as a natural and astute teacher, he managed to take the edge off what could have been interpreted as a sermon:

How often have I stood in need of it myself & with what difficulty have I swallowed it & how hard have I found it to keep upon my stomach! May you, my friend, have better success! If you do not want it in one way, you are sure to have occasion for it before long in some other. If you should be raised up from this sickness, as I trust you will, do not suppose but that you will have something else to try you.

He counselled 'Common sense & one's own natural inclinations' as the best guides in such matters.³⁴¹

On academic subjects Clare wrote confidently to him as a father as well as a fellow poet. In September 1824 he embarked on a literary ramble to discuss the works of Chatterton and Bloomfield while, at the same time, having no hesitation in asking for advice on suitable school books for his children and for future criticism of his 'Life' that he was currently writing.³⁴² It was typical of Cary's kindness that he replied promptly to such a request.³⁴³ He invariably found something friendly and encouraging to say, as in this letter dated January 1823:

Many happy new years to you, dear Clare. Do not think because I have not written to you sooner that I have forgot you. I often think of you in that walk we took here together, & which I take almost every day, generally alone [...] I am glad to see a New Shepherd's Calendar advertised with your name. You will no doubt bring before us many objects in nature that we have often seen in her but never before in books; & that in verse of a very musical construction. These are the two things, I mean description of natural objects taken from the life, & a sweet melodious versification, that particularly please me in poetry; & these two you can command if you chuse.³⁴⁴

Later he contributed criticism of Byron and Scott and a comment on the poems of Ebenezer Eliot: 'In his Rhymes on the Corn Trade, are not *words that burn* as Grays calls it, but rather *words that scald*.'³⁴⁵ In November 1827 Clare sought his criticism of *The Shepherd's Calendar* and described a new project, 'only attempts after the manner of the olden Bards in the reign of Elizabeth & the Muses'. He praised Cary's *Lives of the Poets* in the *London Magazine*, commented on the bankruptcy of booksellers, on Darwin's poetry and embarked on a short piece

of literary criticism of his own, concluding his letter ‘yours very sincerely & affectionately’.³⁴⁶ Cary had assured him in February 1825 that he would read his ‘*Life*’ & not fail to tell you if I think you have spoken of others with more acrimony than you ought’³⁴⁷ but in January 1829 did not respond enthusiastically to Clare’s proposal to write in the style of others:

I quite agree with Mr Taylor that it will be better not to attempt any deception with respect to the poems that you have written or intend to write in the style of older Bards. I do not remember ever to have heard of any advantage resulting from such attempts. Not that I see so much harm in them as many do. But I think it more advisable to avoid what might injure you in the good opinion of some who are at present your friends. And in truth I must own I like you better in your own natural guise of John Clare than in the borrow’d trim of Sir Walter Raleigh Sir Henry Wootton or any other Sir of Elizabeth’s or James’s days.

Wise counsel in rejection of a project which he must have known was dear to Clare if only for financial reasons, diplomatically followed by words of praise and encouragement to soften any disappointment.

What you most excel in is the description of such natural objects as you have yourself had the opportunity of observing, and which none before you have noticed though everyone instantly recognises their truth.

It is noticeable that after this date Clare did not continue with this plan, indicating that he valued and accepted Cary’s opinion, whose invitation, in the same letter, to a repeat visit to Chiswick was warm and friendly, giving Clare the attention and regard that he needed, dogged as he was by health problems and depression.³⁴⁸

In January 1830 Clare wrote of the disappointment he had suffered in his financial settlement with Taylor³⁴⁹ and in April Cary replied in an obvious attempt to placate him and explain the change in Taylor’s circumstances:

I am sorry you have had any disappointment at settling with Mr Taylor. I have not seen him for a good while; & do suppose that the line he has now got into as Publisher to the London University, is not very favourable to his connexions in the poetical way. In this grand Age of Utility, I expect it will soon be discovered that a piece of canvas is more

advantageously employed as the door of a safe where it will secure a joint of meat from the flies than if it was cover'd with the finest hues that Titian or Rubens could lay upon it, & a sheet of paper better disposed of in keeping the same meat from being burnt while it is roasting, than in preserving the idle fancies of a poet. No matter: if it is so, we must swim with the stream. You can employ yourself in cultivating your cabbages, & in handling the hay fork; & I, not quite so pleasantly, in making catalogues of books. We will not be out of the fashion; but show ourselves as useful as the rest of the world. In the me[an ti]me we may smile at what is going forward; entertain ourselves with our own whims in private; & expect that the tide some day may turn.³⁵⁰

The philosophy of a reasonably comfortable man. Life in London had its compensations which, in Cary's case, were the ease with which it enabled him to visit his literary club, the Athenaeum, and maintain contact with friends such as Samuel Rogers and Charles Lamb as well as fellow poets, Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge; old friends from the *London Magazine* days; and scholars like George Dyer and William Crowe.³⁵¹ Clare continued to share his worries with the man whose advice he had come to rely on. In his last letter to Cary in October 1832 he gave full details of his attempts to publish a volume of poetry by subscription for which he had been criticised by a writer in the *Athenaeum*; of his inability to pay his debts; and of Taylor's apparent intransigence (actually his legal inability) in refusing to send him capital from his fund money to stock his smallholding.³⁵² Cary's commiseration was soothing and down-to-earth. He had endeavoured to mediate in this disagreement between the poet and his former publisher:

I have been waiting in the hopes of having an opportunity of sending you a letter in one of your pacquets from Mr Taylor, and indeed wish'd to have spoken to him on one subject you touch'd upon, that of raising a little money to stock your farm. He told me some months ago that the money in the funds could not be touch'd for that purpose, I know not for what reason; to which I replied that if that was the case, I thought some other means might be devised. [...] I have call'd on him several times since; but he has always been in the country, always expected back, & never come. So I will defer writing no longer. It gave me pain to hear that you have been so troubled with returns of ill health for the last three years. May the next be more auspicious!³⁵³

That Clare valued this relationship is evident from his letter of January 1830 in which he deplored the long gap in their personal contact:

At all events I value your correspondence & friendship so much that I will not loose either the one or the other by any neglect on my part ³⁵⁴

He also strove to maintain his foothold in the literary world to which he had been introduced in London, which can be judged from the letters he wrote to Allan Cunningham, George Darley, James Montgomery, and Harry Stoe Van Dyk and others. ³⁵⁵ He aspired to become part of this literary circle and when he called for news of these Londoners and other mutual acquaintances Cary tried to oblige him, including in his letters other matters of mutual interest; his meeting with Wordsworth and a new work by Cornwall, at the same time appearing to remember to comment on Clare's crab apple tree.

The rhyme that is now in fashion runs rather too wild to please me. It seems to want pruning and nailing up. A sonnet like a rose-tree may be allow'd to grow straggling. But a long poem should be train'd into some order. How does your Crab-tree come on? I doubt the fruit of it will make some long faces in Helpstone, unless ignorance & stupidity keep watch and prevent it from being tasted. ³⁵⁶

On another occasion he gave news of Charles Lamb. ³⁵⁷ These warm reciprocal letters were important to Clare who responded equally warmly, commenting on the time he had spent with Cary and his family, which had left 'pleasant remembrances of friendship & hospitality'. He wrote again in the same strain two years later, these letters illustrating the ease in their relationship that he clearly felt, ³⁵⁸ Cary was always high in his regard. As he remarked in a letter to Taylor in 1830 lamenting a loss of contact with old friends:

I hear from one friend still the amiable english Dante—Cary—he is still the same—still possessing that calm quaker like urbanity that is never ruffled either by prosperity or adversity—& still a Curate I dare say to the disgrace of Bishops & Patrons of Church property—but merit has nothing to do now a days even with matters of godliness—cant chicanery cunning & hypocrisy are the only candidates that shuffle into success ³⁵⁹

Clare's comment is reminiscent of Lamb's essay *A Quaker Meeting*, published in the *London Magazine*, in which he wrote:

Reader, would'st thou know what true peace and quiet mean; would'st thou find a refuge from the noises and clamours of the multitude; would'st thou enjoy at once solitude and society; would'st thou possess the depth of thine own spirit in stillness, without being shut out from the consolatory faces of thy species; would'st thou be alone and yet accompanied; solitary, yet not desolate; [...] come with me into a Quakers' Meeting.³⁶⁰

In his letter of October 1832 to Cary Clare wrote: 'Your kind letter was to me an happiness your philosophy of quietness was better then medicine to my mind for I was enduring ill health & impatience when I recieved it.'³⁶¹ The Tibbles quote a similar comment from Clare 'Of all the different sects that differ from church going give me for humility & meekness the quakers'.³⁶² It is tempting to speculate that both Clare's imagination and his photographic memory had been captured by Lamb's description of a Quaker meeting.

Between 1821 and 1823 Cary's contributions to the *London Magazine* had been considerable but by 1825 the halcyon days of the magazine were over and he was looking for another means of supplementing his income. In 1826 he was appointed Assistant Keeper of the Printed Books at the British Museum and remained in this post until 1837, on the same salary.³⁶³ King comments that at his age and high degree of scholarship Cary was worthy of something better: 'In carrying out his dull and arduous duties for over eleven years it was his poverty rather than his will which consented.' The rent-free accommodation provided was initially very limited and the family lived in some discomfort until two more rooms were made available.³⁶⁴

In 1831 a third edition of the Dante was published. Since 1832 Cary had been working on the translation of the Greek lyric poet Pindar, and this work was published in 1833. It had been delayed by the death of his wife, to whom he was devoted, which had affected his mental health. His son wrote:

The first effect of this dreadful blow was apparently a stunning of all sensation. There was but little outward show of grief, an awful stillness without composure, as it were an amazement of all the faculties of mind and body. In a few days a look of mere childishness, almost approaching to a suspension of vitality, marked the countenance which had but now been beaming with intellect. Then followed constantly recurring attacks of delirium, with an occasional and fitful recovery of self.

Cary was granted six months' leave of absence and was taken to Italy by one of his sons. He resumed work at the Museum on his return to London. He was warmly welcomed by Lamb; their

meetings subsequently became a regular engagement.³⁶⁵ In 1837 he applied for the post of Keeper of the Printed Books on the retirement of his senior, and fully expected to be appointed. He was passed over and immediately resigned in indignation. A colleague paid this tribute: ‘Cary left the Museum with the hearty respect and with the brotherly regrets of all his colleagues, without any exception. Of him it may truly be said, he was a man much beloved.’³⁶⁶ His son welcomed his retirement: ‘I believe that his freedom from a regular and laborious employment, in the end, tended very much to his own comfort and happiness.’ There were financial problems but these were not serious. Cary had a small inheritance from his father and four of his six sons were launched in their careers, equipped and prepared to care for any needs he might have. He lived with two sons in Westminster and devoted himself to writing the history of Italian poetry which he did not finish. Complete editions of Milton, Dryden, Thomson, Young, and Cowper were published with introductions by Cary. He maintained his interests, and his friendship with Darley and other writers continued; he entertained several poets, Carlyle among them. The summer months were spent near Oxford where he was able to enjoy walking in the city, working in the Bodleian Library or at All Souls, where the Warden had provided him with a private room. He also visited Miss Mitford, the author of *Our Village*, at whose cottage he may well have met the young clergyman who later became Cardinal Newman, with whom he was already well acquainted.³⁶⁷ By 1843 he was less well but completed a revision of Dante and began a commentary on his Pindar, which remained unfinished. He also met once more the former sub-editor of the *London Magazine* Thomas Hood, possibly at Miss Lamb’s in St. John’s Wood, where he called in his carriage to take her for drives.³⁶⁸ It was the predictably decorous if somewhat routine existence of an elderly gentleman of the time.

Undoubtedly he had met with sadness, disappointment, and ill-health in his lifetime but, compared with the many tribulations that Clare had to undergo, some of which were, admittedly, of his own making, it was a cushioned existence that Cary enjoyed in the genteel environment of Chiswick and St John’s Wood. There is considerable contrast between the lives of these two men. Brought up in comparative affluence, with a public school and university education, Cary had an obvious advantage over the boy whose mother was illiterate, whose father had limited reading ability, who became paupers, and whose own education was sporadic until the age of twelve, after which time he taught himself on his way through life.³⁶⁹ There is great similarity in the mental and physical ill-health that dogged both Cary and Clare from youth. They both suffered the disappointment of having work overlooked by the public, the *Inferno*, *The Village Minstrel*, and *The Shepherd’s Calendar* having met with that fate. They shared several mutual acquaintances, Lamb among them, and the same publishers. As writers they were invariably

impecunious but this was relative. Whereas the Clare household lived poorly, as is implied in his description of 'the luxury of a barley loaf or dish of potatoes'³⁷⁰ Cary, it is thought, suffered principally from his expectations, having, no doubt, been accustomed to a good standard of living and finding that he could not always provide for his family as he wished. This caused him genuine anxiety. Both men were compulsive readers and compulsive workers. The bond between them was their love of poetry and of nature, which could account for the instinctive affinity demonstrated in their correspondence. Cary's value to Clare as philosopher, educator, and mediator was considerable. A man with an open mind and a keen sense of humour, a reluctant priest but a dedicated classical scholar he, in his turn, was able to appreciate the genius of the self-educated poet. As King comments: 'Had all Clare's friends shown such kindness, humour, and sound sense in their dealings with him, the final disaster might have been averted.'³⁷¹ Both men died in their early seventies and are commemorated in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Such comparisons are, of course, only relative to the vastly different social classes of the personalities concerned. However, the similarities between the lives of these two exceptionally gifted writers, which may be coincidental, are striking. The contrasts provide a clear illustration of the wide gap between the lifestyles of two groups of society in their particular era.

3.8 The Fitzwilliam Family

William Wentworth Fitzwilliam, (1748-1833), second Earl, eldest son of the first Earl Fitzwilliam, succeeded to the earldom in 1756, at the age of eight.³⁷² The Fitzwilliam seat in Northamptonshire was Milton Hall, some five miles from Helpstone, and it was there, in 1820, that Clare had his first meeting with the Earl and his son, then Lord Milton. As he explained in his Autobiography, his request to Lord Milton, before the publication of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, that the volume might be dedicated to him, had remained unanswered. After publication the poet sent a copy to Milton and was then asked to take ten more copies to the Hall. Clare described his reception:

His Lordship sent for me and instantly explaind the reasons why he did not answer my letter in a quiet unaffected manner which set me at rest.[...] Lady Milton also askd me several questions and wishd me to name any book that was a favourite expressing at the same time a desire to give me one but I was confou[n]ded and coud think of nothing so I lost the present in fact I did not like to pick out a book for fear of seaming overreaching on her kindness or else Shakespear lay at my tongues end Lord fitzwilliam and lady fitzwilliam too talkd to me and notid me kindly and his Lordship gave me some advice

which I had done well perhaps to have noticed better then I have he bade me beware of booksellers and warnd me not to be fed with promises—on my departure they gave me an handfull of money the most that I had ever possessd in my life together I almost felt that I shoud be poor no more there was seventeen pound ³⁷³

Drury also described this meeting in a letter to Taylor dated February 1820, giving details of Lady Milton's questions to Clare:

She then enquired respecting his parents & in her book 'I shall remember this'—which it is evident she did do for a good supply of blankets & everything that can comfort old people was sent the next day or two. Clare was told to ask freely for anything that would help him in his pursuits—books, instruction, & money he might ask for with the confidence of one certain that his request will give pleasure to his benefactors. ³⁷⁴

This seems like genuine, spontaneous generosity; no hint of condescension can be detected.

The Fitzwilliam's principal family seat was Wentworth House, a palatial mansion near Rotherham in South Yorkshire, which included stables and kennels that were probably the finest in England. ³⁷⁵ Fitzwilliam had racing stables there and is described as having been a betting man all his life. ³⁷⁶ He could well afford this luxury; the net surplus on his colliery income alone is said to have been 314,000 between 1798-1805. ³⁷⁷ The family divided their year between Milton and Wentworth Woodhouse, which are said to have been residences of equal rank. ³⁷⁸ In the tradition of the family the Earl was a committed Whig. He was appointed to the lord-lieutenancy of the West Riding in 1798 and, during the illness of King George III in 1811, was mentioned as a possible future Prime Minister. This came to nothing but he was later offered the honour of the Garter which he declined. ³⁷⁹

The second earl has attracted particular mention from historians for his considerate, but firm, approach to matters concerning law and order. E. P. Thompson describes the Fitzwilliams as moderate Whigs and the second Earl as 'a man of temperate disposition'. He comments that the Earl's approach to Luddism (1811-17) was dedicated to the destruction of the movement but scrupulous as to the means employed. Of particular interest to this thesis is the account of his action in 1819 in attending a public meeting specifically called to censure the magistrates of Manchester for the manner in which the suppression of the Peterloo protest was carried out, which had led to the subsequent massacre. As the result of the 'violent language' the Earl is said to have used to express his refusal to condone this, he was dismissed from his lord-

lieutenancy.³⁸⁰ This reveals a man deeply concerned over the treatment of others, who was not prepared to accept repression as the logical government response to what was, patently, a peaceful protest.

Clare described Lord Fitzwilliam as one of the best patrons he had had.³⁸¹ In 1819 he drew attention to the Earl's generosity, some time before the poet himself was known to him, in sending his father, Parker Clare, to the Sea-bathing Infirmary at Scarborough for the relief of his rheumatism,³⁸² a fact he mentioned again with great gratitude in 1832.³⁸³ When Lord Radstock started a subscription for Clare in 1820 Clare recorded in his Autobiography that 'The good Lord Fitzwilliams gave me 100'.³⁸⁴

It was the second Earl who was in the chair at the first meeting at Peterborough in 1809 to discuss the proposed enclosure of Maxey with Deepingate, Northborough, Glinton with Peakirk, Etton and Helpstone.³⁸⁵ At the second meeting the commissioners were appointed. These were Edward Hare, William Custance, and Charles Berkeley.³⁸⁶ Hare is described by the Hammonds as 'of Northampton, Gentleman',³⁸⁷ Custance, by Porter, as 'of Cambridge, a full-time Commissioner'.³⁸⁸ Edward Hare was known to Fitzwilliam, having surveyed property for him in 1771 and again in 1773.³⁸⁹ By 1809, both men had had many years' experience. No description of Charles Berkeley has been traced. The fact that the second Earl, apparently popular with the villagers, was the principal landlord concerned with the enclosure of the area, may have been pivotal. A man of integrity, obviously concerned with justice, and with consideration for the welfare of the poorest, it is feasible that Fitzwilliam had recommended these Commissioners himself. By that time, they would have been well aware of his standards of uprightness and well aware, also, of the approach that would be expected of them. Examination of their notebooks, carried out in chapter 4, indicates a degree of thoroughness, meticulous attention to detail, and probity in their dealings that, in conjunction with the reputation of the Fitzwilliam family, may have contributed to the fact that, unusually for Northamptonshire, little local disturbance was reported throughout this particular enclosure.

On his death in 1833 Lord Fitzwilliam was succeeded by his only son, Charles William Wentworth (1786-1857), formerly Lord Milton, a widower with ten children. He is described as 'A man of chivalrous honour, high moral courage, and perfect independence and disinterestedness'.³⁹⁰ According to Clare, the third earl was no less generous than his father throughout his lifetime. There are several instances of this. Clare, in 1822, after expressing concern to his publisher on behalf of his Helpstone friends the Billings brothers lest they should lose their property over mortgage repayments, was later able to report to him:

I write this to tell you that the bother of Lawyers & Jews is all setteld Lord Milton has lent the 'Old Bachelor' £20 to pay off the interest & thats all thats needed at present³⁹¹

Referring to an artist, William Cowan of Rotherham, who was coming to Milton in 1822 and was to sketch the poet's Helpstone cottage, Clare tells us that Lord Milton was his patron and had sent him to Italy the previous year 'To improve himself'.³⁹² By 1829 he himself was writing to Milton mentioning his wish to have his own small farm or cottage,³⁹³ and in 1832 writing to Taylor to try to extract savings from his Trust fund to embark on a farming enterprise.³⁹⁴ A tenancy in one of the Fitzwilliam cottages was finally arranged for him. On his removal to Northborough in 1832 he wrote to Taylor:

I enter upon the cottage as a tennant—you speak as if you felt it otherwise—but I cannot look at any right of my having any claims of extra kindness on those who have been kind to me already all my delight is that I have an oppertunity of having such men as the Fitzwilliams & the Miltons for Landlords—for when a man rents anything under them it is as certain as his own³⁹⁵

He wrote to Eliza Emmerson in the same vein:

To have such men for Landlords is a satisfactory happiness—for so long as the Miltons & the Exeters have been a name in the neighborhood—there is not one instance that I know of where they have treated willing industry with unkindness in either insulting dependents with oppression or treating poverty with cruelty—not one³⁹⁶

Grainger notes that, like Clare, Lord Fitzwilliam 'observed insects, birds, and plants', and adds the authorial wish: 'That literary and scientific exchanges had been possible between Clare and this serious-minded, quiet, country-loving gentleman who observed with an attentiveness that reminds one of Clare himself.'³⁹⁷ It is evident that the concern of the Fitzwilliam family was as much directed towards the problems of the poorest in their villages as with wider issues on the political scene, as in the case of the Peterloo massacre. That they were both popular and respected in the area can surely be accepted from Clare's account of the death of Lady Milton, which occurred in 1830:

We had a very uncomfortable occurrence indeed in the death of Lady Milton. she was such an amiable woman and so well beloved that our whole neighbourhood is in mourning not in dress but in heart and I fear the loss will never be supplied—she must have been an excellent woman for she has left no public enemies behind all join in her praise at least all that I hear of ³⁹⁸

The Fitzwilliam concern for Clare continued into the period of his confinement in Northampton General Asylum, from December 1841 until his death in 1864. Ischam states categorically:

Lord Fitzwilliam paid 11/- a week towards John Clare's maintenance, and Clare's name under the initials 'J.C.' appears in the *List of Private Patients, whose Payment for Maintenance are in the lowest remunerative rate of payment viz. 21s. per week, shewing the Amount of Benefit derived from the Funds of the Institution*, which was printed in the *Annual Reports* of the Asylum during Clare's residence. ³⁹⁹

Martin describes the arrangements differently: 'Earl Fitzwilliam, who had taken him under his charge, only allowed eleven shillings a week for his maintenance, which small sum entitled Clare to little better than pauper treatment.' He adds that, on the poet's death, the superintendent of the asylum approached Lord Fitzwilliam for a grant towards the conveyance of the body to Helpstone. According to Martin: 'The noble patron replied by a refusal, advising the burial of the poet as a pauper at Northampton.'⁴⁰⁰ This statement cannot be verified but, when the generosity of the Fitzwilliams over the years to Clare and others is taken into account it seems strangely at odds with their usual liberality. Clare's body was transferred to Helpstone and he was buried there, as was his wish, the Tibbles claiming that this was done at the instigation of the Bellars family.⁴⁰¹ Crossan points out that Cherry takes issue with Martin over his allegation as well and over the integrity of the Fitzwilliams, 'which he is at pains to defend'.⁴⁰² Porter confirms that Fitzwilliam contributed eleven Shillings a week towards Clare's maintenance in Northampton. He states that although he was 'admitted as a pauper patient (his record stated "gardener") he was to be treated as a gentleman'.⁴⁰³ The Tibbles also make this point: 'Earl Fitzwilliam paid for Clare at the eleven shillings a week rate for poor patients, but he also paid for boots and shoes. Thus Clare was respectably dressed.'⁴⁰⁴

Those working and living on the two Fitzwilliam estates were apparently in the happy position of having benevolent landlords and paternalistic patrons to support them. In Helpstone during the period of enclosure this can only have been the greatest advantage.

NOTES

1. Spencer T. Hall, *Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People, chiefly from Personal Recollection*, (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1873), p. 156.
2. *By Himself*, p. 2. Clare habitually spelt Helpstone with a final 'e'. To-day it is referred to as Helpston.
3. Northampton MS 43, no. 17.
4. This information was supplied by the late Mary Moyse, Hon. Secretary of the John Clare Society.
5. *By Himself*, pp. 12, 74, 90, 111; *Letters*, p. 210; *By Himself*, p. 243.
6. *By Himself*, p. 113.
7. *Letters*, p. 36 n.3.
8. John Clare Billing, see chapter two, note 8, above.
9. *Letters*, p. 6 n. 1; p. 36 n.3; p. 193 n. 3.
10. *Letters*, p. 43. William Hilton, RA. painted the now well-known portrait of Clare, currently in the National Portrait Gallery, London.
11. Alan Rogers, *The Book of Stamford* (Buckingham: Barracuda, 1983), pp. 76-77.
12. Patrick O'Leary, *Regency Editor: The Life of John Scott* (Aberdeen: (Aberdeen University Press, 1983), pp. 30, 46.
13. Rogers, pp. 74-78, *passim*.
14. Alec Clifton-Taylor, *Stamford* (Lincoln: Lincolnshire County Council, 1990), pp. 5-6.
15. George Burton, *The Chronology of Stamford* (London: Edwards & Hughes, 1846), pp. 199, 227.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
18. E. C. Till, *A Family Affair: Stamford and the Cecils, 1650-1900* (Rugby: Jolly, 1990), pp. 49-50.
19. Clifton-Taylor, pp. 16-17. Ernest Hodgkinson and Laurence Tebbutt, *Stamford in 1850: A Nineteenth Century Portrait of an Ancient Town* (Stamford: Dolby, 1954), p. 5.
20. Robert Owen, *A Life of Robert Owen by Himself: With a new Introduction by John Butt, 1771-1858*, (London: Knight, 1971), p. 12. The shop was McGuffog's, on the corner of St Mary's Street. Till, pp. 29, 59.
21. Clifton-Taylor, p.16.
22. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1957), II, pp. 233-34.

23. *Letters*, p. 96. 'To beaver'. The origin of this word seems to be obscure. It is suggested, from the *OED* reference to OF 'baviere, a child's bib', that Clare's dialect usage, meaning 'to eat', or 'to beaver away', may be derived from this.
24. Till, p. 41.
25. David Newton and Martin Smith, *The Stamford Mercury: Three Centuries of Newspaper Publishing*, (Stamford: Tyas, 1999), pp. 21-22, 42.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
27. *DNB*.
28. Newton and Smith, pp. 94-95, 292-93.
29. See chapter two, note 8, above.
30. Newton and Smith, p. 292.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 153 n. 12, p. 292.
32. *Letters*, p. 541.
33. Till, pp. 14, 20. The Burghley estate extended to 28,000 acres. Rogers describes a long history of Cecil control of the town. In the eighteenth century Lord Exeter's Agent dominated the counsels of the corporation and nominated those who received benefits, or places in grammar schools; he interfered with the election of parish officers in order to obtain control of voters' lists and the Estate bought up advowsons to have power over the nomination of clergy. He also suggests that the Estate had some authority over the Press. Rogers, pp. 96-97.
34. Newton and Smith, p. 92. Burton, p.169.
35. *News*, 18 February 1810.
36. Till, pp. 36-37.
37. Rogers, p. 92.
38. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, rev. and ed. C. T. Onions, 3rd. edn, revised with addenda, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944).
39. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 746.
40. *The Poetical Works of George Crabbe*, ed. A. J. Carlyle and R. M. Carlyle (London: Oxford University Press, Milford, 1932), p. 241.
41. See n. 39.
42. *By Himself*, p. 20. The subject of subscriptions arose again as late as November 1834, when George Reid, a Glasgow accountant, offered to try to find subscribers for Clare's fourth volume of poetry. *Letters*, p. 618 and n. 1.

43. A. S. Collins, *The Profession of Letters. A Study of the Relation of Authors to Patron, Publisher, and Public 1780-1832*. (London: Routledge, 1928), pp. 17-21. Collins contends that patronage, although well-meaning, did more harm than good and that it had ceased to exist by 1820. In his opinion the acceptance of patronage was tantamount to an admission of failure and 'influential friendship' would have been a better term. pp. 246-251.
44. *By Himself*, p. 23.
45. *Letters*, pp. 68-69. Markham Sherwill also wrote on 11 May 1820 urging Clare to omit certain lines from 'Helpstone' and 'Dawnings of Genius', no doubt at Radstock's request. *Ibid.*, n.1.
46. British Library, Eg. MS, 2245, fols 60 r-v.
47. Eg. MS 2245, fols 79v-80r.
48. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 114r.
49. *Catalogue*, pp. 23-34.
50. Eg. MS 2245, fols 118r-120v.
51. *Letters*, pp. 117-19.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
55. *By Himself*, pp. 54-55.
56. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 39r.
57. See note 45 above.
58. Eg. MS 2245, fols 118r-120v.
59. Eg. MS 2248, fols 228r-v.
60. Eg. MS 2234, fols 397r-398v.
61. *Letters*, p. 639 n. 2.
62. *By Himself*, p. 113.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 136. See also section 33.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 110, pp. 118-21.
65. See chapter 3.7.
66. Stamford, Town Hall, Phillips Collection, pamphlet no. 52 GIL. A fire was reported in a shop on Long Causeway, Peterborough, belonging to Mr Gilchrist, in the *Mercury* of 17 January 1823.

67. NMS 65 (dated 21 March 1872). This letter is addressed 'Gentlemen', but the recipients remain unnamed throughout. Phillips Collection, Stamford Pamphlets, item 52, GIL; *Mercury*, 28 August 1801.
68. *Mercury*, 14 December 1804.
69. *Letters*, p. 35 n.7, p. 53. They were Octavius, Francis (Frank), and James Simpson.
70. *Mercury*, 29 August 1806.
71. *Ibid.*, 3 October 1806, 14 April 1815, 16 February 1838. Stamford pamphlets, item no. 44. Horatio Gilchrist was Mayor from 1828-1829.
72. Stamford Hall Books. Common Hall, 9 October 1806. Octavius and Horatio Gilchrist, Francis Simpson, Thomas Simpson, and Richard Turnill are shown as Capital Burgesses. They were all known to Clare.
73. *Mercury*, 18 June 1802.
74. *Mercury*, 16 March 1804. For example at The King's Birthday Dinner, *Mercury*, 29 May 1812, and The Coronation Ball, *Mercury*, 20 July 1820.
75. *Mercury*, 8 June 1809, 14 December 1810.
76. David Newton and Martin Smith, *The Stamford Mercury Three Centuries of Newspaper Publishing* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 1999), pp. 92-93; *Mercury*, 3 March 1809; Newton and Smith, pp. 98-99.
77. P. O'Leary, *Regency Editor, The Life of John Scott* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), p. 30.
78. Newton and Smith, pp. 92 and footnote (unnumbered), 94; *Mercury*, 21 April 1809.
79. *News*, 13 October 1809.
80. *News*, 10 January 1812.
81. *Mercury*, 2 October 1812. Stamford pamphlets, no. 93.
82. O'Leary, p. 31.
83. *By Himself*, p. 113. In the *Mercury* of 19 November 1819 there is a reference to the Bull Running in Stamford 'on Saturday last', i.e. 13 November 1819, so undoubtedly this was the date of Clare's first meeting with John Taylor. Justin Simpson states, in the letter already referred to in n. 2: 'Mr G certainly knew nothing of him or his productions till Mr Taylor's visit to Stamford'. NMS 65.
84. *Clare The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 35-38.
85. *By Himself*, pp. 136-39. The theatres would have been Drury Lane and Covent Garden. *Ibid.*, p. 307 n. 188.

86. Ibid., p. 146.
87. *Letters*, p. 23 and n. 1.
88. *Catalogue*, no. 355, p. 32.
89. *Letters*, pp. 96-97.
90. Ibid. pp. 114-15.
91. Ibid. p. 128.
92. Ibid. pp. 130-31.
93. Ibid. pp. 163-64.
94. Eg. MS 2245, fols. 70r-71r.
95. Nor. MS 65. The addressees are unnamed.
96. See n. 66.
97. George Burton, *Chronology of Stamford* (London: Edward & Hughes, 1846), p. 185.
98. Stamford pamphlets, no. 97, p. 1.
99. *Later Poems*, I, pp. 232, 478, 635. Clare expressed his appreciation of Burns's poetry in early 1819, *Letters*, p. 5; his interest in the Scottish poets generally for their songs in his *Journal, By Himself*, p. 185; and in a letter to James Hessey in April 1822, *Letters*, pp. 236-37. He also had two copies of Burns's poetry in his library, two of Ramsay's, and one of Tannahill's. *Catalogue* nos. 134, 135, 340, 341, 372.
100. *Letters*, pp. 23 n. 1. Gilchrist presented Clare with a copy of one of these letters in December 1820. *Catalogue*, no. 222, p. 32.
101. Ibid., p. 123.
102. Andrew Nicholson (ed), *Lord Byron, The Complete Miscellaneous Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 400.
103. *Letters*, p. 23n1.
104. Nicholson, p. 462.
105. Phillips Collection. Item no. 97, p. 5.
106. *By Himself*, p. 189.
107. Billing, p. 3. *Drakard's History of Stamford*, printed by and for John Drakard, (Stamford, 1822), p. 140.
108. *News*, 6 October 1809.
109. Dibden, *Literary Reminiscences*, p. 386. Clare's first visit to Milton Hall was in February 1820 (*Letters*, pp. 32-34). He records that he was offered a book as a present and that Shakespeare would have been his first choice, one that he was too embarrassed to make.

- By Himself*, p. 118. His love of Shakespeare's work is made clear in references in his *Journal*; p. 194 is but one example.
110. Justin Simpson, *Obituary and Records for the Counties of Lincolnshire, Rutland and Northampton* (Stamford: Newcomb, 1861), pp. 264-5.
 111. Nicholson, p. 406.
 112. *Mercury*, 24 October, 1823.
 113. Phillips Collection. Catalogues, item no.22.
 114. John Clare Billing, p. 3.
 115. Nicholson, p. 406.
 116. *News*, 4 July 1823.
 117. *Letters*, p. 276.
 118. *Letters*, p. 550.
 119. *Letters*, p. 18.
 120. Tim Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle: the life and work of John Taylor, Keats's publisher* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 2.
 121. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-10. Lackington's 'Temple of the Muses' in Finsbury Square contained over half a million books. Lackington was a shrewd bookseller, who undercut his rivals' prices to achieve higher sales. It was here that Taylor met his future business partner, James Hessey.
 122. Olive M. Taylor, 'John Taylor: Author and Publisher 1781-1864', *London Mercury*, X11 (June 1925), pp. 162-64. Olive Taylor was the great-niece of John Taylor.
 123. Chilcott, p. 161.
 124. *Ibid.*, p. 3, p. 17.
 125. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19. 'Junius' is described as a Whig Letter-writer who anonymously attacked many members of the government in a series of letters that appeared in the *Public Advertiser* between 1769 and 1772. George Saintsbury in *A Short History of English Literature*, (London: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 646-47, writes: 'They attacked the king, the ministers (especially the Duke of Grafton), and a great number of things and persons connected with the administration of the day. They showed inside knowledge of official matters'.
 126. Edmund Blunden, *Keats's Publisher: A Memoir of John Taylor* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), pp. 249-51. A list of John Taylor's writings is given.
 127. *DNB*.
 128. *Letters*, p. 499.

129. Chilcott, p. 22.
130. *Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 69.
131. Chilcott, pp. 24-25.
132. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
133. *Letters*, pp. 121-22.
134. Eg. MS 2245, fols 225r-v.
135. *Letters*, p. 69, n. 1.
136. Eg. MS 2250, fol. 146v.
137. Northampton MS 44 (30 November 1819).
138. Olive M. Taylor, p. 260.
139. *Letters*, pp. 27-28.
140. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45.
141. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.
142. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-70, *passim*.
143. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 343r.
144. *Letters*, p. 213.
145. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
146. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
147. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
149. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
150. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.
151. *Ibid.*, pp. 210, 270 n. 2.
152. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
155. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
156. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
157. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
159. Eg. MS 2247, fols 132v-133r.
160. Eg. MS 2247, fols 134r-135r.
161. *Letters*, pp. 361-63.

162. Ibid., p. 367.
163. Chilcott, p. 111.
164. Ibid., pp. 122-24.
165. Ibid., p. 124. *John Clare The Midsummer Cushion*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Anne Tibble (Manchester: Mid NAG, Carcanet, 1990), p. xi.
166. Olive M. Taylor, p. 158.
167. *Letters*, p. 59 n. 7.
168. Olive M. Taylor, p. 261.
169. *Letters*, pp. 59-60 n. 8.
170. Ibid., p. 129.
171. Ibid., pp. 147, 153, 182.
172. Ibid., pp. 122, 124, 351.
173. Ibid., p. 134.
174. Ibid., p. 172.
175. Ibid., p. 161, n.2.
176. Ibid., pp. 227-29.
177. Ibid., p. 143.
178. Olive Taylor, pp. 261-62
179. Walter Jerrold, *Thomas Hood: His Life and Times* (London: Rivers, 1907), p. 94.
180. Olive M. Taylor, p. 263. Bauer (pp. 82-84) refers to the 'Londoners' but it is not clear when they acquired this title. Taylor finally established these 'Magazine Dinners' as regular monthly events.
181. *By Himself*, pp. 131-32.
182. Chilcott, p. 149.
183. Olive M. Taylor, p. 264.
184. Chilcott, p. 181.
185. Olive M. Taylor, pp. 266-67.
186. Chilcott, p. 179.
187. R. W. King, '*Parson Primrose*': *The Life, Work and Friendships of Henry Francis Cary (1772-1844) Translator of Dante* (New York: Doran, 1925), p. 172.
188. Chilcott, p. 180.
189. Ibid., p. 150.
190. Olive M. Taylor, p. 261.
191. Chilcott, pp. 156-57.

192. *By Himself*, pp. 131-32.
193. Bauer, pp. 84-85.
194. Chilcott, p. 151.
195. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 768.
196. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 225r.
197. Eg. MS 2247, fols 322r-v.
198. Chilcott, pp. 187; Olive M. Taylor, pp. 266-67.
199. Olive M. Taylor, p. 259.
200. Chilcott, pp. 210, 140, 195.
201. *Letters*, p. 688.
202. Olive M. Taylor, p. 267.
203. D. W. Prouse, *A History of Newfoundland* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood 1896), pp. 372-73. Radstock was responsible for the capture of American privateers and French frigates. After service in the East Indies and the Mediterranean he became Vice Admiral and Colonel of Marines. An action off Cape St. Vincent, in which he was Third in Command, resulted in victory over the French Fleet.
204. Maurice J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700—1830* (London: Cass, 1965), p. 27, p. 53. The Evangelical revival, founded by Charles Wesley in 1738 to promote sobriety, industry, and devotion to duty, was developed by Wilberforce some fifty years later. Brown claims that nearly all the rich in Clapham, for example, had joined the Evangelicals. The High Church group supporting the Evangelical party were sometimes alluded to as the ‘Clapton Sect’. Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1961), p. 51, pp. 351-53.
205. Brown, pp. 1-2.
206. *Ibid.*, p.354. Lord Radstock was President of the Naval Charitable Society. p. 360.
207. *Letters*, p. 168. William Waldegrave, Baron Radstock, *The Cottager’s Friend; or a Word in Season to him who is so fortunate as to possess a Bible or New Testament, and a Book of Common Prayer...Twentieth edition. With corrections and additions.* British Library General Catalogue to 1995, CD-ROM
208. *By Himself*, p. 121.
209. Northampton Public Library, Clare Collection, Vol II, no. 45, 20 February 1820.
210. *Letters*, p. 120. The trustees were Taylor himself and Richard Woodhouse, a barrister and friend of Taylor since 1811. Chilcott, p. 13. Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 253.

211. *By Himself*, p. 54. A distant relative of Radstock's had married a natural daughter of James 11, a fact which, if generally known, could account for Clare's comment on Radstock's noble descent. *Whitaker's Peerage, Baronetage, Knightage, and Companionship for the year 1931*, p. 585.
212. *Early Poems*, II, p. 117.
213. Eg. MS 2245, fols79r-80r.
214. Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 37.
215. *Early Poems*, I, pp. 161, 451.
216. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 118r.
217. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 225r.
218. *Letters*, p. 69. 'Dolly's Mistake and 'My Mary' had already been removed from the 3rd edition for 'certain indelicacies'. Clare reckoned them 'the two best in the book'. *Letters*, p. 83.
219. Northampton Public Library, Clare Collection, Vol II, MS 43, no 26 (26 July 1820).
220. *Letters*, pp. 117-19 and n. 1.
221. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
222. *Letters*, p. 126.
223. Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (London: Penguin 1985), p. 19.
224. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 158-59, 768.
225. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
226. Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 9, 88-89. In 1820 Lord Radstock's address was Portland Place, London. Northampton Record Office, Fitzwilliam Drawer, Frisby ZB903, 14-68.
227. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
228. *The Opinions of William Cobbett*, ed. G. D. H. and Margaret Cole (London: Cobbett Publishing, 1944), p. 15. In 1810 Cobbett was imprisoned for two years in Newgate.
229. *Stamford News*, 31 May 1811. In 1811 Drakard was fined 200 and imprisoned for eighteen months in Lincoln Castle.
230. Chilcott, p. 95.
231. *By Himself*, p. 12.
232. Howard Newby, *The Deferential Worker* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 111.
233. *Letters*, p. 153.
234. Brown, p. 354.

235. *Catalogue*, p. 27, no. 200.
236. *Ibid.*, p. 33, no. 388.
237. *Ibid.*, p. 27, no. 218.
238. Brown, p. 5.
239. *By Himself*, p. 30.
240. *Catalogue*, no. 400.
241. Northampton Central Library, Vol 1, Item 20, 20 January 1857. Mrs Leo Hunter (a lion-hunter or pursuer of celebrities), is a character in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*.
242. A. S. Collins, *The Profession of Letters: A Study of the relation of Author to Patron, Publisher, and Public, 1780-1832* (London: George Routledge, 1928), p. 246 ff.
243. Newby, pp. 44-45.
244. *Letters*, p. 86 and n. 6.
245. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-25.
246. *By Himself*, p. 136. *Letters*, p. 103.
247. *Letters*, p. 568.
248. *Ibid.*, p. 565.
249. Collins, p. 247.
250. *Critical Heritage*, p. 57.
251. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 39r-v.
252. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 40r.
253. *By Himself*, p. 136. *Letters*, p. xli.
254. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 119v.
255. Eg. MS 2245, fols 60r-v.
256. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 96r.
257. Eg. MS 2245, fols 79r-80r.
258. Eg. MS 2245, fols 118r-120r.
259. *Letters*, p. 125.
260. Eg. MS 2246, fol.159r.
261. Eg. MS 2246, fol. 153r.
262. *Ibid.* (undated).
263. *Letters*, pp. 108-09 n. 2.
264. *Catalogue*, nos. 115, 137, 172, 270, 276, 282, 288. 297, 302, 408.
265. Eg. MS 2245, fols 60r-61r.
266. *Letters*, p. 160.

267. Eg. MS 2246, fol. 88r.
268. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 96r.
269. *Letters*, p. 110.
270. NMS 44.
271. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 211r.
272. Eg. MS 2246, fol. 1r.
273. Eg. MS 2246, fol. 152v.
274. Eg. MS 2246, fols 167v-168r.
275. *Letters*, p. 349.
276. Eg. MS 2248, fol. 294r.
277. Eg. MS 2248, fol. 328r.
278. Eg. MS 2248, fols 329r-v.
279. Eg. MS 2249, fol. 118r.
280. *Letters*, p. 80 n. 12.
281. Eg. MS 2245, fols 331r-v, 332r.
282. Eg. MS 2246, fol. 74r.
283. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 325r.
284. Eg. MS 2248, fol. 280r.
285. Eg. MS 2245, fols 397r-398v.
286. *Letters*, p. 604.
287. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
288. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 204r.
289. *Letters*, p. 217 n. 6.
290. Eg. MS 2245, fol. 398v.
291. *By Himself*, p. 213.
292. *Letters*, p. 373.
293. See notes 270 and 271.
294. *Letters*, p. 351.
295. *Ibid.*, pp. 411, 415 n. 2.
296. *Ibid.*, p. 415 n. 1.
297. *Ibid.*, p. 428 n. 5.
298. *By Himself*, pp. 136-37.
299. *Letters*, p. 603.
300. *Ibid.*, p. 620 n. 1.

301. Ibid., p. 627.
302. Ibid., p. 639.
303. See n. 295.
304. R. W. King, '*Parson Primrose*': *The Life, Work and Friendships of Henry Francis Cary (1772-1844) Translator of Dante*, (New York: Doran, 1925), p. 7. Title on cover, *Parson Primrose. The Translator of Dante and Friend of Charles Lamb. The Life of Henry Francis Cary*. By entitling his book '*Parson Primrose*', King likens Cary to Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield, paying tribute to the dignity, almost amounting to humility, with which they both confronted the misfortunes of life.
305. King, p. 133.
306. Ibid., pp. 154-55.
307. Ibid., p. 159.
308. Ibid., pp. 225-26.
309. Ibid., see n. 3.
310. Ibid., pp. 133-34.
311. *By Himself*, p. 143.
312. *By Himself*, p. 139.
313. King, p. 13.
314. Ibid., pp. 15-19.
315. Ibid., pp. 35-41.
316. Ibid., p. 50.
317. Ibid., pp. 66-68. The options that were open to Clare when he was unemployed at a similar stage in his career provide a sharp contrast: 'When I was out of work I went to the woods gathering rotten sticks or picking up the dryd cow dung on the pasture which we calld cazons for firing', *By Himself*, p. 68.
318. King, pp. 67, 81-87.
319. Ibid., pp. 75-76.
320. Eg. MS 2246, fol. 102r.
321. Eg. MS 2246, fols 139r-v.
322. King, pp. 88-92.
323. Ibid., pp. 119-21.
324. Ibid., pp. 94-95.
325. John Clare, *A Champion for the Poor Political Verse and Prose*, ed. by P. M. S. Dawson, Eric Robinson and David Powell (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2000), p. 143, ll. 51-52.

326. King, p. 96. Cary held the Readership at Berkeley Chapel, London, then a curacy in Chiswick followed by a curacy at the Savoy Chapel Royal, The Strand, London.
327. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
328. *Letters*, p. 36.
329. Eg. MS 2249, fols 84v-85r.
330. King, pp. 124-30.
331. *Ibid.*, p. 134. King conjectures that Clare may have met Keats at this time, possibly with Cary. It is clear from Clare's letter to Taylor that he had not met Keats by June 1820: 'I should like to see the fiz of the man before he drops off' *Letters*, p. 78. Keats died in Italy in 1821.
332. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
333. Walter Jerrold, *Thomas Hood His Life and Times*, (London: Alston Rivers, 1907), pp. 105-06. King, p. 149.
334. Charles Lamb, *The Essays of Elia* (London: Bell, 1889), p. 502.
335. *Letters*, p. 179.
336. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
337. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
338. Eg. MS 2246, fols 101r-102 r.
339. *Letters*, p. 311. Clare had also written to James Hessey in April 1822 'The blue devils are my constant Companions', *Letters*, p. 235.
340. Eg. MS 2246, fols 387 r-v.
341. Eg. MS 2246, fols 452r-453v.
342. *Letters*, p. 304. Cary replied to this letter within four days.
343. Eg. MS 2246, fols 138r-139v.
344. Eg. MS 2249, fols 84r-85v.
345. Eg. MS 2249, fol. 85r.
346. *Letters*, pp. 401-03.
347. See n. 340.
348. Eg. MS 2248, fols 105r-106r.
349. *Letters*, p. 494.
350. Eg. MS 2248, fols 225r-226v.
351. King, pp. 208-09.
352. *Letters*, pp. 594-95.
353. Eg. MS 2249, fols 84r-85v.

354. *Letters*, p. 49
355. *Letters*, pp. 600, 501, 412, 401.
356. Eg. MS 2246, fols 175r-176r. Robert Heyes considers that Cary's reference to the crab tree is metaphorical. As Cary is comparing poems to plants Heyes thinks this reference is to a poem, specifically to *The Parish*, which could be considered a poem in the style of Crabbe. Clare was working on that poem at this time and it might have been discussed with Cary when they met in London in 1822.
357. See n. 348.
358. *Letters*, p. 245, pp. 311-13.
359. *Ibid.*, p. 511.
360. *Lamb*, pp. 58-59.
361. See n. 349.
362. *The Prose of John Clare*, ed. by J. W. and Anne Tibble, 2nd end (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 227.
363. *King*, pp. 178, 201-04. King equates the post of Assistant Keeper with that of an assistant librarian.
364. Jonathan Bate has established that, by 1820, Clare, with his wife and first child, his mother, father, and a sister, were occupying four rooms, two up and two down, in the Helpstone cottage. Although his sister left in 1821, Clare's family increased regularly and by 1832 in the same accommodation he had six children. Jonathan Bate, 'New Light on the Life of Clare', *The John Clare Society Journal*, 20 (2001), 41-54 (p. 46).
365. *King*, pp. 230, 235, 241-243. In Clare's account of the progress of his work in 1824 he includes a description of one of his own bouts of mental breakdown in a letter to Cary: 'I have been utterly unable to write or even read this 6 or 7 weeks my mind is numbd & dead like my body & my memory is broken' (*Letters*, p. 311).
366. *King*, pp. 265-69.
367. *Ibid.*, pp. 270-74.
368. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-91.
369. *By Himself*, pp. 2, 4.
370. See n. 348.
371. *King*, p. 230.
372. *DNB*.
373. *By Himself*, p. 118.
374. *NMS* 43, 15.

375. *DNB*. In 1999, Wentworth Woodhouse was advertised for sale. In the advertisement it is described as ‘An eighteenth century house of 365 rooms, one of the greatest private palaces in England, with a 600ft-long facade and parkland of 85 acres’. The asking price was £1.5 million. To repair and restore the structure was expected to cost millions. *Country Life*, 24 July 1999.
376. J. H. Porter, ‘The Development of Rural Society’, in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, general editor Joan Thirsk, ed. by G. E. Mingay, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), VI, pp.836-938 (p. 923).
377. J. V. Beckett, ‘Estates and Enclosures’, in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, general editor Joan Thirsk, ed. by G. E. Mingay, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), VI, pp. 604-729 (p. 527).
378. F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 94. The Fitzwilliams also owned property in Ireland (p.94), and in Grosvenor Square, London (p. 106).
379. *DNB*. F. M. L. Thompson notes that in 1821 the Fitzwilliams changed their political opinions to favour Reform, a shift of allegiance that would have required considerable moral courage. *Landed Society*, p. 280.
380. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 634.
381. *By Himself*, p. 55.
382. *Letters*, p. 19.
383. *Letters*, p. 582.
384. *By Himself*, p. 121.
385. *Stamford Mercury*, 18 February 1809.
386. *Stamford Mercury*, 25 February 1809.
387. J. L. Hammond and Margaret Hammond, *The Village Labourer*, 2nd edn, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1987), p. 380. Hare is recorded as a Commissioner for the Enclosure of Stanwell, Middlesex in 1789, twenty years before the enclosure of Helpstone.
388. J. H. Porter, vol. vi, p. 846.
389. Northampton Record Office, Fitzwilliam Miscellaneous Papers. Edward Hare compiled a Survey and Valuation of the Lordship of Upton, 27 December, 177 (vol 689), and a Survey of estates at Humbleton and Meaux, (Yorkshire, East Riding) dated 27 December 1773 (vol. 552/2).
390. *DNB*.
391. *Letters*, p. 229.

392. Ibid., p. 259.
393. Ibid., p. 480.
394. Ibid., pp. 561, 567.
395. Ibid., p. 568.
396. Ibid., p. 576. Although Mark Storey suggests that Elizabeth Gilchrist was the intended recipient of this letter on the basis of a reference to a nephew, Robert Heyes states that this is incorrect. He contends that Clare is replying to a letter Eliza Emmerson wrote to him on 27 January 1832 in which she mentions *her* nephew, who was staying with her. (Pforzheimer manuscripts).
397. *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. xlvii.
398. *By Himself*, p. 162. DNB. Lady Milton died in 1830.
399. Giles Ischam, 'John Clare: The Northampton Years', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol III, no. 5 (1964), 185-89 (p.188). Ischam gives no further reference information and The Archives Manager at St Andrew's Hospital, Northampton, Miss A. E. Ridley, is unable to confirm this entry from the Reports at her disposal.
400. Frederick Martin, *The Life of John Clare*, ed with an Introduction and Notes by Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Cass, 1964), pp.292, 295.
401. J. W. and Anne Tibble, *John Clare: His Life and Poetry*, (London: Heinemann, 1956), p. 200.
402. Greg Crossan, 'The Nine Lives of John Clare', *The John Clare Society Journal*, 5 (1986), 37-46 (p. 39).
403. Roy Porter 'All madness for writing': John Clare and the Asylum', in *John Clare in Context*, ed. by Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 263.
404. J. W. and Anne Tibble, p. 173.

Chapter 4. Enclosure

The agricultural policy known as enclosure, namely consolidation by fencing, reached Clare's native village of Helpstone early in 1809. A meeting, previously advertised in the *Stamford Mercury*, of the proprietors of estates in Glinton with Peakirk, Northborough, Maxey with Deeping, Etton with Helpstone, and the common called the North Fen, was held in Peterborough on 17 February 1809 to consider the expediency of an 'Inclosure' of these lands. It was resolved that it was expedient and a Petition to Parliament was prepared and signed by those present. Lord Fitzwilliam was in the chair. The reasons given for the application were that:

Some Parts of the said Arable, Meadow, and Pasture lands were intermixed, and otherwise inconveniently situated for the respective Owners and Occupiers thereof, and the said Commons and Waste Grounds yield but little profit, and in this present State are incapable of any considerable improvement.¹

In this statement there is some indication that prior thought had been given to the project. Certainly there was the intention to press on with these plans, possibly because the advantages of improved agricultural practice were being discussed nationally and openly by landowners. A 'numerous' meeting was then held the following week to take into consideration the expediency of the Application to Parliament for an Act for dividing and enclosing the Open and Unenclosed lands in these parishes, to settle the proportions to be offered to the Landlords of the Manors and the Tithe Owners, and to appoint the Commissioners.² Experimental scientific studies into agricultural methods had indicated that increased productivity could lead to financial gain if subsistence farming were replaced by a cash economy. The fact that these two meetings were held in Peterborough, which was fairly inaccessible for the average smallholder living in any of the villages about to be affected, without some means of transport could have caused hard feelings. Although there is no evidence at this stage that any such criticism was raised it creates the impression of a certain high-handedness. Consensus was reached at that meeting. Among the signatories was that of James Joyce, a farmer of Glinton and the father of John Clare's childhood sweetheart, Mary Joyce. Hoskins has pointed to the fact that the signatories of an enclosure petition were not representative of a numerical majority in favour of the motion but were of those appointed by virtue of the value of their property, based on the land tax assessment. (This gives some indication of the social status of the Joyce family and the discrepancy between them and

the son of a landless labourer who was friendly with Mary Joyce at school). It was mandatory that the lord of the manor and the tithe owner were included. Thus the first steps towards enclosure were non-democratic by present-day standards.³ There is no record that any objections were made at this meeting. If, as it seems, this enclosure was to be effected in the interests of improved agricultural efficiency and for the financial benefit of the larger landowners, Clare could have been reflecting local grumbling among smaller farmers when in 'The Mores' a poem dated 'early to mid-1820s', he referred to the onset of 'lawless laws' and found that these plans seemed to smack of hoped-for financial advantages that, for the small man at least, would not materialise: '& dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes. Have found too truly that they were but dreams.'⁴ In his choice of the word 'plunder' he is also hinting strongly that greed at the expense of others, amounting to illegal pilfering, was a component part of this scheme, if not a major part. This would undoubtedly be the opinion of many of those who were suspicious that they would not benefit from the new arrangements. Clare depicts the 'rebels' as the enforcers of the project, the opposers as the victims. No suggestion that there was any legal irregularity in this particular enclosure has been traced. Perusal of the Commissioners Minutes show punctilious attention to detail. Points of debate are carefully recorded, as are matters relating to receipts, expenses and expenditure. The identity of the three Commissioners is given in section 3.8.

Research into matters connected with this enclosure is difficult as, apart from the regular notices of future meetings and perambulations that appeared in the *Mercury*, there is little written comment to be found. There are few sources of information. Anscombe points to the House of Commons Journals, books of Claims and Awards, and Commissioners minute books, adding that very few of the latter have survived.⁵ Neeson considers that although early local opposition may have been the most effective and the most vocal it is the hardest to find. She also points out that Assize records for the Midland circuit, which included Northamptonshire, have been lost.⁶ The Hammonds have concluded that cottagers and small land occupiers put up little evidence of resistance because they were shrewd realists, recognising that counter-petitions involved legal expenses and would be put before a Parliament of landowners in favour of enclosure.⁷ Tate describes Northamptonshire as 'THE county of Parliamentary inclosure' and comments that the change, when it came 'aroused some discontent'.⁸ Thompson, who also questions the lack of protest in Northamptonshire, considers that villagers generally were fatalistic when faced with this dilemma:

Even so, this passivity may be overstated; there has been little research into the actual response of the poor to enclosure, and such research presents peculiar difficulties, being

concerned with the illiterate and the inarticulate enduring distinct experiences in hundreds of different villages over many decades.⁹

Neeson, alluding to the north-eastern heath and fen of the Soke of Peterborough, home of the poet John Clare, maintains that opposing Parliamentary enclosure here was a matter of time and patience and draws attention to the many forms that opposition could take: ‘Stubborn non-compliance, foot-dragging and mischief were common’. She adds:

It follows that the most active opponents to enclosure in Northamptonshire were the ‘poor parishioners, both farmers, labourers and handicrafts-men’ [...] They were the smaller farmers who occupied and owned or rented up to 40 acres of open field land and for whom enclosure represented high costs, raised rents, an individualistic agriculture, the loss of common pasture and a higher poor rate.¹⁰

The Bill became an Act in August 1809, but the Commissioners’ final Award was not made until 1820. The Claims and the Award for Helpstone and district are to be found in the Northampton Record Office. The discovery of one book of Commissioners’ Minutes dated 1809-14 (by an archivist, in 2000) in the Record Office has proved invaluable. Tate has drawn attention to the value of such a record as ‘Among the rarest, [...] neither the British Museum, the London School of Economics, the Public Record Office, nor the Bodleian has one’.¹¹ Apparently this has not previously been studied by Clare scholars but detailed examination has proved rewarding. Three important questions which have not hitherto been addressed arise out of the information in these Minutes. The first queries the reason for the delay in the passing of the Act and the final Award eleven years later. In Peacock’s opinion: ‘Enclosures were not done swiftly and at one time. In many cases the time that elapsed between an Act and the actual award covered many years, during which the owners could have been kept waiting to see the outcome of their claims’.¹² The second and related question automatically arises as to why there was apparently no resistance to this particular enclosure. The Hammonds comment that enclosure was no new menace to Northamptonshire and that evidence of resistance was sparse generally.¹³ A discrepancy cannot be accepted as evidence that there was no resistance at all in Helpstone. No record of overt protest or violent resistance to the Helpstone enclosure has, as yet, been traced and there is no record of this in the House of Commons Journals. Such action could always be put down by official intervention, usually military, and thus many protesters had come to recognise the futility of violence. Recourse to lawful, but covert, resistance always remained open. Neeson states that

Northamptonshire had a history of resistance to enclosure since the rising of 1607 and points out that ‘the collective memory of the ‘many little ones’ must have informed all their social relations in the enclosed village over the years that followed’. Her research establishes considerable local opposition in the county generally, very often unlawful resistance.¹⁴ There is a record of machine-burning in Alwalton and rioting in Sawtry, both places under ten miles from Helpstone.¹⁵ Clare would have been aware of any local complaints and discontent in his immediate vicinity. He has left a record of those people he regarded as close friends and neighbours, and these names recur on the list of Claimants. Any resentment they expressed either about delay or the outcome of their Claims would probably have been known to him.

These two first questions are so closely connected that one explanation can be applied to both. The Helpstone and district enclosure area included a number of small farmers and landholders who could not have expended large sums of money on fees to mount legal opposition, had they wished to do so. Illegal and violent protest was another option for those opposing the proposal but, as Lord Fitzwilliam and other chief promoters of the scheme were the principal landlords in the area and in some cases the employers of the smaller men, such resistance was dangerous in terms of job-security and tenancies. Passive resistance remained. Any delaying tactics that could hold up Commissioners’ work by compelling them to devote further time to discussion and inspection would delay an enclosure but not defeat the project as a whole. It has not yet been brought to light that such measures were used here.

Using the Commissioners’ Minutes as source material we immediately have the impression that they intended to press ahead with their work. After the Act became law they held their first meeting on 8 June 1809, the second on 7 July 1809 when Claims were called for by 7 August 1809. Examination of their Minutes has revealed several instances of delay. Initially this occurred in the submission of Claims. It was not until 14 September 1809, after personal application by the Clerk, that ‘the greater Part of the residue’ had been received (p. 10). Additional Claims were still being received in August 1810. From a largely illiterate and hard-working group of landworkers such delay can be accepted as predictable. Twenty-one specific Objections can be traced in this five-year period, but unfortunately the references are to ‘further Objections’ and ‘several Objections’ being received, which makes absolute accuracy impossible. By 13 November 1809 Perambulations were being held and were attended by many owners of land to be enclosed. Examples of delay that may have been genuine or otherwise appear at once. An Objection was raised by Commoners of the Borough Fen, with Maxey, Northborough and Glinton claiming the Wash as part of North Fen Common. This occasioned a great deal of work. Records show that books were perused and witnesses were examined. Further evidence and a

great number of witnesses were heard at the next meeting, and searches ordered in divers old books. By 24 January 1810 witnesses, books, papers, and writings were still being examined. A further search was ordered. By 9 March 1810 it was reported that the search had revealed nothing. This is a clear example of the delay that can be caused by one Objection alone. A second example is the Application received on January 1812 concerning the foundation of a house on which Right of Common was claimed. This necessitated an Inspection. No appearance of a regular foundation was found, but time-consuming work had been found. These queries may or may not have been genuine or could be interpreted as delaying tactics, the second may be illustrative of the importance that Rights of Common had assumed. The work was never straightforward. By 1812 Rates were owing and warning letters were drafted; there were Objections from Proprietors concerning their Allotments, and that foot roads had been stopped up; in 1813 that fencing had been neglected and that a bridle road had been put across the corner of a farmer's land. Complaints held up the routine business of meetings, eventually becoming routine themselves. By 1814 the first report of damage occurs. This was to the bank of the Brook Drain and Etton Bridge but as the repairs were ordered to be done as soon as the weather permitted it is not clear whether the initial damage was in fact caused by weather. Clare has recorded that he worked with gangs on enclosure fencing and it is reasonable to assume that he was aware of any incidence of damage. It is unlikely that he was, in fact, involved with it personally but likely that he was conscious of the reasons that gave rise to it.¹⁶ There is no mention of it in his writings. These details in the Minutes allow us to establish that there were eight delays, twenty-one objections, four complaints, and one case of damage in this district in a five-year period and that extra work was occasioned. It has become clear that it is difficult to decide whether any Objection or Complaint was genuine. The findings supply a feasible explanation where delay is concerned. This could also have constituted a form of passive resistance but cannot be proven. The relevance of the delay to Clare as a writer lies in the contribution that the detailed background knowledge of the effects of Enclosure and social change that he acquired as an observer would make to his work. This can be detected in the numerous angry and resentful references to these subjects in both his poetry and prose, which will also be discussed in the next section.

The third question remains, namely why Clare, a landless labourer like his father, was so bitterly hostile to enclosure or, indeed, why he was involved in the subject at all. He was not financially affected and they had no Rights of Common. In 1809 Mrs Millicent Clarke of Helpstone, the owner of the Clare's rented cottage, submitted her Claim: 'Four houses in tenure of P. Clare, J. Burton and others, two tofts [...] in tenure of self [...] together with Right of

Common for each house', confirming the fact that neither Clare nor his father had any entitlement. Peacock's comment that in 1816 a number of parishes in East Anglia were in doubt as to the outcome of their Claims is relevant.¹⁷ During a period of eleven years such matters would have been discussed in the villages concerned, and the details and discontent no doubt magnified with the discussion, and ale. These debates would not have been unnoticed by a discerning recorder who was also an impressionable with discussion and ale. Poet Clare was acutely aware that a village was ever a hotbed of gossip:

Bred in a village full of strife & noise
 Old senseless gossips & blackguarding boys
 Ploughmen & threshers whose discourses led
 To nothing more than labours rude employs
 'Bout work being slack & rise & fall of bread
 & who were like to dye ere while & who were like to wed¹⁸

In his case nostalgia for the much-loved and familiar landmarks and landscape of his childhood and youth, eradicated as the countryside was defaced, was a contributory factor, inspiring him to write in 'The Mores':

Far spread the moorey ground a level scene
 Bespread with rush & one eternal green
 That never felt the rage of blundering plough [...]
 Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
 Nor fence of ownershp crept in between
 To hide the prospect of the following eye [...]
 Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours
 Is faded all—a hope that blossomed free
 & hath been once no more shall ever be
 Inclosure came & trampled on the grave
 Of labours rights & left the poor a slave
 & memorys pride ere want to wealth did bow
 Is both the shadow & the substance now [...]
 Moors loosing from the sight far smooth and blea
 Where swopt the plover in its pleasure free

Are vanished now with commons wild & gay [...]
 Fence now meets fence in owners little bounds
 Of field & meadow large as garden grounds
 In little parcels little minds to please
 With men & flocks imprisoned ill at ease (ll. 1-50)

He is also underlining the point that when the labourer lost his own strips of land he lost the right to work independently for himself, a change in farming policy that compelled him to become a landless labourer working for the owners of large, newly-enclosed holdings, if such work became available under the new system. Men and animals are depicted as imprisoned and 'ill at ease'. The reference to uneasiness strikes a warning note, either intentionally or unintentionally. It is possible that the poet, as a detached observer, had detected some indication that action against enclosure might be taken, or had heard some plans for disruption. It is also significant that a reference to 'labour's rights' has been introduced. As the open-field economy vanished and the percentage of pasture increased so the employment available for women, boys and the unskilled worker disappeared also. Hoskins considers that 'The new economy economised on labour' and that only one third or a quarter of the labour was employed under the new system.¹⁹ For Clare it was the loss of personal freedom that was repugnant. By extension, in his opinion, everything and everyone seemed to have become enclosed. In the same poem he stresses that at one time the very sheep and cows had been free to range:

Cows went & came with every morn & night
 To the wild pasture as their common right
 & sheep unfolded with the rising sun
 Heard the swains shout & felt their freedom won
 Tracked the red fallow field & heath & plain
 Then met the brook & drank and roamed again (ll. 25-30)

The loss of commons and common right was uppermost in his mind. His scorn for the enclosers was unlimited, again depicted in 'The Mores':

These paths are stopt—the rude philistines thrall
 Is laid upon them & destroyed them all
 Each little tyrant with his little sign

Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine (ll. 65-68)²⁰

Repetition of the word 'little' throughout the poem indicates his contempt for the uncaring and unscrupulous who were seen to claim land at the expense of others. The average villager, not well-versed in the policy of a cash economy as compared with subsistence farming, could not be expected to appreciate the advantages of scientific agricultural improvements that seemed so patently detrimental to his individual interests. Such matters as the rapid rise in the population, the subsequent need for increased food production, and the necessity to generate more capital for investment in agriculture were not subjects that might be expected to feature in the discussions in local alehouses in remote villages. Indeed, it is questionable whether Clare himself addressed these problems very deeply, particularly as a younger man.

Nevertheless the intense personal bitterness that Clare expressed about enclosure and the loss of commoning rights is so outstanding that it cannot be explained solely as nostalgia for the golden age of the past. It merits further investigation. The letters to his sons from Northampton General Asylum between June 1849 and March 1860 (Appendix B) provide a list of many of his close friends and neighbours and, by relating these to the Claims that were put forward to the Commissioners for land, house property, or Rights of Common, and to the final Award, some names recur. Four abridged examples have been selected from the Claims:

Claim no:

- 26 John Billings, in Helpstone. A Commonable Messuage and Homestead. Two acres, more or less, of Field Land. One Acre and a Half, more or less, of Meadow Land. All Freehold, and in his own occupation.
- 41 John Burbidge, of Glinton, yeoman. Claim for Right of Common and a Freehold Messuage, with the Yard, Garden, and Homestead.
- 53 John Crowson, in Helpstone. Claim for A Commonable Messuage, with the Garden, &c, in his own occupation, Freehold.
- 155 Richard Royce, of Helpstone. Claim for Right of Common in respect of: A Messuage, with Garden and Orchard. The Scite or Toftstead, whereon a Messuage formerly stood, with the Homestead or Garden. Freehold.²¹

While there is no reference to any dispute involving these mentioned, their Claims and Rights must have been a subject for on-going discussion during the eleven years of Commissioners' meetings, perambulations, and debate, and Clare, through his own and his parents' connections in the village would have been on the fringe of these discussions from the age of sixteen. The Minutes show that the majority of meetings were held at the New Inn, Market Deeping. Clare's parcels were collected from The Bull in Market Deeping, a short distance from the New Inn, by him or some member of his family, and the opportunity for an exchange of tavern news here with employees is obvious.²² The possibility that discussions, or the grumbling of applicants, were overheard by staff at the New Inn and repeated, cannot be discounted. This period of delay in the settlement of Claims would have been a time of tension for those waiting to learn the terms of their Award. A sensitive man able to identify with the feelings and problems of others would become as one with their cause. Enclosure was an expensive business for all those caught up in it. Not only was there the expense of employing Commissioners, solicitors, and surveyors, but also legal and parliamentary charges, the cost of constructing new buildings, new public roads, fencing, gates, and drains and laying out footpaths as well as felling and carting timber. Hundreds of quicksets were needed to construct miles of posts and rails. Attending to the rights of church and tithe owners also had to be accounted for. It is reasonable to conjecture that this was a matter for major complaint among smallholders who could not envisage any personal benefit from the changes. Indeed, Tate has described it as 'absurdly expensive, and often a major problem for the small man'.²³ Clare's friends and neighbours, as shown in Appendix A were farmers, smallholders, and craftsmen from the area so well known to him. Study of the Claims and Awards provides evidence that he was literally surrounded by people who were affected by the enclosure procedure in some way. His former schoolteacher Mrs Bullimore, and the cobbler Will Farrow whose shop Clare had identified as 'a place of amusement for the young ploughmen and labourers on winter evenings' were among them.²⁴ Concern on behalf of sorely-trying friends such as the Billings brothers, already discussed in section 3.4, is wholly understandable. In matters concerning injustice and deprivation Clare was easily roused. This is evident in some of the poems he wrote on the subject of widows, wounded soldiers, and ill-treated or neglected animals. 'The Badger' and 'The Fox' are examples of the latter.²⁵ The comparison between the treatment of animals and the privation of the labouring poor is made in 'On seeing a lost Greyhound in winter lying upon the snow in the fields':

Tho thou'rt a dog (with grief I say't)

Poor men thy fare partakes
 Like thee lost whelp the poor mans help
 Ere while so much desir'd
 Now harvests got is wanted not
 Or little is requir'd²⁶

a clear reference to the employment of seasonal labour that became prevalent as the need for labour declined when arable open fields were superceded by enclosed pasture. The villages and hamlets in question were small and Clare probably visited some of them regularly, rubbing shoulders with smallholders, craftsmen and labourers. He may have been employed as a day labourer on occasions by some. This gives rise to an analysis of the influence of discussion in such an environment. There were several alehouses and two inns in Helpstone alone and eleven years of long winter evenings in which villagers could debate the rights and wrongs of daily life. Hobsbawn and Rudé describe a village inn as:

[...] A natural centre of meeting and discussion. [...] and the less formal and official beer houses were constantly being accused of being centres of subversion, i.e. of discussion. The inn, where not the only secular meeting place, was often one of two, so it could not help but become a vehicle of politics.

They also present a view of a village:

The English village of the early nineteenth century was plainly not a dark backwater totally insulated from knowledge and contact with the more dynamic sectors of society. Village radicals (as often as not the shoemakers, whose literacy and intellectualism were proverbial) radical craftsmen and shopkeepers in small market towns, provided a link with the wider world and formulated ideas and programmes which the labourers sometimes made their own, if only because rural crafts—men and others of the kind so often acted as their spokesmen and organisers.²⁷

News circulated from Stamford. Clare had no illusions about the backwardness of 'humble Helpstone' where he considered 'Usless ign'rance slumbers life away'.²⁸ He described his personal situation in a letter to Hessey: 'Now & then seeking the 'Bell' to be cheerd with the [?silence] of company w[ho] sleep all day with their eyes open or only [wake] to howl about the

times'.²⁹ He had also worked at the 'Bell' in Helpstone for a year as a young man so was well-versed in current local opinion. The owner, an immediate neighbour, was a Claimant and received an Award.

The case of Clare's old friends, John and James Billings, smallholders of Helpstone, provides an example of what could be a typical case of financial problems caused by enclosure. When their Claim was awarded it was clearly stated that each small parcel of their land was to be fenced and maintained by them. Hoskins points out that allotments to the wealthy and the Vicar were often made 'at the expense of other proprietors' and that all their small parcels of land had to be 'mounded and fenced round by ditches and good hedges, good posts and double rails'.³⁰ In the case of the Billings this represented great expense, of whose home Clare wrote: 'It is an old ruinous hut and hath needed repairs ever since I knew it for they neither mend up the walls nor thatch the roof being negligent men but quiet and inoffensive neighbours'. He had already described how, as a youth, he used to spend 'many winter nights and sabbath leisures' at their house, a focal point where the young men of the village used to 'sing and drink the night away'.³¹ Financial problems soon arose for the Billings. The Minutes show that in May 1811 John Billings paid 8/- Rates; in November of that year a further £2; and in June 1812 £11.19.3 as part of his Rates. The expense of enclosure had to be shared on a pro-rata basis and this, for something that was not universally wanted, was a heavy burden. Clearly it would create difficulties for some. Village gossip and ale would only inflame resentment, Clare felt sufficiently strongly about his friends' dilemma to write a ditty to them entitled 'Billings sorrows in being sober for want of money to get drunk' in which their oppression under the weight of parish rates and taxes is depicted:

The taxes distress me
 & parish rates dress me
 Out of all my good money and calling
 So here I sit growling
 & whooping & howling
 Far away from the beer house a bawling³²

Two years after the Award was finalised they were in financial difficulty. Clare's capacity for involvement in the troubles of others is demonstrated in a letter to Taylor outlining the Billings's problems.

‘Bachelors Hall’ is on the wreck or nearly so—when the inclosure was they mortgagd the property for 200 to a Jew a second Iago [...] & thus it is that the Billings being my oldest now only friends in the village I cannot see these rogues pursue their prey uninterrupted—nothing is a greater hell to me then to see an old friend wrongd by intentional villany by meditated fraud—hell overtake them but I make one desperate struggle in behalf of an harmless man

He then set out a plan to sell his future work to Taylor for that sum to enable him to obtain the mortgage and acquire the property. The scheme came to nothing, but Clare’s language in this letter is indicative of his depth of feeling. He continued: ‘My feelings are roused to madness at such acts of violence & my imagination cannot withhold attempting struggle to save a sinking fellow creature & more especially a friend [...]’³³ The last we hear of the Billings brothers is from Clare himself. In November 1829, in an attempt to secure the release of his fund money, he wrote to Taylor: ‘I have cleared the prospect to see a little further as to how I must proceed for the future & my intentions are to get a small farm or cottage as soon as possible [...] & if I can I should like to purchase Billings House & land which will come under the hammer very shortly [...]’.³⁴ Evidently the Billings brothers were compelled to relinquish their property nine years after Helpstone was enclosed, although the reason for this has not been found. (John Billings died in December 1838, in Helpstone, aged 76).³⁵ Enclosure expenses undoubtedly caused resentment and would have been a major topic of discussion in a small rural area. Clare would have been well-informed about this and could identify with the problems of his close companions, which this case demonstrates.

The eleven-year interim period between the passing of the Act and the publication of the final Award was a time of deep national disturbance. Although Luddism, 1811-17,³⁶ was confined to the West Riding, Nottingham, Leicestershire and Derbyshire and, as a dispute in the woollen industry did not directly affect Clare or his area, the news would have been carried in the London Newspapers, repeated in the local papers, and conveyed to the outlying districts by visitors or travelling tradesmen. Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire are adjacent counties to Northamptonshire and Clare worked in Newark for a short time. He also went to Nottingham in an unsuccessful attempt to join the militia.³⁷ News of an uprising would undoubtedly be a matter for general discussion. Thompson comments on the unrest:

Luddism must be seen as arising at the crisis—point in the abrogation of paternalist legislation, and in the imposition of the political economy of laissez-faire upon, and

against the will and conscience of, the working people. [...] One can see Luddism as a manifestation of a working-class culture of greater independence and complexity than any known to the eighteenth century.³⁸

The Government had been deeply unpopular for some time. In May 1812 the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, had been assassinated in the House of Commons.³⁹ The various Corn Laws, introduced between 1815 and 1846, were to the detriment of the working man and caused Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer, to write, as bitterly as Clare. The incidence of the East Anglia Riots by agricultural workers in 1816 during this hiatus-period in the affairs of the Helpstone enclosure, the concern that this caused, and its relevance to Clare's work, is a fact that appears to have been largely overlooked. A subsequent uprising in 1822 is described by Hobsbawm and Rudé as 'less dramatic [...] but more persistent and in many ways more successful.'⁴⁰ General prosperity for large farmers due to agricultural profits either from high prices, enclosure, or the introduction of more scientific farming methods, had marked the war years. No such benefits had accrued to the labourers however, who were disadvantaged by the high price of food and unemployment simultaneously, and discontent was rife. These riots, which affected Norfolk, Suffolk, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire, all counties contiguous to Northamptonshire, initially took the form of threatening letters to landowners and farmers but later developed into arson directed against property, animals and crops. The protesters were demanding bread and beer, or blood.⁴¹ At this time it is not surprising to find the average man not only searching for a reasonable livelihood but for greater personal independence. The Peterloo incident of 1819 and the activities of the Cato Street Gang in 1820 have been discussed in chapter 2.2. In the year 1818 Clare was writing 'The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters', not only as a labourer and poor man himself but also as a poet, impelled to record the feelings and opinions of those around him who were suffering deprivation, while moneyed men profited at what seemed like their expense:

I never can withhold my tears
 To think how I am sarv'd
 To think how money'd men delight
 More cutting then the storm
 To make a sport and prove their might
 O' me a fellow worm

Later in the same poem he expressed what could have been a view prevalent at that time among his fellow men, namely that the enclosers were their enemies:

‘Ah cruel foes with plenty blest
 ‘So ankering after more
 ‘To lay the greens & pastures waste
 ‘Which proffited before
 ‘Poor greedy souls—what would they have
 ‘Beyond their plenty given?
 ‘Will riches keep ’em from the grave?
 ‘Or buy them rest in heaven?’⁴²

Williams points to the fact that much of the country had already been enclosed by a process which had continued since at least the thirteenth century, and adds:

There is no reason to deny the critical importance of the period of parliamentary enclosures, from the second quarter of the eighteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century [...] Again, as the economy develops, enclosure can never really be isolated from the mainstream of land improvements, or changes in methods of production, of price-movements, and of those more general changes in property relationships which were all flowing in the same direction; an extension of cultivated land but also a concentration of ownership into the hands of a minority.⁴³

The changes in farming practice that Enclosure had brought with it included the abolition of commoning rights, a loss that presented further problems. As Anscombe points out, common right usually went with either a cottage or land: ‘Even if the cottager could prove that common right did attach to his premises, the small plot he would receive in exchange would not really compensate him for the right to turn stock into the open fields’.⁴⁴ This left ample room for dispute and resentment, followed by endless debate, both official and unofficial. Many local people known to Clare, if not all of them, held Rights of Common through ownership of house property or land and study of the Claims reveals that all claimants had their right registered.

Some study of the complex law of the Rights of Common which, broadly speaking, amounted to the keep of a horse or cow, sheep, and geese, on the common land, and gleaning, in proportion to the acreage of land held, reveals the hardship involved when this loss occurred.

Neeson has listed the free benefits that could be gathered from the open common in the way of herbs, nuts, vegetables and berries, sand for cleaning or for sale, rushes for lighting, furze and sticks for cooking and warmth, hares, rabbits, birds, fish and feathers.⁴⁵ Gleaning after harvest, she stated ‘was a common practice, universally regarded as a common right’. It has been estimated that ‘gleaners in Roade, Northamptonshire, gathered enough corn after harvest to make bread to last the rest of the year, worth about six per cent of the family’s annual income’.⁴⁶ There is no such record for Helpstone, but Clare does mention the gleaning that he did personally and also records the cazons, the nuts, berries, fish and rabbits that he acquired from the waste land.⁴⁷ The enumeration of this apparent trivia assumes new importance when it is appreciated that the poor had no substitutes for these commodities. Without money, purchasing was impossible, so deprivation was the inevitable result. The product of the commons made a significant impact on the supply of food for a family. Thompson comments that ‘The land was no longer common to all but an economic investment for the few’.⁴⁸ For Clare, who had no entitlement to commoning rights, what he had lost was, in his opinion, more valuable. He undoubtedly felt he had a very personal entitlement, the right to roam at his own free will over his native land. His sense of loss was also for landscape that he regarded as belonging to him and to all men. The average villager who was losing commoning rights was also losing income in the form of subsistence, which had given him a marginal independence. He and his family lost the value of a thrift economy to which they and other villagers had become accustomed; although with or without permission is not clear. In 1821 the following well-known epigram had been published:

The fault is great in man or woman
 Who steals a goose from off a common
 But what can plead that man’s excuse
 Who steals a common from a goose!⁴⁹

The authorship of these lines has remained anonymous and it has never been suggested that they could be attributed to Clare. However, what he saw as injustice continued to incense him.

Between 1822 and 1824 he wrote ‘On finding a Favoutite Nook Destroyed’:

Ye birds & beasts of fates despited birth
 Forced from the wilds which nature left your home
 By vile evasions of encroaching men [...]
 Ah tyrant knaves while preaching freedoms laws

Crying down tyranny in stronger powers
 You glut your vile unsatiated maws
 & freedoms birthright in the weak devours⁵⁰

Strong words indeed. The subject of displacement was frequently in his mind. As late as 1830, in 'The Fallen Elm', he was repeating the view that it was 'the cant of tyranny in stronger powers' to remove the birthright of the weak:

It grows the liscence of oerbearing fools
 To cheat plain honesty by force of might
 Thus came enclosure—ruin was its guide
 But freedoms clapping hands enjoyed the sight
 Though comforts cottage soon was thrust aside
 & work house prisons raised upon the scite
 Een natures dwellings far away from men
 The common heath became the spoilers prey
 The rabbit hath not where to make his den
 And labours only cow was drove away
 No matter- wrong was right and right was wrong
 & freedoms bawl was sanction to the song⁵¹

The thrusting aside of comfort's cottage is an allusion to the removal of squatters' huts on the commons, demolished when waste land was enclosed. Familiar homes were lost to the poor and workhouses were built to replace them. Such references to 'labour's rights', quoted on p. 6, to 'tyrants' and 'o'erbearing fools', are pointers to the working man's view, by the early nineteenth century, of those in authority, and his increasing search for independence for himself.

By the mid-1820's Clare's social life had developed. He had been entertained in the homes of some of the affluent in Stamford, had visited London three times, been invited to call at Burghley and Milton Hall, and had seen something of the lifestyle of the wealthy. It is tempting to speculate that he may have used the theme of Enclosure as a cover to enable him to inveigh against wealth and privilege generally, a criticism that possibly began as early as the period 1809-1813, when 'accurs'd wealth' was attacked in 'Helpstone', the poem of which he had had such 'great hopes' and at one time fancied might be his 'Master piece'.⁵² There was always the enduring picture of the magnificence of Burghley as a near neighbour to compare with the

poverty of his cottage in Helpstone. As there is no concrete evidence that such matters were in his mind when he wrote ‘The Mores’ however, this must remain conjecture. Thompson finds that ‘The ground-swell of rural grievance came back always to access to the land’ and concludes:

The yearning for land arises again and again, twisted in with the outworker’s desire for an ‘independence’, from the days of Spence to the Chartist Land Plan and beyond. Perhaps its vestiges are still with us today, in allotments and garden plots. Land always carries associations—of status, security, rights,—more profound than the value of its crop.⁵³

Enclosure was a highly emotive subject and one over which the two interests were unlikely to agree. The capitalist considered that the powerful, wealthy, and educated were taking the global, and pragmatic view with the economic interests of the country at heart: those enduring deprivation and poverty could only attribute the drive for enclosure as greed and pride, the main cause of all their woes. This was a clash of values that could not be reconciled. The average villager was experiencing change in almost every walk of life and was not likely to enjoy an experience so overloaded with personal hardship. Against this background Clare was writing about life as he experienced it. At the same time he became the chronicler of an important period of social and economic change and disruption in the rural life of his time.

NOTES

1. *Mercury*, 18 February 1809. ‘Inclosure—the lawyers’ spelling of enclosure’. W. E. Tate, *The English Village Community and the Enclosure Movements* (London: Gollancz, 1967), p. 188.
2. *Mercury*, 24 February 1809.
3. W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: the Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* (London: Macmillan, 1957), p. 247.
4. John Clare, *Middle Period*, II, p. 350.
5. J.W. Anscombe, ‘Parliamentary Enclosure in Northamptonshire: Processes and Procedures’, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 7: 6 (1988-89), 409-23 (p. 422).
6. J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1777-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 263.
7. J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832: A Study of the Government of England Before the Reform Bill* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1987), p. 45.

8. W. E. Tate, 'Inclosure Movements in Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 2 (1949), 19-33 (p. 30).
9. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 240.
10. J. M. Neeson, 'The Opponents of Enclosure in Eighteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Past and Present*, 105 (1984), 114-39 (p. 118, p. 132).
11. W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest A Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 270.
12. A. J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood: The Agrarian Riots in East Anglia: 1816* (London: Gollancz, 1963), p. 17.
13. *Village Labourer*, p. 260.
14. Neeson, 'Opponents of Enclosure', pp. 126, 139.
15. E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp.116-18. Commissioners' Minutes. As these are not paginated I have inserted the page numbering.
16. *By Himself*, p. 90.
17. Peacock, p. 17.
18. *Early Poems*, II, p. 139.
19. *Middle Period*, II, pp. 347-50.
20. Hoskins, p. 263.
21. *Letters*, pp. 663-83.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
23. Tate, *The English Village*, p. 23, p. 174.
24. *By Himself*, p. 64.
25. John Clare, *Northborough Sonnets*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995), pp. 25-27.
26. *Early Poems*, I, p. 202.
27. Hobsbawm and Rudé, p. 38, p. xiv.
28. *Early Poems*, I, p. 156.
29. *Letters*, p. 257.
30. Hoskins, pp. 251-55.
31. *By Himself*, p. 52.
32. *Middle Period*, II, p.76.
33. *Letters*, pp. 227-28.
34. *Letters*, p. 480 and n. 20. NMS 30.

35. Helpstone Burial Records, entry no. 211, 9 December 1838. The entry is signed ‘C. Mossop’.
36. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 570.
37. *By Himself*, pp. 76-77.
38. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 594, 658.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 623.
40. Hobsbawm and Rudé, p. 60.
41. Peacock, p.116.
42. *Early Poems*, I, p. 228-34.
43. Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (London: Hogarth, 1985), p. 97.
44. Anscombe, ‘Parliamentary Enclosure’, p. 416.
45. Neeson, *Commoners*, pp. 158-70.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 313-14.
47. *By Himself*, pp. 39, 40 and 68, 47, 199.
48. E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin 1993), p. 184.
49. In Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 92 and note 90.
50. *Middle Period*, III, p. 443.
51. *Middle Period*, II, p. 34. Clare gives his description of a workhouse in ‘The Village Funeral’, dated 1815:

Yon Workhouse stands as their asylum now
 The place where poverty demands to live
 Where parish bounty scouls his scornful brow
 & grudges the scant fare he’s forc’d to give

Early Poems, I, p. 227.
52. *Early Poems*, I, pp. 156-63, p. 569 n.
53. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 253-54.

Chapter 5. Social Change

Continuing the theme of enclosure, this chapter constitutes a survey of the social changes that followed on its heels. To examine this, three issues that contributed to these changes, (a) unemployment, (b) common right, and (c) custom, have been considered.

In the opinion of E. P. Thompson:

Enclosure (when all the sophistications are allowed for) was a plain enough case of class robbery, played according to fair rules of property and laid down by a parliament of property-owners and lawyers. Recent scholarship suggests that the rules of the game were kept to more fairly than was suggested by the Hammonds in their great *Village Labourer*: even very small property-owners received reasonable treatment, many enclosure commissioners acted conscientiously, and so on.¹

What seems clear in the opinion of the average working man is that he was not actively involved in the decision-making that was to alter his whole way of life and that of his community. As will be found in the following quotations from Clare's poetry, there was an impression of slavery, or he was interpreting the reaction of his fellows as such. Alternatively, it may have been his own personal opinion. In one example '[Labour and Luxury]', which may have been written in 1818, he states:

Luxury's wealth & pride upholding
 Poor labours slav'd to dead
 While they die gorg'd like beast in clover
 We die for wants of bread²

At the same time, it is unlikely that the small man genuinely expected such weighty matters to be discussed between wealthy landowners and humble workers. Nevertheless the changes were resented, gradual though they may have been. As the machinery of government was organised at that time both the political scene and agriculture were dominated by the aristocracy and the gentry. Thus Enclosure was seen from two totally different standpoints. As Hobsbawm and Rudé comment:

The upper classes probably did not realise, until riot and incendiarism taught them differently, quite how much they had been excluded from the village community by the poor. The squire still saw himself as the paternal protector, the farmer as strict but humane, and both saw the labourer as obedient, grateful and fundamentally at one with the traditional hierarchy of rank. [...] There is evidence that in 1830 the labourers and their sympathizers did not normally want a disruption of the old society, but a restoration of their rights within it, modest, subaltern, but *rights*. The gentry almost certainly, a proportion of the farmers probably, resented and resisted the disintegration of the old order and would have liked to maintain it. What they failed to see was that their very actions as landowners and farmers, the very fact of their growing wealth and changing styles of life, turned their attachment to the traditional order into empty phrase [...] What they did was to create an order in which the poor were pauperized and rightless, and rank and wealth became caste superiority.³

Mention has already been made in the previous section to the references to rights that began to appear in Clare's poetry dated early to mid-1820s. In the Helpstone district some attempt at general involvement in the enclosure debate was made although only one instance can be cited. In 1811 it was recorded in the Commissioners Minutes that the clerk was ordered 'To apply to two or three of the most intelligent Inhabitants in each parish or place within this Inclosure and request their attendance at the next meeting'. Clare makes no comment about this. He was aged eighteen at the time and it is unlikely that he was involved in any way. That next meeting was concerned with the valuation of land in the area and was attended 'by many of the occupiers of the lands referred to'.⁴ (As a farm worker he would not have been expected to have informed views on this subject). From this statement, and from the meticulous detail recorded in the Minutes, it appears that there was a moderate approach in the case of this enclosure and that the Commissioners did act conscientiously. Edward Hare, one of these Commissioners, had acted in 1771 and 1773 for Lord Fitzwilliam in his Yorkshire estates and was no doubt an old and trusted servant.⁵ From what is recorded in chapter 3.8 about this particular land owner there is no indication that he would have wished matters to be handled otherwise.

Agriculture had become vital to the economy of the country. The wars which had begun in 1793 had stopped the import of cereals, and recent poor harvests had added to the pressure for farming modernisation in the name of national interest. However, workers generally, with no voice in the discussions, had little understanding of the benefits they were told would flow from any new system.⁶ With no comprehension of a market-driven agricultural policy the whole

concept of enclosure was, understandably, judged by them from the personal and sceptical point of view of the small farmer or labourer. From necessity, and despite his dislike for the project, Clare himself was compelled to participate in the general work of enclosure in his area already referred to in chapter 4. He states his own preference for open fields unequivocally:

Read in old Tusser with whose quaint rhymes I have often been entertained [...] he seems to have felt a taste for inclosures and Mavor that busy notemaker and book compiler of school boy memory has added an impertinent note to tussers opinion as an echo of feint praise so much for a parsons opinion in such matters—I am an advocate for open fields and I think that others expirience confirms my opinion every day⁷

This statement also confirms that Clare had heard the opinions of others on this vexed question.

As strips of the open field system were engrossed into small holdings or farms, enclosed by fencing or hedges, so capital was needed to meet the expense of such enclosure. Such capital was not always available to a small man. The freehold cottager received only a small allotment of land in respect of his property, lost his common rights, and his holding was no longer a viable proposition. Those severely affected were compelled to sell their land and seek employment in the cities. The example in the previous chapter indicates that the Billings brothers struggled to meet the rates imposed to meet the costs of enclosure and that their property was finally offered for sale, although the reason cannot be confirmed. Some smallholders remained in their villages as landless labourers, some becoming roundsmen. Changes in the farming system from open field arable to pasture affected a large number of people as less labour was needed. As previously noted, Hoskins considers that after enclosure one third or a quarter of the former labour force was used.⁸ Craftsmen such as wheelwrights and carpenters, lost work, as did the common shepherds and pinders.⁹ Unemployment caused poverty and deprivation; resentment was inevitable.

With the abandonment of the open field system was the loss of companionship that was a daily occurrence when strips were being worked, and after work when crop rotation would be under discussion at communal meetings and close co-operation was needed. As Neeson comments:

The description of common fields as open fields is entirely appropriate. Distances are shorter when fields are in strips. You can call from one to the next. You can plough them and talk across the backs of the horses at the same time.¹⁰

Such losses in themselves constituted disruption in the life of the community. In addition, the customary master and servant relationship on large farms was declining, with the number employed and the practice of being summarily discontinued, causing a break in communication between the work-force and employers. This was particularly noticeable in harvest time and is mentioned in one of the ‘songs of complaint’ of the early nineteenth century quoted by Howkins and Dyck:

The master of the board would sit, the table for to grace,
 The servants as they all came in, they took their proper place,
 The good old dame with cheerful heart, gave to each man his due,
 Where plenty then it did abound, when this old hat was new.
 But now the times are altered much, and the poor are quite done o’er,
 The men do get their wages paid like beggars at the door,
 Inside the house they must not come, if they be e’er so few,
 Which cruelty did ne’er abound, when this old hat was new.

And they comment:

Central to the old order was social harmony. (‘How often were we merry made’ or ‘The master at the board would sit’) symbolised by the similarities of behaviour and dress. Yet it was not an equal society (‘The servants as they all came in, they took their proper place’); rather, it was one in which men were bound together by their ‘words’ into a society of mutuality.¹¹

A different version of this song, ‘When this old hat was new’,¹² is included by Deacon among the songs known to Clare, who had this to say on the same subject in *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, published in 1827:

& the old freedom that was living then
 When masters made them merry wi’ their men
 Whose coat was like his neighbors russet brown
 & whose rude speech was vulgar as his clown [...]
 All this is past—& soon may pass away

The time torn remnant of the holiday
 As proud distinction makes a wider space
 Between the genteel & the vulgar race¹³

These old songs, and his comments, if accepted as accurate accounts, represent valuable historical narratives to-day.

Enclosure was accompanied by strict enforcement of commoning rights. As Thompson points out:

Those petty rights of the villagers, such as access to fuel, and the tethering of stock in the lanes or on the stubble, which are irrelevant to the historian of economic growth, might be of critical importance to the subsistence of the poor.¹⁴

These benefits have been enumerated in the previous chapter. To the men who had been newly reduced in status to that of wage labourers (as well as to those who were already relying on their acquisitions from the commons) the loss of rights represented a considerable loss of subsistence, and therefore independence. They were no longer property owners, free from subservience and dependence in their own eyes at least, and thus had become inferior to those who were landowners, however small. This created a new structure in the community. Comradeship and dependence on each other vanished to a great extent when the necessity to discuss and plan future agricultural programmes was dispensed with. In some areas the right to glean was also abolished, in others it was tolerated as some sort of charity. The Hammonds state: ‘After a decision in the Court of Common Pleas in 1788, gleaning was decided upon entirely at the farmer’s discretion’.¹⁵ Clare, who mentions his own gleaning, was probably able to do this by some custom proper to his particular village. What he, and no doubt some of his fellow men could not accept, or understand, was how this change of circumstances could have happened to them without any participation, on their part, in the decision-making that was to affect their livelihoods and their way of life. If queries were raised the changes could be explained by the powers -that-be as modernization in the national interest in a time of war, especially after bad harvests. Neeson draws attention to the work of George Bourne:

who [...] argued that the life commoners got was particularly satisfying. On one level, satisfaction came from the varied nature of the work. Commoners had a variety of tasks, many calling for skill and invention, and they had a sure knowledge of their value. [...]

Bourne [...] knew he was describing something that had almost disappeared. [...] But his description reminds me powerfully of the recurrent themes of John Clare's poetry. [...] Bourne thought that a commoner's sense of well-being came from a sense of ownership or possession, a feeling of belonging, and an overwhelming localness. This was not the ownership of a few acres (though that is surely important too) but the possession of a landscape. [...] Like Clare, Bourne's commoner 'did not merely "reside"' in his parish: he was part of it and it was part of him. He fitted into it as one of its native denizens, like the hedgehogs and the thrushes. All that happened to it happened to him. Commoners were the 'human fauna' of their lands. They lived with its seasons, they knew its history and its geography, they felt a sense of belonging in the routines of every day spent on it [...]. All that the commoner did, others did too. Going to get rushes was doing what was appropriate, what the village did, what ought to be done. Each usage of common waste created a sense of self: it told commoners who they were.¹⁶

Inevitably, country life followed the routine set by the seasons, as Clare depicts in *The Shepherd's Calendar*:

Anon the fields are wearing clear
 And glad sounds hum in labours ear
 When children halo 'here they come'
 And run to meet the harvest home
 Stuck thick with boughs and thronged with boys
 Who mingle loud a merry noise
 Glad that the harvests end is nigh
 And weary labour nearly bye
 Where when they meet the stack thronged yard
 Cross buns or pence their shouts reward
 Then comes the harvest supper night
 Which rustics welcome with delight
 When merry game & tiresome tale
 & songs increasing with the ale
 Their mingled up roar interpose
 To crown the harvests happy close
 While rural mirth that there abides

Laughs till she almost cracks her sides¹⁷

Resentment built up at the sight of changes that clearly benefited the large landowner and brought loss to the small man, injustices that would have created bitterness among villagers generally. The planners had not foreseen the degree of social change that might result from what was, to them, a purely agricultural development. In an age when the theory that ‘Whatever is, is right’ was, supposedly, firmly established as far as the upper classes were concerned, they presumably considered that there was no need to devote much thought to any social changes that might occur.¹⁸ No doubt any alteration in the hierarchy of the great chain of being was, to them, virtually unthinkable. They could assume that revolutionary thinking could and would be controlled by further repressive legislation and, where necessary, by force. Any creeping growth of radical thinking was equated with subversion; even implying criticism of either the government or the aristocracy would cause deep displeasure. Apart from the works published by The Religious Tract Society, which is discussed in the next chapter, this doctrine was also taught by means of homilies or hymns. Of the latter, one of the most popular ‘All things bright and beautiful’ demonstrates this point in its fourth stanza:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And order’d their estate.¹⁹

The lecture, or pill, is well coated, or concealed, with pretty descriptions of ‘little flowers, little birds, tiny wings, a bright sky, ripe fruit, tall trees, meadows, and rushes by the water’, no doubt intended to make it acceptable to the young children obediently chanting their lesson, for whom it was intended as well as adult congregations. Clare himself was the recipient of numerous personal homilies from the donors of the books in his library.

Against a background of local comment, dissatisfaction and resentment John Clare wrote *The Parish*, prefaced with the explanation:

This poem was begun & finished under the pressure of heavy distress with embittered feelings under a state of anxiety & oppression almost amounting to slavery—when the prosperity of one class was founded on the adversity and distress of the other—The haughty demand by the master to his labourer was work for the little I chuse to allow you

& go to the parish for the rest—or starve—to decline working under such advantages was next to offending a magistrate & no opportunity was lost in marking the insult by some unqualified oppression -

However, as though recollecting himself and the dangers of such outspokenness, he makes an attempt to qualify these comments with a further sentence:

but better times & better prospects have opened a peace establishment of more sociable feeling & kindness—& to no one upon earth do I owe ill will

These words have, perhaps, never been given the prominence they deserve. Clare's intensity of feeling was poured in to this poem, a vitriolic social satire dated '1820 to 1824, with additions probably as late as 1827'. It was not published in his lifetime.²⁰ After such an introduction it is reasonable to assume that the poet was not only representing his own point of view but also reflecting the opinions of many that he had heard, and was still hearing, in cottages, fields, alehouses, drawing-rooms, markets, and on street corners. In January 1820, for example, one John Atkin of North Muskham introduced himself to Clare by letter as a joiner by trade who had had a superficial education, stating 'I am an Ardent Admirer of rural Poetry, and have myself Composed a few pieces.' On 25 February 1820 he describes the poem he is writing:

The Subject of my Poem, is Jonah Tink, it is rather a satirical one, it exposes and criticises the conduct of many Characters who do not act according to the station of life they are placed in [...] my motto is

The Cap amongst the Crowd is gone,

The Man it fits, he puts it on—[...]

It is the history of a Man who by the favours of Fortune has risen into Notice it describes the scenes of Advancement, the difference of Sentiments expressed, and the conduct of Individuals towards him, in his low, and High Estate, and is a counter-part of what we every Day see in our progress through Life

An extract from the poem is given:

Beside being Steward, he became,
A Man of Fortune, wealth, and fame,

and when for Him all did enquire;
 They asked for Jonah Tink Esquire;
 For such is now the force of wealth,
 T'will buy us every thing but health,
 Nay rank and titles I've been told,
 Are sometimes bought with Sterling Gold,
 While Merit—with its empty bags,
 May pass through life, in nought but rags!!

In lines highly critical of both Roman Catholicism and the Church of England he concedes that at least the former 'Employed, and clothed, and fed the Poor' when all the Church Livings were in their hands but concludes that when the Christian Pastors took over from them, their contribution was to accept the wealth that had come to them and, once that had been grasped, to leave 'the Parishes to the Poor!!!!'²¹ Robinson and Powell suggest that it was this piece of satirical verse by Atkin that may have set Clare to work on *The Parish*.²² There are certainly several concepts in his poem that bear a great similarity to Atkin's lines.

In *The Parish* Clare introduces 'the Parish hind', as 'oppressions humble slave. Whose only hope of freedom is the grave', and announces his intention of addressing various subjects, namely 'the cant miscalled religion'; the mockery of Justice in the face of need; the so-called Kings and Queens of the parish, low class creatures of pretence; and those who deal in tyranny and crime (ll. 1-10).²³ Throughout the poem he inveighs against the hypocrisy of those who operate in these areas. As a poet, he accepts that truth is an offence and unpalatable to many but chooses to present it in preference to flattery. His first nostalgic picture is for the disappearing customs of the farming world:

That good old fame the farmers earnd of yore
 That made as equals not as slaves the poor
 That good old fame did in two sparks expire
 A shooting coxcomb & a hunting Squire (ll. 105-08)

And he goes on to depict the way in which class structure had crept in after enclosure.

& their old mansions that was dignified
 With things far better then the pomp of pride

At whose oak table that was plainly spread
 Each guest was welcomed & the poor was fed
 Were master son & serving man & Clown
 Without distinction daily sat them down (ll. 109-14)

In 1814 Ebenezer Elliott had written of the Harvest Supper and included a criticism of the new social structure, as well as other social ills, in similar terms:

Feast of the Happy Village! where art thou !
 Pshaw! thou wast vulgar—we are splendid now [...].
 Where is the Common, once with blessings rich—
 The poor man's Common! like the poor man's fitch
 And well-fed ham, which erst his means allow'd,
 Tis gone to bloat the idle and the proud!
 To raise high rents! and low'r low profits! O,
 To-morrow of the furies! thou art slow:²⁴

There is no evidence that Clare ever read any of Elliott's work. In *The Parish* he describes the farmer who, with his wife and daughter, aped the squire's domestic arrangements to the extent that 'Even his Lordship thought so grand before / Is but distinguished in his coach and four' (ll.139-40). He ridicules the new 'flimsey class' of farmer, the youngster who 'Struts like the squire & dresses dignified' (ll. 23, 242) and the racketeer whose talk is all of 'Horses & dogs & women oer his wine' (ll. 291): he sees these new farmers as 'Wondrous wise' 'In politics and politicians lies' (ll. 716, 715). The cheat and the niggard are identified. (ll. 381-450). Honour is introduced, 'stale & past her pride,' now replaced by 'knavery & cant in triumph'. (ll. 452, 453), Religion is attacked as 'A cloak to hide what godliness may want' as congregations 'lay religion by till sunday next' (ll. 456, 486). The custom of appointment by nepotism is criticised, the elderly priest shown as unable to read even the largest print and seeking 'A curate to supply his place / A kinsman of his worships sacred race' (ll. 1516-17). Parish officials, illiterate, but crafty enough to cheat the poor, are described as a 'learned body' (l. 1225) and are singled out for detailed scorn:

For all may by the color know the game
 As hungry dogs know carrion by the smell

So all may know them by their ways as well [...]
 So as they reign here let them hang together
 Stinking when met like sinks in stormy weather (ll. 1305-07, 1312-13)

He derides the parson who prays for good harvest weather with, in reality, his own tithes in mind (ll. 1336-1340). We are reminded here of Jane Austen's obsequious curate, Mr Collins, who apparently put the importance of agreeing his allocation of tithes before that of preparing sermons for his flock.²⁵ Clare is not deceived or impressed by the regular church attendance of those who:

Mock god with all the outward show of praise
 Making his house a pharisees at best
 Gods for one day & Satans all the rest (ll. 1347-49)

So-called Justice earns some comment. Although its representative is seen as harsh, his rule one of 'caprice & whim', he does at least give at Christmas rather than talk about the principle of giving, although this may well be his payment to enter Heaven (ll. 1410-12):

A blunt odd rude good picture of his kind
 Who preaches partial for both church & king
 & runs reform down as a dangerous thing (ll. 1443-45)

The new young curate, a 'kinsman of his worships troop' (l. 1525) has a good voice but is noted more for his skill as a tradesman than as a cleric. He contrives to charge for every service he offers, to which, of course his parishioners are not accustomed. Soon he is suspected of longing for the death of the incumbent so that he may have the whole living. The poet muses:

& is religion grown so commonplace
 To place self interest foremost in the race (ll. 1562-63)

He personally remembers with affection and respect the former priest, one of 'the old school' rather than a 'hunting Parson'. In his eyes that 'good old Vicar' would be remembered as:

Plain as the flock dependant on his cares

Their week day comforts & their sunday prayers
 Hed no spare wealth to follow fashions whim
 & if he had she'd little joys for him
 He kept no horse the hunting sports to share
 He fed no dogs to run the harmless hare
 Hed naught to spare while hunger sought his shed
 & while he had it they near wanted bread (ll. 1606-13)

'The shattered workhouse of the parish poor' (l. 1790) does not escape criticism as 'A makeshift shed for misery' (l. 1712) where even the light of day is not allowed to enter. Its inmates are given money for six days only and on the seventh 'Theyve nought for sunday but the parsons prayers' (l. 1831). The village Bailiff, nicknamed Bumtagg by Clare, employs an assistant who becomes a tyrant over the village boys who try to continue gleaning; where once they gathered acorns for pigs and rotten wood for the family's fire they are now driven off with threats of jail and whipping. 'Thus knaves in office love to show their power' (l. 2122). In this context it is worth remembering that the Fitzwilliams only used Milton Hall for approximately six months each year and therefore, with a partially absentee landlord, his bailiff may have assumed a status and power well above his station, thereby incurring extra dislike.²⁶ Clare ends his poem with the thought that it will not be popular with those whose conscience is touched "'Were the cap fits theyll wear it as their own'" (l. 2196) which bears a great resemblance to Atkin's motto in the letter quoted earlier in this chapter:

The Cap amongst the Crowd is gone,
 The Man it fits, he puts it on

E. P. Thompson considers that it was for 'the tithe-consuming clergy that the special hatred of the rural community was reserved'.²⁷ Clare's comments about the clergy will be examined in chapter 6, John Clare and religion.

Clare deplored the disappearance of old country customs and his resentment and genuine grief are depicted in much of his poetry and prose, summarised in lines in *The Shepherd's Calendar*:

Old may day where's thy glorys gone
 All fled and left thee every one

Thou comst to thy old haunts and homes
 Unnoticed as a stranger comes (ll. 429-32)

While the new thing that took thy place
 Wears faded smiles upon its face
 And where enclosure has its birth
 It spells a mildew oer her mirth²⁸

Examples of such routine events appear in Clare's Journal:

This used to be 'Break day' when the Fen commons used to be broke as it was called by turning in the stock it used to be a day of busy note with the villagers but inclosure has spoiled all²⁹

This was dated '25th Day of April 1825'. Familiar games were also seasonal:

how many days hath passed since we usd to hunt the stag or hunt the slipper[...]and duck under water on May eve and tossing the cowslip balls over the garland that hung from chimney to chimney across the street and then there was going to east well on a sunday to drink sugar and water at the spring head but inclosure came and drove these from the village³⁰

He laments the loss of landmarks that had long been familiar to him:

Took a walk in the fields saw an old woodstile taken away from a favourite spot which it had occupied all my life the posts were over grown with Ivy and it seemed so akin to nature and the spot were it stood as tho it had taken it on lease for an undisturbed existance it hurt me to see it was gone for my affections claims a friendship with such things but nothing is lasting in this world last year Langly bush was destroyed an old white thorn that had stood for more then a century full of fame the Gipseys Shepherds and Herd men all had their tales of its history and it will be long ere its memory is forgotten³¹

For him, trees were personal friends, as were his familiar haunts:

I used to be fondly attached to spots about the fields and there were 3 or 4 were I used to go to visit on sundays one of these was under an old Ivied Oak in Oxe wood [...] two others were under a broad oak in a field called the Barrows and Langley Bush and all my favourite places have met with misfortunes³²

His reaction to the loss of rights of way and conservation areas was similar:

Saw three fellows at the end of Royce wood who I found were laying out the plan for an 'Iron railway' from Manchester to London—it is to cross over Round Oak Spring by Royce Wood Corner for Woodcroft Castle little thought that fresh intrusions would interrupt and spoil my solitudes after the Inclosure they will despoil a boggy place that is famous for Orchises at Royce Wood end³³

His concern extended to such familiar figures as gypsies:

There is not so many of them with us as there used to be the inclosure has left nothing but narrow lanes were they are ill provided with a lodging Langley Bush is the only place were they frequent commonly³⁴

The disruption of community life that occurred after enclosure appears to have caused some of Clare's deepest anger and frustration, not only on his own account and that of his family but also on behalf of his fellow men. Understanding the importance of village traditions in the early nineteenth century in a village the size of Helpstone is not easy from this distance in time but, as the pattern of farming practice changed and seasonal rituals were gradually abandoned, it becomes clear that a whole way of life had been sacrificed in the name of improvement. Apparently man had been deprived of his rights as a freeborn individual. The regular occurrence of change down the centuries and, in some circumstances, its inevitability, may be apparent to the historian but to those born and bred within the confines of a small community it is invariably both unacceptable and distasteful. As Clare has recorded, it left a sense of bewilderment and frustration. His personal lament for the loss of old country customs is well-known and is given full rein in *The Shepherd's Calendar*:

Old Customs O I love the sound

However simple they may be
 What ere wi time has sanction found
 Is welcome and is dear to me
 Pride grows above simplicity
 And spurns it from her haughty mind
 And soon the poets song will be
 The only refuge they can find³⁵

Finally, the dread of pauperism and fear of the workhouse became paramount in the concerns of the poor as they saw conditions worsen, which Clare has stressed in *The Parish*. He could draw on his own experience of poverty and the way it had affected his handicapped father, to support any local feelings that existed on the subject of parish relief, referring to it in 'The Lament of Swordy Well':

Alas dependance thou'rt a brute
 Want only understands
 His feelings wither branch & root
 That falls in parish hands (ll. 33-36)

In the same poem he depicts it again as meagre and grudging:

Parish allowance gaunt & dread
 Had it the earth to keep
 Would even pine the bees to dead
 To save an extra keep (ll. 73-76)³⁶

With hindsight it is not difficult to appreciate that enclosure was needed in the interests of general agricultural improvement and equally that the large landowner, with foresight, could have devoted more thought to the social dislocation and deprivation that were likely to occur when this took place. However, divorced as they were from current opinion in their villages, they were unable to do this and resentment in many parts of the country continued to fester. That resentment was manifest in the riots that took place in 1816, 1822 and 1830. Clare could have read reports of these outbreaks in his local newspapers, as East Anglia was affected. The riots of

1816 were mostly in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire. In 1822 Norfolk and Suffolk were again involved. The revolt in 1830 began later in East Anglia than in the South.³⁷

NOTES

1. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 237-38.
2. *John Clare: A Champion for the Poor: Political Verse and Prose*, ed. P. M. S. Dawson, Eric Robinson & David Powell (Manchester and Ashington: Carcanet and MidNag, 2000), p. 14.
3. E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London: Penguin 1973), pp. 39-40.
4. Commissioners Minutes, 15 July 1811.
5. Northamptonshire Record Office, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton. Fitzwilliam miscellaneous papers, Vol. 689. Edward Hare, *Survey and valuation of the Lordship of Upton, 27 December 1771* Edward Hare compiled, *Survey, Lord Fitzwilliam's Estates at Humbleton & Meaux (Yorks, E. Riding) 1773*.
6. W. E. Tate, *The English Village Community and the Enclosure Movements* (London: Gollanz, 1967), p. 23. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 239-41.
7. *By Himself*, p. 195. William Fordyce Mavor edited a new edition of Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* in 1812. *By Himself*, p. 322 n. 102. Clare had a copy of this edition in his library. *Catalogue*, item 380.
8. W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* (London: Macmillan, 1957), p. 263.
9. Tate, pp. 174-75.
10. J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 180.
11. Alun Howkins and C. Ian Dyck, 'The Time's Alteration': Popular Ballads, Rural Radicalism and William Cobbett', *History Workshop Journal*, 23 (1987), 20-38 (pp. 21-23).
12. George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983), pp. 230-31.
13. *Middle Period*, I, p. 83, ll. 158-66.
14. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 239.
15. J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832: A Study of the Government of England before the Reform Bill*, 2nd edn (Gloucester: Sutton, 1987), p. 180.

16. Neeson, p. 179.
17. *Middle Period*, I, pp. 133-34.
18. *Alexander Pope: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Davies, 7th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 249 ll. 294, p. 272 ll. 145.
19. Mrs Alexander, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (London: Clowes, 1916), p. 573.
20. *Early Poems*, II, pp. 697-779. In a letter to James Hessey dated January 1823, Clare states that he has just finished writing his 'Parish a Satire'. *Letters*, p. 254.
21. Eg. MS 2245, fols 23r-24r; fols 43r-44v. Acknowledgements to Dr Bob Heyes who brought these letters to my attention.
22. Robinson and Powell make this point in *Early Poems*, II, p. 797.
23. Further references to *The Parish* are given after quotations in the text.
24. Ebenezer Elliott, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh: Tait, 1840), p. 87.
25. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 103.
26. F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 94.
27. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 257-58.
28. *Middle Period*, I, pp. 73-74, ll. 429-432, 457-460.
29. *By Himself*, p. 224.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
35. *Middle Period*, I, pp. 158, ll. 41-48.
36. *John Clare: A Champion*, pp. 215-16.
37. Hobsbawm and Rudé, pp. 60-61.

Chapter 6. Clare and Religion.

Some grievously suspect thee, Clare!
 They want to know thy form of prayer;
 Thou dost not cant, and so they stare
 And smell free-thinking;
 They bid thee of the devil beware.
 And vote thee sinking.

The poem from which these lines are an extract, by Charles Abraham Elton (1778-1853), was published anonymously in the *London Magazine* for August 1824. Clare had met Elton, described by Mark Storey as a scholar, poet and politician, during his third visit to London.¹ It is not known what caused Elton to write these lines but they were presumably inspired by some conversation he had overheard or discussion that he had had with others who either knew Clare, or who had heard comments about his current interest in religion. If Clare was really ‘grievously’ suspected this was surely a serious matter. We are told that his church/chapel allegiance was being questioned but, as Elton then credits him with being non-hypocritical, his approach to religion could amount to free-thinking. He is warned to avoid this ‘devil’ but is already seen as being on a slippery slope. Certainly Elton exonerates Clare in the lines that follow:

With smile sedate and patient eye
 Thou mark’st the creedman pass thee by,
 To rave and raise a hue and cry
 Against each other:
 Thou see’st a father up on high,
 In man a brother.²

But these were dangerous times in which to draw attention to anyone’s religious views. As mentioned below, at that time Dissent was, by some, regarded as synonymous with Radicalism. This, in their opinion, could amount to treason. So was this a serious warning or merely an innocuous jest? In this chapter any hints that could have led Elton to issue this warning will be examined.

The first indication that there might have been any criticism of Clare's religious allegiance came from Octavius Gilchrist. Before Clare's first volume of poetry was published in January 1820 an article appeared in the *London Magazine* the same month, 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet' by Gilchrist. The writer gives the impression that adverse comments had been voiced on the subject of Clare's religious opinions and that he was endeavouring to put the record straight for the new poet. He gives a verbatim account of a conversation with Clare on the subject of his attendance at the Reverend Isaiah Holland's meeting house. Clare's response was that he had never heard Holland preach but, having been brought up in the communion of the Church of England, he had found no reason to withdraw from it. Gilchrist chose to introduce Holland as 'a Calvinistic preacher'. Whether this was done to portray Clare very clearly as a loyal member of the Church, as distinct from a Dissenter, to create a favourable impression with his patrons and other influential people, is open to conjecture, but the loyalty to either Church or Chapel of each man is very carefully delineated. Gilchrist adds that Holland had 'now quitted his charge', a somewhat ambiguous remark.³ He may have been emphasising the fact that Holland was no longer in charge of the chapel at Market Deeping, or that he had given up his scrutiny of the poet's work and their friendship had been only of a transient nature. Through London contacts Gilchrist would have been aware that the political views of religious dissenters were regarded as suspect. As early as 1820 Lord Radstock, the man who was to become Clare's influential patron, had decided to ensure that his protégé's views on religion coincided with his own conservative opinions. He had begun to present him with books, many of which contained homilies on this subject. In Francis Gastrell's *The Christian Institutes*, published in 1812, Radstock wrote 'Beware, beware, beware of Enthusiasm, it being the most dangerous enemy that true Religion has to encounter'⁴ As Radstock wrote this in February 1820 it could be that some gossip about Clare had reached him even before he met the poet in March of that year, or he was merely ensuring that a naive countryman was furnished with some guidelines on a potentially dangerous subject. Enthusiasm was the term used at that time to describe any religious sect where free-thinking or emotional fervour were over-enthusiastic and therefore dangerous. Radstock was clearly referring to a non-Church of England service or meeting. In 1821 a third 'warning' was conveyed by Edward Drury in an outspoken letter to Clare:

However unpalatable the truth may be to you, I think every one of the great people dislike your connections & think you a radical man in consequence of your intriguing with Gilchrist. In one quarter it was distinctly asserted that such was the case. On

canvassing the point over with Mr. W. Hopkinson, the Atty. of Stamford, he has kindly offered to introduce you into pleasant and familiar society[...]I mentioned that you were certainly undecided in your religious opinions though by no means as bad as he had heard.⁵

As in the case of his friendship with Holland, Clare was being judged by the company he kept, no doubt on grounds of their, or his, suspected Dissent or Radicalism. It is clear from Drury's letter that in the town of Stamford Gilchrist was considered to be a Radical, probably on account of his connection with John Drakard and suspected involvement with the radical *Stamford News*. Clare had other associates who were not above suspicion. For example, Blunden has drawn attention to comments about Taylor and Hessey, Clare's publishers. He quotes Coleridge as saying that they had attained 'a high respectability' and adds 'Their leaning towards the reformist side had got them enemies but not disrepute'.⁶ Blunden also cites the opinion of R. H. Horne who, commenting on the excellent work of Taylor and Hessey as publishers, wrote:

The bad success of these gentlemen was owing to the extraordinary force of the political tide at that period; the proof of which is manifest from the fact that some of their publications commencing with a rapid sale, and stopping abruptly after the appearance of several virulent attacks from periodicals who were opposed to the politics or liberal sentiments of the writers. The other publishers have ruined themselves from adopting an opposite extreme.⁷

However, concerning the *London Magazine* period 1821 Blunden quotes De Quincey on the subject of Taylor's religious opinion:

Mr. Taylor professed himself a religious dissenter; and in all the political bearings of dissent he travelled so far that, if in any one instance he manifested an illiberal spirit, it was in the temper which he held habitually towards the Church of England. Then first, indeed, it was—and amongst the company which I sometimes saw at Mr. Taylor's—that I first became aware of the deadly hatred—savage, determined hatred, made up for mischief—which governed a large part of the well-educated dissenters, in their feelings towards the Church of England. [...] Mr Taylor, [...] shared in all the dominant feelings of the dissenters, such as I heard them frequently expressed in his

society; and naturally, therefore, he entertained, amongst other literary opinions a peculiar & perhaps blind veneration for Locke.⁸

Early in 1821 Clare had written to Taylor:

If I had an enemy I could wish to torture I would not wish him hung nor yet at the devil my worst wish should be a week's confinement in some vicarage to hear an old parson and his wife lecture on the wants and wickedness of the poor⁹

This comment may well reflect opinions that he had heard expressed during his visit to London the previous year. Clare could be commenting on the social policy or power of the Church as well as the unchristian approach (as he saw it) of those who singled out the poor, passed judgement on their weaknesses, and found it unacceptable that they should have needs. Aided perhaps by good food and liquor and stimulated by an audience, Clare could have made similar unguarded remarks during dinners given by Taylor for the 'Londoners', a venue where gossip and speculation probably abounded. Certainly Thomas Bennion, Taylor's clerk/porter, warned Clare in July 1822 after his second visit to London by reporting a conversation he had had with Mrs Emmerson:

she commenced her conversation in the usual Theatrical Manner respecting you, first by enquiring if you had not disgraced yourself very much the night you dine with the contributor of the London Mag and if you had not given great offence to the Rev^d Mr C— by saying you wish'd the churches were all in ashes and the parsons sent to beg their bread, i told her i did not hear you say it, and if you did some excuse was to be made for you as you might be a little fresh [...] She said she had heard all this from a friend that you had told, and that she was very sorry to think you was so strong a deist i told her you was but a very little way inclined to deisem I found out who this friend was before i left her its Mr R— [...] i have a goodeal to say when we meet again, but let me beg ov you to be cautious what you say to Mr R— for it will all go to M^{rs} E— & L—d R—, so mind your Ps & Q¹⁰

The extent to which Clare was being watched and discussed is obvious from these comments.

Disapproval of the Dissenting Sects possibly had its roots in the impact made on this country by the French Revolution and the fears that it engendered in government circles and the Establishment at the incipient spread of

radicalism, or even earlier, as Lincoln suggests. In his opinion 'The natural right to freedom of conscience', a principle inherited from the seventeenth century by religious dissenters, played a stimulating part in the development of political thought. He maintains that Dissenters were tainted by the actions of their predecessors and that this stigma would be difficult to outlive: 'Dissenters were those people whose forebears had executed a king and disestablished the Church and now they were welcoming the French Revolution and were 'up in arms' against the Test Acts.' He adds that in the general opinion 'What a Dissenter was capable of doing yesterday affords a measure of his activities to-day and a fair forecast of his conduct tomorrow'. Their common creed he cites as: 'The rejection of human authority; the natural right of determination according to conscience; power in the hands of the congregation and not the hierarchy; toleration; freedom of conscience above all.'¹¹ Once Dissent was equated with Radicalism, which in many minds it was, it was then only a short step towards condemning signs of radicalism as disloyalty amounting to treason. Clare had taken a risk by his innocent deviations.

By the age of twenty-one he was attending the village chapel in Helpstone. According to his Autobiography the bookseller from whom he had purchased 'a blank book' in 1814 had known him earlier 'by seeing me often at the chapple at Helpstone for I was then fond of hearing the Independants [...].'¹² (later referred to by Clare as 'congregational dissenters or Independants').¹³ His friendship with the Rev. Isaiah Knowles Holland, referred to by Gilchrist in his *London Magazine* article, appears to have begun a few years later. Mark Storey notes that there is no biographical information to confirm that Clare knew the minister before 1819 and that most of their correspondence took place within that year.¹⁴ Holland was transferred to the Free Church, St Ives, in 1820 but maintained contact with Clare sufficiently to visit him in 1821.¹⁵ He it was who introduced the poet to the writings of Burns, Shenstone and Pope. Clare sent copies of his work for Holland's criticism, which he valued, and their subsequent correspondence was largely about poetry.¹⁶ It seems that it was this friendship that caused the initial concern among Clare's well-wishers.

From an early age he had been made aware of Sunday observance and of the expectation that he would conform to village tradition where this was concerned, not to mention the adverse opinion he would attract if he did not do so. Commenting on this and on his love of reading he admitted:

As it is common in villages to pass judgement on a lover of books as a sure indication of laziness, I was drove to the narrow nessesity of stinted oppertunitys to hide in woods and dingles of thorns in the fields on Sundays to read these things, [...] to read such things on sundays was not right [...] I have often absentet my self the whole Sunday at this time nor

could the chiming bells draw me from my hiding place to go to church, tho at night I was sure to pay for my absence from it by a strong snubbing¹⁷

The reproach, no doubt, was from his parents or friends and neighbours, even from the Vicar himself. He was aware that his fellow villagers were not deeply religious, as may be seen from his remark:

In our unlettered villages the best of the inhabitants have little more knowledge in reading than what can be gleaned from a weekly News paper Old Moors Almanack, and a Prayer Book on Sundays at Church, while the labouring classes remain as blind in such matters as the Slaves in Africa—¹⁸

As though in regret at his earlier revelations about himself, or perhaps for the benefit of his readers, he wrote later:

In matters of religion I never was and I doubt never shall be so good as I ought to be—tho I am at heart a protestant, perhaps like many more I have been to church [more] often than I have been seriously inclined to receive benefit or put its wholesome and reasonable admonitions to practice—still I reverence the church and do from my soul as much as anyone curse the hand that's lifted to undermine its constitution—¹⁹

In a further explanation he seemed to try to put a more favourable gloss on his shortcomings:

I used to drop down behind a hedge bush or dyke and write down my things upon the crown of my hat and when I was more in a hip for thinking than usual I used to stop later at nights to make up my lost time in the day—thus I went on writing my thoughts down and correcting them at leisure spending my Sundays in the woods or heaths to be alone for that purpose and I got a bad name among the weekly church goers forsaking the 'church going bell' and seeking the religion of the fields tho I did it for no dislike to church for I felt uncomfortable very often²⁰

He makes another apparent attempt to rationalise his former admissions with the explanation that all his Sundays were working days in the summer months, although games of marbles and leap

frog also took place, as well as collecting wild flowers and strawberries, and ‘stealing peas in church time when the owners was safe’, with the added qualification:

We heard the church bells chime but the fields was our church and we seemd to feel a religious feeling in our haunts on the sabbath while some old shepherd sat on a mole hill reading aloud some favour[i]te chapter from an old fragment of a Bible which he carried in his pocket for the day ²¹

Was this last statement the true picture? If it seems like poetic licence it must not be forgotten that Clare had quickly learned to write with one eye on his likely audience. By the time he was writing poetry he continued the same routine, using his Sundays to be alone in order to write and being forced to admit in his Autobiography that he ‘got a bad name among the weekly church goers’.²² (In 1848, writing from Northampton Asylum in a letter to one of his sons, he admitted ‘I have often broke the Sabbath when a boy and perhaps it was better then keeping it in the Village hearing Scandal and learning tipplers frothy conversation—’)²³

Clare continued to devote much thought to religion as entries in his Journal for the years 1824 and 1825 confirm. Having read Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* in September 1824 he was critical of the Church’s teaching:

The sum of my opinion is that Tyranny & Cruelty appear to be the inseparable companions of Religious Power & the Aphorism is not far from truth that says ‘All priests are the same’—The great moral precept of a meek & unoffending teacher was ‘Do as ye would be done unto’ and ‘love those that hate you’ if religious opinions had done so her history had been praiseworthy.²⁴

This comment could be a summary of Clare’s thoughts on religion at that time. Obviously his general opinion of the Church was low if he equated tyranny and cruelty with religious power. For the most part he had encouragement from many of the clergy, particularly the Revd Charles Mossop and the Lord Bishop of Peterborough. Nevertheless he comments here that the clergy in general fell short of his interpretation of the standards set by Christ. In the same month he records his criticism of the Song of Solomon: ‘Thought the supposd illusions in that lucious poem to our Saviour very overstrained far-fetchd and conjectural it appears to me as eastern love-poems & nothing further but an over-heated religious fancy is strong enough to fancy anything’.²⁵ This may relate to the Enthusiasm of the dissenting sects which he had by that time rejected, as he recorded in Sketches in 1821: ‘The “free will” of ranters, “new light” of methodists, and “Election Lottery” of Calvinism I always heard with

disgust and considered their enthusiastic ravings little more intelligible or sensible than the belowings of Bedlam.²⁶

This statement may have been written for the benefit of an imagined reader. He had a complete change of opinion however, for by 1824 he had decided to join the Ranters, as later in this chapter). A reading of the New Testament in 1824 did convince him of its sacred design and he wrote:

Its writers were inspired by an almighty power to benefit the world by their writings that was growing deeper and deeper into unfruitful ignorance [...] for want of culture. But he remained cynical: I am far from being convinced that the desired end is or will be attained at present while cant & hypocrisy is blasphemously allowed to make a mask of religion and to pass as current characters will not say that this is universal God forbid—²⁷

A month later Erskine's *Internal Evidences of Religion* inspired him and he quoted the following lines: 'To walk without God in the world is to walk in sin and sin is the way of danger. Men have been told this by their own consciences & they have partially and occasionally believed it but still they walked on—too true—'. Whether Clare is generalising or musing over his own shortcomings cannot be established but he comments: 'A very sensible book'. He later added that he had found therein:

Some of the best reasoning in favour of its object I have ever read I think a doubting christian may be set right at a first perusal and a reasoning Deist loose doubts sufficient to be half a christian in some of the arguments and a whole one ere he get to the end.²⁸

Clare was ever an acute observer. He tended to criticise groups and theories rather than identifiable characters, as in *The Parish*, and although his comments were usually shrewd and well directed they were generally humorous and lacking in personal spite.

During this period of consideration he scrutinised many different sects and religions and found them wanting. He was, for example, critical of Roman Catholicism and on 24 and 25 May 1825 recorded in his Journal: 'The Catholics have lost their bill once more and its nothing but right they should when one beholds the following Sacred humbugs which their religion hurds up and sanctifys—'. At last Parliament had made a right decision in Clare's eyes. This comment is followed by a list in which numerous Catholic relics are somewhat mockingly described.²⁹ (Clare was given to mockery when he felt strongly on a certain subject. Several examples of this can be found in his Journal, notably those concerning

the Mayor's feast, Valentines, and Editors).³⁰ On 11 March 1829 he received a letter from Henderson on the subject of Catholic Emancipation:

I have not seen the debates on the Catholic Cause, I have only seen an outline of the proceedings of thursday night in one of the Provincial papers, Mr Peel made a speech of *four hours length* & was followed by Mr Banks & others finishing with Lord Milton [...] I have not heard if they got through it even on friday or adjourned till monday—I feel equally anxious with you to se the debates on the question, yourself must know that I am a catholic emancipator of sixteen years standing & therefore must feel anxious *to get the matter off my hands*³¹

That this subject had, by implication, been in Clare's mind over a period of four years, and of interest to Henderson for sixteen years, is interesting in itself. It is entirely feasible that this shared interest was founded on Lord Milton's involvement in the matter. Clare himself was impressionable. He was also actively engaged in his own spiritual questioning. The Tibbles note that: 'After reading Richard Wright, the Unitarian missionary, he talked of becoming Unitarian, Because they were content to go their own way in meekness and humility, he admired the Quakers.'³² He also wrote of his belief in tolerance:

I dont see why any man is to be laughed at for the opinions he entertains of his faith any more then another for other opinions equally absurd— [...] commonsense or the right but persecutions only augment them—therefore if reason & commonsense cannot convert them from harmless superstitions she will not oppress them³³

This broadminded approach could have been interpreted as freethinking; it was dangerous territory.

Clare's criticism of the Clergy had begun early in his career and can be traced to 1819 and his poem 'The Woodman', which was ultimately dedicated to his friend Holland:

Holland to thee the humble ballads sent
 Thee who for poor mens welfare oft has pray'd
 Whose tongue did ne'er belye its good intent
 Preacher as well in practice as in trade
 (Alas! too often moneys business made)³⁴

His dislike of the practice of charges for offices by the clergy was continued in *The Parish*, see Chapter Five. Clare's opinions on double standards in Church life are included in a fragment headed 'For Essay on Bone & cleaver Club'. In this he makes a number of hard-hitting statements about the Church and clergy, addressed to an imaginary Club President:

whats the use of the words virtue & morality I want to know that Mr President we cant live by religion Mr P thats truth its all hypocrisy in the saints to seem religious & to talk about character thats a pretty trick isnt it Mr P isnt it when they dont posses common honesty [...] to please every body Mr President we must act justly to nobody thats truth—we must praise the church to the parson Mr president & abuse it to the parishioners[...] we must go to church with farmer folly to be good & get an hours sleep in the pew only contriving to waken to sing amen with the clerk in the prayer for the royal family only go to church Mr P that's all [...] wait in the porch to make a bow to the priest & praise his dull sermon Mr P thats truth then go home & drink to the abolition of english slavery (aplause) tythes ([applause]) parsons ([applause]) & taxes in the company of radicals [...] Cant humbug & hypocrisy are the three in one grand principles of this age[...] If we say parsons have great salarys Mr P we are deists & devils & worse³⁵

The main thrust of his attack is the degree of hypocrisy among those involved; the advice he draws from it for himself and others is that it is expedient to act a lie in order to keep in favour with the influential. He also stresses the general lack of appeal that he considered the church held, emphasising the dull sermons, and the fact that certain members of the congregation had the habit of sleeping during these boring services for which the clergy were well paid. His comments about the clergy in *The Parish* have already been examined in Chapter 5, where his criticism had been particularly outspoken. As he himself wrote in a letter to Hessey in 1822: 'Perhaps upon parish oppressors I am to severe—but all the flattery they deserve is a horsewhip'.³⁶

He does not tell us whether he was also attending the church at that time. Obelkevich points out: 'Many villagers [...] regularly attended both church and chapel without a definite preference for either'. The times of Church services were, apparently, re-scheduled to facilitate this. As his study specifically refers to the district of South Lindsey in Lincolnshire it cannot be claimed that this was common practice or was generally known. Horn also states that some families attended both Church and Chapel and adds that they were labelled 'devil dodgers'. Chapels were anything but dull; they provided entertainment through the very nature of their services, members of the congregation were encouraged to speak and to participate generally in the organisation of the meetings. By the warmth provided in their buildings, the novelty of visiting preachers, and by the teas, outings, and treats offered to their congregations they were inviting to the poor. In contrast, during monotonous Church services within cold

buildings the congregation was expected to be decorous and restrained. Even the seating plan was hierarchical.³⁷ There is no evidence that these comparisons were generally known, what resentment they caused, or whether, had they been taken into account by Clare's critics, they would have continued to judge him so harshly for his suspected defection from the Church and possible conversion to the Dissenting sects. The Evangelicals among his critics were indoctrinated with the teaching of their own particular beliefs; current opinion seems to have been that by the divine order of things the poor were predestined to endure deprivation, buoyed up by anticipation of eternal life in the world to come.³⁸ Evangelicals were often wealthy and influential people and no criticism of those in power was acceptable to them. Nevertheless, Clare expressed his own opinion on several occasions, none of them more clearly than in his Autobiography: 'If every mans bosom had a glass in it so that its secret might be seen what a blotted page of christian profession and false pretensions woud the best of them display'. Some of his religious criticism was directed against himself. At this time he considered himself to be 'much wanting' where matters of religion were concerned.³⁹ This was a subject that occupied his thoughts a great deal, as may be seen throughout his poetry and prose. On or before November 1822 he had been inspired to write 'To the Deity', with the concluding lines:

Accept o god a mortals worship free
 As natures soul born hopes which are not vain
 To hope the best an helpless worm like me
 Tho vile—thou hast no pleasure in its pain
 I am but dust—& thou Eternity⁴⁰

Yet he recorded in his Autobiography: 'In my younger days I inclined to deism but on reading Pain[e]s doubtful of pain[e]s sub[t]eltys for he seemed detirmined to get over every obstacle with the opinion he set out with'.⁴¹ By 1824 his general health was deteriorating. The hypothesis that there was some connection between his health, his depression, and his search for some religious outlet to meet his spiritual needs, is examined in Table A. By then he was also harassed by poverty, problems connected with the publication of his work, lack of employment, the health of the ageing parents he supported, and the increase in his own family. By 1824 he had three young children. Table A draws our attention to the fact that 1824 was a year when Clare's bouts of ill health, depression, and religious indecision coincided and were most frequent. The first mention of his religious search is in a letter from Taylor to him dated 3 April 1824 from which we learn that Clare had already mentioned a decision he had made to join the Ranters Primitive Methodists. Taylor was supportive and encouraging:

As for joining the Ranters, you do right to get real practical Religion whenever it can be found. I am not at all afraid of your plunging into the Excesses of Enthusiasm nor indeed are there any Excesses to be dreaded except those which are a Cloak to Wickedness. In this case, Enthusiasm is the grossest, and most damnable Hypocrisy.—⁴²

This was very different advice from that given by Radstock in his homily, quoted earlier. With contradictory comments from these two sources, Clare was left to find what comfort he could. In the same letter Taylor refers to Clare's very serious illness during the three-month period since his previous letter of January 1824. In reply, and apparently writing only a few days later, Clare confides that he has lost confidence in his doctors and is resigned to the worst. He had become suicidal:

When I was first took god forgive me I had hard work to bare up with my malady & often had the thought of destroying myself & from this change in my feelings I satisfactorily prove that Religions foundation is truth & that the Mystery that envelops it is a power above human nature to comprehend [...] I agree with you that the religious hypocrite is the worst monster in human nature & some of these when they had grown so flagrant as to be discovered behind the mask they had taken to shelter their wickedness led me at first to think lightly of religion & sure enough some of the lower classes of dissenters about us are very dectiful & in fact dangerous characters especially among the methodists with whom I have determined to associate but then there are a many sincere good ones to make up.⁴³

On 20th April he informed Hessey: 'I have joined the Ranters that is I have enlisted in their society they are a set of simple sincere & communing christians with more zeal then knowledge earnest & happy in their devotions'.⁴⁴ He adds that he considers his disorder incurable. As Lucas points out, in choosing to take this action, and telling his publishers so, 'Clare may have been trying to free himself from Radstock's endless concern for the state of his soul'.⁴⁵ Understandably, Clare would have felt comfortable in the company of the Ranters who, Obelkevich maintains, were poor and fervent, their numbers mostly consisting of farm labourers.⁴⁶ Clare's personal perplexity over certain religious matters, his 'doubts and unbelief' and concern about the hereafter, continued. To Taylor on 8 May 1824 he wrote 'The sincere and enthusiastic manners of the methodists in devotion puts my glimmering consience to shame'. He appears to have switched his allegiance three times during a very short period, either indicative of the transient nature of his interest or of his religious

uncertainty. His comment on his health is that he is no better, adding: ‘what the complaint is god knows I do not’.⁴⁷ On 10 August of that year he is telling Inskip that he has been in London for three months to seek medical advice there as he has been ‘in a terrible state of ill-health six months gradually declining & I verily believe it will upset me at last’ By September he is informing Cunningham that he is no better, and telling Cary that he is getting worse, adding: ‘I thought I was getting well once but I’ve not a hope left me now’. In November, Savage is told of his ‘severe illness’ In December he is commenting to Elton on his ‘present miseries’ and to Cary that he has been unable to read or write for six or seven weeks and that he thinks and feel that he will not recover from his complaint.⁴⁸ These comments on health and religion are interspersed with references to frequent bouts of depression.

During Winter months of bad weather and longer hours of darkness, when the need for warmth and consolation were greatest, Methodist evangelism and revivalism were at their height, according to Obelkevich.⁴⁹ These were months of general distress for the poor; work was scarce or unavailable. Ill health was most likely to occur at these times, and days not worked were days not paid, causing a shortage of spending power and thus of food and necessities. Clare’s shifts of allegiance were clearly based on something more than academic interest and indicate a genuine search for a religious belief. According to his Journal he appears to have had little employment between September 1824 and September 1825. If the weather was wet he did not go out. He records that he read, walked, nursed his illness, and searched for plants but makes no mention of work.⁵⁰ In the early nineteenth century medicine had not advanced sufficiently to offer information, reassurance, or treatment, where many illnesses were concerned. Horn draws attention to this:

For those who did become ill, medical care was often rudimentary. Few could afford to pay a doctor’s fees or even join a friendly society or medical club which would promise [...] to provide for ‘the comfortable relief of its respective members in cases of Sickness, &c.’ [...] For those without such medical advice, self-help, charity and the poor laws were the main alternatives [...].⁵¹

The incidence of depression or mental disturbance was probably not considered a health problem by the average man but as a social stigma and was a subject generally avoided. As Porter states:

Historians of psychiatry have told us that the Georgian century was the dark age of ‘the trade in lunacy’, when many were improperly locked away and cruelly treated; whereas

psychiatric reform arrived in the nineteenth century, with new legal safe-guards against false imprisonment, and a more sympathetic understanding of madness.

Clare visited several doctors in both Stamford and London but there is no record of any treatment for depression as such. Porter questions whether Clare was actually mad and, if so, from what psychiatric disorder he was suffering. He continues: 'Nineteenth century psychiatric doctors had genuine reservations about the wisdom of prying too energetically into patients' mental states, especially introspective and depressive characteristics.'⁵² Continuous ill health is in itself sufficient grounds for depression and the link between the two seems self-evident in Clare's case.

His religious questioning and doubts do not appear to have attracted disapproval from the vicar of Helpstone, the Rev. Charles Mossop. Clare wrote to Hessey in 1830: 'Mr Mossop our Vicar has been uncommonly kind to me in my illness & he wrote as kindly while I was ill to Mrs Emmerson to ask her to get my eldest boy Frederick into a school [...].'⁵³ His intermittent correspondence with Mossop, who was in Helpstone until 1853, and his sister, continued for twelve years, his last letters to them being in August and September 1832.⁵⁴ He remained in contact with the wife of the Lord Bishop of Peterborough Herbert Marsh, and Wilson, Martin, and the Tibbles have all commented on an incident that occurred during his attendance at Peterborough Theatre with the Bishop and Mrs Marsh in 1830.⁵⁵ Apparently at this performance of *The Merchant of Venice* Clare 'ranted and raved' at Shylock. Lucas comments:

Biographers tend to give the impression of him as an unsophisticated member of the audience who was not able to distinguish between illusion and reality. [...] Yet Clare had attended the London theatres, which many others in the audience had probably not done. [...] Far from being a country bumpkin who did not know how to behave, perhaps he was just showing people in Peterborough how things were done in London.⁵⁶

There is evidence of an intervention ten years earlier at the Stamford theatre by Octavius Gilchrist, a regular visitor to London, who caused an interruption of half-an-hour by insisting that a certain performer should comply with an audience demand for an encore.⁵⁷ It is tempting to speculate that Clare, by attacking Shylock, may merely have been siding with the underdog, something that he was wont to do. He was certainly still corresponding with Mrs Marsh in 1832 although on such subjects as his health, William Cobbett and Reform.⁵⁸ He could have had some contact with the Curate at Northborough in 1837 over drawings for his poetry.⁵⁹ He was not shunned by these Church officials on account of any supposed defection from the Church and he in his turn seems to have been pleased to accept such contacts. He did not lose interest in

religion. His Biblical Paraphrases were written, according to his own notes, ‘in early 1841’ and ‘late in 1841’. According to the Tibbles it was Dr Darling who had suggested that he should paraphrase the Psalms and the Book of Job ‘to quiet the mind’.⁶⁰ Robinson comments:

They vary in merit but they are valuable as illustrating his state of mind [...] The apocalyptic note deriving from Clare’s study of the scriptures is immensely powerful in such a poem as ‘There is a day a dreadfull day’ and the Book of Job was never very far from Clare’s mind in the years 1839 to 1841.⁶¹

Whether or not he considered himself still a member of the Church at these times, and was considered to be so, is open to conjecture. However, we learn from his response to the initial disagreement with Radstock in 1820 that he had absorbed some ideas of freedom of thought and conscience, although the exact source cannot be identified.⁶² In Horn’s opinion chapels provided an opportunity for men to learn to express their independence and work on democratic lines.⁶³ Such teaching could have affected Clare’s thinking. His interest in the dissenting sects cannot be read as totally theological or spiritual.

As early as 1820 he had made his views known on the subject of the individual’s right to personal decision-making. Concerning the abandonment of the ‘bill of pains and penalties’ he stated that he was on the side of the King rather than Queen Caroline in a letter to Hessey from Helpstone:

This night is the grand illumination for our City in honour of St. Caroline [...] the windows are to be illuminated but as the grand characteristic of an Englishman is liberty of conscience I will for once sustain it—I am persuaded to light up in consequence of keeping the peace & my windows unbroken—but they have their whims & jack will have his & I am now as soon as your letter is done making preparations of defence a large oaken bludgeon & if the devil heads the mob let him head it so as he passes my door peaceably [...] I am as rebellious against his opinions as he was in old times [...]⁶⁴

If he is alluding to Helpstone as a city it can only have been in jest, to stress the non-importance of the event in his opinion, bearing in mind the size and importance of the hamlet in question. In 1824, still musing on the subject of man’s right to personal decision-making, he wrote to Taylor:

My opinion Taylor of true Religion amounts to this if a man turns to god with real sincerity of heart not canting & creeping to the eyes of world but satisfying his own conscience so that it shall not upbraid him in the last hours of life [...] that man is as certain of heaven in the next world as he is of death in this.⁶⁵

Clare is implying that the involvement of a third party between Man and God is unnecessary. Such a belief can be associated with the doctrines of both Puritans and Quakers who strove to purge the Church of ceremonial worship and an ordained ministry. He had no doubt absorbed this principle when taking an interest in the Quakers, as referred to above. E. P. Thompson considers:

Liberty of conscience was the one great value which the common people had preserved from the Commonwealth. The countryside was ruled by the gentry, the towns by corrupt corporations, the nation by the corruptest corporation of all: but the chapel, the tavern, and the home were their own. In the 'unsteeped' places of worship there was room for a free intellectual life and democratic experiments with 'members unlimited'.⁶⁶

Owing to Clare's religious indecision the search to identify his personal allegiance becomes complicated. With so much suspicion abroad he had learned that it was expedient to adjust his words to anticipate the reaction of his audience. If the above accounts of his interests can be accepted as correct either to a greater or lesser degree, then it is clear that it would have been safer, in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, for the future prospects of any writer or worthy citizen not to be found a Dissenter (and thus perhaps a Radical), or even thought to be one. Clare was not outside the current atmosphere of suspicion. He was watched, criticised and warned. This can be established from the examples already mentioned; Gilchrist's obvious concern and his attempt to correct false impressions, in his article of January 1820; from Radstock's counsel in his homily of 1820; from Drury's written warning of that year; from Bennion's letter of 1822 and from Elton's poem. There was on-going discussion about Clare but we can only speculate about who else was involved in this criticism. It may have been quite general. Elton himself absolves him in stanza 9 of his poem:

With smile sedate and patient eye
Thou mark'st the creedmen pass thee by
To rave and raise a hue and cry

Against each other:
 Thou seest a father up on high,
 In man a brother.

The poet is judged to be above the petty squabbles among the sects and is, furthermore, primarily a Christian. This is followed by what appears to be another, concealed, warning:

I would not have a mind like thine
 Thy artless childhood tastes resign,
 Jostle in mobs, or sup and dine
 Its powers away;
 And after noisy pleasures pine
 Some distant day.

The poet is seen to have lost his taste for simple things and is now enjoying London life, wining and dining perhaps to excess and to the detriment of his health. He might miss this entertainment on his return to country ways. But was it only these excesses that were leading him astray?:

And, John! though you may mildly scoff,
 That curst confounded church-yard cough
 Gives pretty plain advice, be off!
 While yet you can;
 It is not time yet, John! to doff
 Your outward man.⁶⁷

Perhaps it was not only his physical health that was at risk. These lines could be interpreted as a warning that his reputation was also being contaminated by the company he was keeping, possibly the company of known radicals. It remains interesting that Elton considered it necessary to write this poem and that Taylor saw fit to publish it. But these were politically sensitive days and Clare's research into, or openly-expressed admiration for, religious views outside the confines of the Established Church could have been interpreted as adherence to a dissenting sect, thus attracting suspicion and distrust, possibly danger. Royle and Walvin consider that Methodism itself made a contribution to radicalism:

It often expressed the Class conscientiousness of a community (particularly a village Community) against the established symbols of squire and parson [...]. Dissent can still be identified with reform in the nineteenth century, for the obverse of the union of Church and State was that of dissent in religion and politics. Not all reformers were Dissenters by any means, but all (or practically all), Dissenters were Whigs, Liberals, or radicals.⁶⁸

If this view is accepted as a correct assessment then indeed Clare was in dangerous territory. In September 1824 he tried to sum up his personal religious opinions

I have read the first chapter of Genesis the beginning of which is very fine but the sacred historian took a great deal upon credit for this world when he imagines that god created the sun moon and stars [...] for no other purpose then its use [...]—it is a harmless and universal propens[i]ty to magnify consequences that appertain to ourselves and would be a foolish thing to try the test of the scriptures upon these groundless assertions—for it contains the best Poetry and the best morality in the world⁶⁹

Yet of the New Testament he opined:

I am convinced of its sacred design and that its writers were inspired by an almighty power to benefit the world by their writings – but I am far from being convinced that the desired end is or will be attained at present while cant and hypocrisy is blasphemously allowed to make a mask of religion and to pass as current characters I will not say that this is universal God forbid—⁷⁰

Certainly Dissent had a good deal to offer to anyone of Clare's independence and enquiring mind and particular needs. Loyal supporters of the Established Church such as Mrs Emerson and Lord Radstock among others, had cause to be alarmed at the prospect of a diffusion of dissenting doctrines, especially if they contaminated their protégé whom they were anxious to promote as an example of 'an honest and upright man' whose political views coincided with their own. The suspicion accorded to Dissenting groups by other reactionary movements had effectively politicised them and this stigma, as it was then designated, would have been extended to their followers, or quasi-followers. Nevertheless, although Clare had no long-lasting loyalty to any sect and repeated his commitment to the Church, he clearly fell under some degree of suspicion.

The only certainty about his religious opinions is their continuous uncertainty. It is difficult to improve on the Tibbles' summary of the situation:

Clare did not know in theological detail what he believed. To the end he did not succeed in building any body of belief for himself. He knew better what he did not believe. And he held his 'litany of doubts' within a religion of gratitude for earth's beauty.⁷¹

NOTES

1. Charles Abraham Elton, 'The Idler's Epistle to John Clare', *London Magazine*, X (August 1824), 143-45, *Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed Mark Storey, (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 183-86 (pp. 184-85).
2. Clare's first letter to Elton is dated 18 December 1824. His third visit to London was in May 1824. *Letters*, pp. 309, xl-xli.
3. 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet', *London Magazine*, I (January 1820), 7-11.
4. *Catalogue*, p. 27, no. 218.
5. Egerton MS 2250, fols 131 r/v, 132 r/v. Robert Heyes confirms that this letter can be dated on internal evidence to 16 March 1821.
6. Edmund Blunden, *Keats's Publisher: A Memoir of John Taylor* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 65.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
9. *Letters*, pp. 137-38.
10. Eg. MS 2246, fols 88r-89v.
11. Anthony Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1938), pp. 9-12.
12. *By Himself*, pp.102-03. *Catalogue*, p. 7 no.1.
13. *By Himself*, p. 104.
14. *Letters*, pp. 4-6.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-14.
17. *By Himself*, pp. 6-7.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

20. Ibid., p. 78.
21. Ibid., p. 40.
22. Ibid., p. 78.
23. *By Himself*, p. 277.
24. Ibid., p. 171
25. Ibid., p. 175.
26. Ibid., p. 30.
27. Ibid., p. 178.
28. Ibid., p. 182-84.
29. Ibid., p. 229.
30. *By Himself*, p. 171-43, esp. p. 213)
31. Eg. MS 2248, fols 126 r/v.
32. J. W. and Anne Tibble, *John Clare: A Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932), p. 278.
33. *The Prose of John Clare*, ed. J. W. and Anne Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 227.
34. *Letters*, p. 17.
35. *A Champion for the Poor*, p. 286.
36. *Letters*, p. 250.
37. James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsay 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 194-212. Pamela Horn, *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), p. 165.
38. Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 43-44.
39. *By Himself*, p. 133.
40. *Early Poems*, I, p. 605.
41. *By Himself*, p. 133.
42. *Letters*, p. 291.
43. Ibid., p. 292.
44. Ibid., p. 294.
45. John Lucas, *John Clare* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p. 41.
46. Obelkevich p. 76.
47. *Letters*, pp. 296-97. It is assumed that these Methodists were Wesleyan and that the group referred to as Ranters were Primitive Methodists.

48. Ibid., pp. 299, 303, 304, 306, 309.
49. Obelkevich, p. 76.
50. *By Himself*, pp. 171-243.
51. Pamela Horn, *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* (Stroud: Sutton 1995), p. 185.
52. Porter, 'All Madness for Writing', p. 263.
53. *Letters*, pp. 516-17.
54. Ibid, pp. 585-91.
55. Frederick Martin, *The Life of John Clare*, (London: Cass, 1964), p. 265. June Wilson, *Green Shadows* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1951), p. 198. John and Anne Tibble, *John Clare: His Life and Poetry*, (London: Heinemann, 1956), p. 145.
56. Lucas.
57. Eg. MS. 2245, fol. 71r.
58. *Letters*, p. 560.
59. Ibid., pp. 639-40.
60. *Later Poems*, I, pp. 105-58.
61. *Later Poems*, I, p. xiii.
62. *Letters*, p. 69.
63. Horn, p. 175.
64. *Letters*, p. 110.
65. Ibid., p. 292.
66. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 56.
67. *Critical Heritage*, pp. 184-85.
68. Edward Royle and James Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848* (Brighton: Harvester 1982), pp.183-84.
69. *By Himself*, p. 173.
70. Ibid., p. 178.
71. *John Clare; His Life and Poetry*, p. 125.