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TWO LETTERS WRITTEN BY
ALEXANDER BICKETT OF LOWELL,
MASSACHUSETTS, DURING HIS TOUR OF
BRITAIN, 1843-1844

Transcribed by
Tiffany Spence

with an introduction by
Kenneth Veitch



THE EUROPEAN
ETHNOLOGICAL
RESEARCH CENTRE

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during his Tour of Britain, 1843-1844*

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Sources in Local History
General editor: Kenneth Veitch

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PREFACE

The two letters presented here are all that remain of a correspondence that Alexander Bickett and Alexander Wright, two immigrant Scots who had settled in Lowell, Massachusetts, kept when the former was visiting Britain in 1843-1844. They were inherited in 2011 by Tiffany Spence from her great-grandmother. Born on a farm in Harwich, Massachusetts, in 1922, she was a dealer in antique glass who lived much of her life on Cape Cod. It is not known when or why they came into her possession.

EDITING

To preserve the conversational tone of Bickett's letters, the original punctuation has been retained. So too has the original spelling. Words that have been misspelled but are readily recognisable have not been annotated. Missing letters have been inserted in [] only when the meaning of the word would otherwise be unclear or hinder easy reading. Sic has been used sparingly, mainly to indicate irregular or archaic spellings that might otherwise be mistaken for transcribal or typographical errors. For misspelled words that are not immediately obvious, or that might be confused with another word, the correct form is provided in [*i.e.*]. Where necessary for sense, missing words are supplied in [].

MAPS



Map 1. Detail from *Map of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island* (1843). Lowell is circled in red. The two places where Bickett was offered employment as a farm manager, Ballardvale and Naushon Island, are circled in blue.

(Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, Boston Public Library)



Map 2. *Plan of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts* (1850). Alexander Bickett's house at the west end of Cheever Street has been circled in red. Alexander Wright lived in Market Street, opposite the Lowell Manufacturing Company's buildings. (Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, Boston Public Library)

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Bickett was born in Ayr on 4 June 1799, the son of Robert Bickett and Agnes Campbell.¹ His father was a skinner and tanner, one of several members of the family involved in some way with the local cattle trade. Bickett continued this tradition when he decided to follow his uncle and become a butcher and cattle dealer. He entered his apprenticeship towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when the cattle trade was flourishing thanks to an unprecedented demand for beef from the British army and navy. By the time he set out on his own, however, the economic prospect was very different. A post-war recession had caused a slump in cattle prices, bringing financial ruin to many in the trade, especially dealers. Bickett struggled on for a number of years, only to be declared bankrupt in February 1825. A series of meetings and examinations were subsequently held to ascertain the state of his affairs, culminating in December, when his creditors accepted an offer of 4 shillings per pound.

Bickett then disappears from the surviving records only to reappear on a list of passengers arriving in New York on 5 June 1832. He had set sail from Greenock on 9 April on board the *Science* with around 130 other Scottish emigrants, 'principally people connected with agriculture, and in comfortable circumstances'.² There were a number of families among the passengers, including nineteen from the Auchterarder district of Perthshire. Bickett, however, appears to have travelled alone.

It is not known where Bickett first settled in America, but he spent at least some time between 1832 and 1839 living with Henry Colman. A former Congregational minister with an abiding interest in agriculture, Colman had left his pastorate in Salem in 1831 to farm 200 acres in Greenfield, Franklin County, Massachusetts. Here he continued to put his belief in improved methods of agriculture into practice, experimenting with new modes of cultivation and livestock rearing.³ In his spare time, he delivered addresses and wrote papers on farming topics ranging from grain flies to rutabaga. As with many American improvers, Colman was a great admirer of British farming, and he often used these public discourses to encourage a spirit of emulation among local farmers. In an address to the Essex Agricultural Society, for example, he highlighted how dairymen in Britain were getting higher yields of milk from their improved breeds of cattle;⁴ and as part of that society's committee on milch cows and heifers, he welcomed the introduction of improved Durham Shorthorn cattle to Massachusetts.⁵ He admitted, however, that he was no expert on British breeds and reserved judgement on their

superiority to the native breed until further evidence was produced – something which Bickett, with his wide experience of cattle breeding in Scotland, would have been able to provide.

Colman sold Meadowbanks farm in Greenfield in 1836 and moved to Boston. A year later, he was given the task of compiling a detailed agricultural survey of Massachusetts, an enterprise based on an idea that he himself had been promoting for a couple of years. As commissioner of the survey, he decided that it would not just record current farming practices, but also highlight recent innovations and show how these and other improvements might usefully be adopted across the whole state. Rather than rely wholly on questionnaires and similar correspondence, he collected much of the information in person, travelling around a selected number of counties in order to observe and talk to farmers. The results of his survey were published in four volumes between 1838 and 1841. They received a mixed reception, with some critics arguing that by focusing on improved farms and their generally wealthy owners, Colman had paid insufficient attention to the practices and practical needs of those farmers who were required to make a living from agriculture. This division between gentlemen farmers and practical farmers cut across all areas of agriculture and was something Bickett himself experienced when advocating improved breeds of cattle.

It is unclear whether Bickett was employed by Colman at Meadowbanks farm or boarded with him either in Salem⁶ or in Boston. By the time the second volume of the agricultural survey had been published in 1839, however, he was living in Lowell, Massachusetts. Since its foundation in 1826, Lowell had grown into a thriving, bustling city of over 20,000 people, many of them immigrants attracted by the prospect of employment in one of its mills or other industries.⁷ Among them was Bickett's brother Francis. He had sailed to New York on the *Cruikston Castle* in the summer of 1836, along with around 150 other emigrants, 'chiefly agriculturalists from the west of Scotland'.⁸ Although he was described as a farmer on the passenger list, he found employment in Lowell as a butcher in the city market. This was another of the Bickett family trades, and one that Alexander had himself pursued when in Scotland. Alexander Bickett was listed in the *Lowell Directory* for both 1839 and 1840 as boarding at 22 Lowell Street (his brother's old lodgings), but neither mention his occupation. A letter he wrote on 1 January 1842, however, suggests that if he did move to Lowell to join his brother in the butcher trade, then as in Scotland, he combined it with cattle dealing. 'I have just returned from "personally perambulating" a portion of the United States and Canada, to the extent of nearly three

thousand miles, and have seen some of the “best” herds of cattle in the country through which I passed,’ he noted,⁹ suggesting a journey of some months. Another possibility is that, as with cattle dealers in Scotland, he had taken on the tenancy of some land in the neighbourhood where he could keep and fatten his herd before selling them on. This would perhaps account for the editor of the *Boston Cultivator* calling him at this time, ‘an excellent Scotch farmer’.¹⁰

Lowell was also home to the recipient of the two letters presented here, Alexander Wright. Born in Arklestone, near Paisley, on 4 May 1800, he travelled to America with his mother and brothers in 1815 to join his father, who had emigrated some years earlier and worked as a bleacher in Smithfield, Rhode Island. After working with his father for five or six years, Wright set out on his own, first as a manufacturer of coach lace and then as the co-owner and manager of a carpet mill in Medway, the first of its kind in Massachusetts. For his looms, and the workers to operate them, he travelled back to Scotland, narrowly escaping shipwreck on his return journey. A consortium subsequently bought the factory at Medway, although Wright was kept on as agent and in 1829 he moved with the rest of the employees to Lowell, where he became superintendent of the Lowell Manufacturing Company. Described as an ‘eminently social and intelligent man’,¹¹ he went on to play an active part in the public life of the city and was elected alderman in 1836 and to the legislature in 1838, although being ‘naturally modest’, he on more than one occasion declined to accept the mayorship of Lowell. His civic spirit was also expressed in various other roles, including as the president of the Middlesex Mechanics Association, a member of the Scots’ Charitable Society of Boston, and an officer in the Middlesex Horticultural Society.

Gardening was just one of the hobbies that Wright pursued. His subscription to John James Audubon’s *The Birds of America* points to an interest in ornithology, which is perhaps not surprising given he was the nephew of Alexander Wilson, ‘The Father of American Ornithology’. Like many Americans at the time, Wright was also intrigued by ‘animal magnetism’, the belief that all living things possess an invisible force or fluid, which can be manipulated to bring about physical effects. While early practitioners attempted to achieve this by touch, by the mid nineteenth century most of them were using mesmerism (*i.e.* hypnotism), which for many adherents became its main point of interest. Wright attended lectures and experiments conducted by one of the leading proponents of this theory, Charles Poyen, in order ‘to ascertain its reality’.¹² Two of these experiments were conducted in Wright’s own house, in front of a specially selected committee of gentlemen and their

wives.¹³ Wright subsequently undertook his own experiments, on one occasion sending a local lawyer into a 'mystic slumber', with the result that this one-time sceptic 'is now as much convinced of the truth of Magnetism, as of his own existence!'.¹⁴ On another, he mesmerised the clairvoyant Cynthia Gleason (a guest in his house at the time), who proceeded to tell the medical history of a 'very respectable lady of Lowell' merely from handling a lock of her hair (which her doctor had obligingly supplied for the experiment). Convinced of its authenticity, Wright was only too happy to provide Poyen with a certificate stating his belief that, 'Animal Magnetism is a *true science*'.¹⁵ Poyen returned the compliment by dedicating his book *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England* to Wright, announcing:

I have met with very few who unite, in so great a measure as you do, an earnest love for science, firmness of character, independence and liberality of mind, the philosophic spirit and soundness of judgment, to so much benevolence, tenderness of feeling, and ease of manners.¹⁶

A copy of Poyen's book on animal magnetism was donated to the library of the Middlesex Mechanics Association.¹⁷ It was listed in the library's catalogue alongside a number of volumes on phrenology, another 'science of the human mind' that had attracted a following in Lowell, often of the same people.¹⁸ The mayor of Lowell, Dr Elisha Bartlett, for example, was not just an enthusiastic supporter of animal magnetism but also a vocal advocate of phrenology.¹⁹ That the American phrenologist L N Fowler was given access to the Lowell mills so he could examine the skulls of the workers, suggests that Wright was at least curious to learn more. Bickett met a teacher in Dundee (James Campbell) who was similarly interested in both mesmerism and phrenology.²⁰ Campbell was, moreover, acquainted with George Combe, whom Wright is likely to have met when the Edinburgh phrenologist gave a series of lectures at the Mechanics' Hall in Lowell in December 1839.²¹ That Campbell had also been undertaking research into different seed preparations, which he had exhibited at the recent Highland and Agricultural Society Show,²² reflects the fact that mesmerism, phrenology and agricultural improvement were all part of the same post-Enlightenment impulse to understand, order and improve the natural world through observation and experimentation, whatever their relative scientific merits.²³

Wright's decision to buy a farm near Lowell and take a part-time interest in agriculture might have been guided by the same enquiring spirit. In doing so, he joined the growing ranks of New England's gentlemen farmers, many of whom had similarly made their money in commerce or manufacturing. Acquiring a farm was more than just an investment or a diverting hobby, however: for Henry Colman and other supporters of improvement, it was a patriotic undertaking, especially as these gentlemen farmers often devoted 'a great deal of time and property to experiment in agriculture, unprofitable indeed to themselves, but of the greatest public benefit'.²⁴ As a member of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture and the Middlesex Agricultural Society, Wright would have had the opportunity to converse with like-minded improvers, attend lectures, borrow books, and otherwise be kept abreast of the latest developments in farming both at home and in Britain. Both of these societies also held annual shows where members could socialise, exhibit their livestock and produce, and view the latest agricultural implements. Wright was a regular attendee at these shows, and in 1840 was commended for his display of strawberries at the Middlesex show and of pears at the Massachusetts show.

In his agricultural survey of Massachusetts, Colman asserted that while the benefits of the Middlesex shows 'have been very great ... they fall far short of accomplishing all the good which they might'.²⁵ One of his complaints was that the premiums for cattle were too often awarded for the 'accidental possession' of a fine animal, which was often purchased in another county for the sole purpose of winning the prize. While admitting that Middlesex was not an ideal stock-raising district due to a deficiency of pasturage, the high price of cattle feed and the demand for agricultural produce, he urged local farmers to try and enhance their stock through experiments in feeding and by importing improved breeds. Some Middlesex farmers had done just that, and Colman made special mention of the Ayrshires imported by John P Cushing of Watertown in 1837. No mention is made of Alexander Wright, but as early as 1838 he was exhibiting Durham Shorthorns at the Middlesex annual cattle show in Concord.²⁶

Exactly which breed of cattle was best suited to the climate and short pasturages of Massachusetts, and New England generally, was a matter of much debate. The Durham Shorthorn was the most widely kept of the improved breeds and had many admirers, with Wells Lathrop of South Hadley Falls, Hampshire County, declaring that it was 'much more valuable than any other race, for the shambles, for the pail, and for the dairy'.²⁷ Henry Colman agreed up to a point, noting in his survey that it

was 'not surpassed, indeed not equalled, by any which have come under my observation ... [and with good keeping] come[s] to early maturity, and attain[s] a large weight'.²⁸ He thought it better suited to the richer pastures of Kentucky and Ohio, however. Others questioned its hardiness, and preferred the North Devon, arguing that it combined the qualities of fattening and milking, and was also a good draught animal. Among those who thought that dairying should be the main concern of the state's cattle farmers, the Ayrshire had a growing number of supporters. Elias Phinney of Lexington informed Colman that, 'I cannot doubt that the Ayrshire, for its dairy properties, is greatly superior to the Durham for this part of our country' and praised its 'capacity for enduring the cold winters and short keep of the northerly part of the country'.²⁹ The Alderney and the 'extremely beautiful' Hereford also had their advocates,³⁰ while some breeders continued to admire the hardy constitution of the native red and proposed that the cattle farmers of New England would be best served by crossing them with either the Devon or the Durham.³¹

While this debate would have taken place wherever cattle breeders and farmers met, it was mainly through farming periodicals such as the *New England Farmer*, *Cultivator* and *Farmers' Register* that they could make their opinions on the topic widely known. With his first-hand knowledge of cattle breeding on both sides of the Atlantic and having seen herds 'both of native and imported stock of different breeds'³² during his recent extensive tour of north-eastern America, Bickett was considered a worthy commentator and his letters were published in a number of papers. Notably, they were all written in the early 1840s when he was living in Lowell and show a strong preference for the Ayrshire breed. In a letter to the *New England Farmer* in January 1842, for example, he called upon his own experience and the evidence presented by British authors to challenge some negative comments made about the Ayrshire in the *Boston Cultivator*, claiming (perhaps with a degree of native pride) that, 'For fine symmetry of form and beauty of colour, it is not surpassed if equalled by any other breed'.³³ This prompted a letter to the *Boston Cultivator* from 'C' of Andover, who sought to correct some of Bickett's assertions so that, 'my brother farmers may not be misled by exaggerated accounts of new things'.³⁴ A month later, Bickett sent a three-page response to the *New England Farmer* in which he not only quoted extensively from both American and British publications, including Henry Colman's survey, but also cited his own findings, to prove that the Ayrshire was, indeed, 'a desirable breed for New England'. Clearly riled, he ended the letter by stating that if his critic did not believe the views of

the quoted authorities, then 'for his own credit he will rebut them by stronger proof and better logic than he has yet produced'.³⁵

Most of Bickett's other letters to the farming press display a similar mixture of well-marshalled evidence and forthright opinion, although in one correspondence the latter characteristic came to the fore. In a letter to the *Boston Cultivator*, A B Allen, a noted cattle breeder and future founding editor of the *American Agriculturist*, claimed that there was no need for American farmers to go to the expense of importing Ayrshires from Britain, as they could be created at home simply by crossing a Durham bull with native cows. Bickett responded by saying that while such a move would be very desirable, 'as the Ayrshire breed of cattle stands unrivalled for their milking qualities, and for the good quality of the butter and cheese produced from it', it was 'an idea too absurd to be entertained for a moment by any person who possesses a fraction of the knowledge of these matters that is generally ascribed to Mr. Allen'.³⁶ For good measure, he implied that Allen had an 'unpractised eye' and that he and other so-called experts were 'able to do the greatest amount of evil' with their published opinions. Allen responded in a moderate tone, explaining that the original article had been written in a hurry and that his views had been misinterpreted;³⁷ and Bickett's overall point received support from other breeders, including Captain George Randall of New Bedford, Bristol County. The spat was prolonged, however, by a letter from 'An Onondaga Farmer', who argued against further importations of improved cattle from Britain partly for reasons of cost, partly because he feared that they would introduce disease, and partly because he thought that there were already enough of them in America to improve the native breed.³⁸ This last argument suggested to Bickett that 'An Onondaga Farmer' and Allen were one and the same, and he alluded to it a number of times in a reply that warned against 'would-be-monopolist breeders'.³⁹ It inevitably drew a response from 'An Onondaga Farmer', who, before going on to deny he was A B Allen, stated:

To the general tone of his paper ... and his insinuations, I have no reply. Such a tone and temper cannot subserve the cause of truth; and will not be indulged in a civilised country, by one who has not made up his mind to forfeit all claim to the character of a gentleman.⁴⁰

It was at this point, in September 1842, that the editor of the *Boston Cultivator* decided to 'close the controversy'.

Gentleman or not, Bickett's skills were clearly valued, as it was around this time that John Marland asked him to manage the farm on the

large estate he had recently bought in Ballardvale, Essex County. It was perhaps Bickett's knowledge of cattle that attracted Marland in particular, as his plans for the farm included establishing an improved dairy herd, to which end he had already purchased a prize-winning Ayrshire bull. One of Bickett's responsibilities would have been to provide the dairymaid, whose principal duties were to milk the cows, bring up the calves, and make butter and cheese from the milk obtained from the cows after the calves had been weaned. This was a skilled job, one that in the words of Henry Stephens required 'an active, attentive, and intelligent person'.⁴¹ Experience working with improved breeds would also have been of great advantage, and for Bickett this meant hiring a dairymaid from his home county of Ayrshire. Such a move was not unusual: emigrant Scots were noted (to some, notorious) for recruiting apprentices and skilled workers from their native districts, usually from among their family or acquaintances, rather than hire locally. What was unusual, however, is that Bickett decided to travel to Scotland himself rather than rely on a trusted family member or friend to choose a suitable person.

It was during this trip that the two letters presented here were written, and they reveal that getting 'a Scotch lassie to go back with him'⁴² was only one reason why Bickett crossed the Atlantic. He was also keen to learn about developments in British agriculture, in particular ones that would be of use to him in his new venture, and spent much of his time visiting dairies, farms, museums, sales and shows across England and Scotland. He also made a brief visit to Ireland. The usefulness of such agricultural tours had been established in the late eighteenth century by Arthur Young, whose publications were widely admired in America and partly inspired Henry Colman's survey of Massachusetts. As its reputation for farming excellence grew through the early decades of the nineteenth century, Britain also began to attract agricultural tourists from America. Some of them sent letters to farming periodicals back home, briefly recounting their experiences and sharing their observations and opinions with an eager readership. The aforementioned A B Allen went further, describing his three-month agricultural tour of Britain in 1841 in a series of detailed articles published in the opening volumes of the *American Agriculturist*. Perhaps the most ambitious of these American visitors, however, was Colman himself, who arrived in Liverpool in April 1843 after his plan 'to visit Europe for the purpose of acquiring practical information in agriculture and rural economy, and, by imparting the same to the public, to extend the knowledge of agriculture, and to promote agricultural science in this country'⁴³ had received the support of the board of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture.

With the early correspondence between Bickett and Wright now lost, it is unclear when exactly Bickett arrived in Britain, although the letter of August 1843 suggests that he had been there for some weeks. It also shows that, whether or not he sailed with Colman, the two men met at least twice in Britain, first in Derby and then in Dundee. In the latter, they climbed the Law together, visited the aforementioned James Campbell, and no doubt exchanged news and shared their opinions on the people they had met and the places they had seen since their previous meeting. It was perhaps at this point that Bickett offered to make Colman known to various farmers in his native Ayrshire, an introduction that was to prove extremely useful to Colman later in his tour: 'I saw there some of the best farming that I have ever seen, and certainly I never met with more hospitable people,' he later reported.⁴⁴

Colman's survey encompassed, in his own words,

everything connected with the cultivation of the earth, the production of food for man and beast, and the condition of those to whom agriculture is a business and a profession. The various operations of husbandry, the implements by which these operations are carried on and facilitated, the plants cultivated, and the live stock produced and maintained.⁴⁵

Bickett's ambitions might have been more modest, but the range and thoroughness of his tour was nonetheless impressive. In England, he visited farms across twelve counties, comparing local practices and noting everything from ploughing techniques to methods of stacking hay and corn. A visit to London included some traditional sight-seeing, but the main object of his interest was the city's dairies, including those in Hyde Park and the famous Rhodes dairy in Islington, where he cast a critical eye over its herd of Durhams and Yorkshires. He also inspected the cattle on Newcastle's town muir, where he was no doubt gratified to find that the best milker 'looked very much like an Ayrshire' (Letter 1).

In Scotland, the scope of his tour widened to include a visit to Drummond's Agricultural Museum in Stirling, which had been founded a decade earlier 'as a medium of collecting and diffusing a knowledge of the best existing instruments of agriculture, systems of cultivation, and for bringing before the public the successive improvements of the day'.⁴⁶ The museum of the Highland and Agricultural Society in Edinburgh had a similar purpose, and on his visit there, Bickett would have been able to study models of the latest farm implements and machines, grain and soil samples, stuffed animals and other instructive exhibits. Its collection of

drawings and paintings of prize-winning livestock appears to have been of particular interest, not least because it gave him further evidence for the superiority of the Ayrshire: 'The Ayrshire cow which I saw the drawing of in the Museum had a much greater appearance of milk than the shorthorn or any other breed that is represented there,' he informed Wright (Letter 1).

In August, he attended the Society's show in Dundee, which despite the bad weather attracted a large crowd. A pavilion had been erected to house exhibits of implements and machines, and it was no doubt here that he saw the 'very usfull' machine for 'throwing up water' (Letter 1). There were also over 750 animals on show and while there were no specific premiums for Ayrshires, Bickett happily noted that they took the three highest prizes for dairy cows of any breed. Colman was also at the show and gave a speech at the grand dinner held on the evening of 9 August in which he generously extolled Scottish farming, acknowledged the debt he owed to the published works of Scottish agriculturists and shared his view that the aims of improved agriculture were not simply economic, but more importantly philanthropic, for as production increased 'human happiness, and consequently human improvement, are best provided for'.⁴⁷ Bickett does not mention attending the dinner, but he would have been able to read Colman's speech in full in the *New England Farmer* on his return to America.

It was around this time that Bickett visited the farm of Deanston (Stirlingshire), where its former tenant James Smith had set out more than 100 miles of drains, experimenting with different types and patterns.⁴⁸ Bickett was by no means the first to do so: by 1843, Deanston was a well-established destination on agricultural tours of Britain. The following extract from an obituary of James Smith both highlights this and describes what Bickett would have experienced on his visit:

Agriculturists from all countries now came crowding every year to visit Deanston, and were hospitably welcomed. Besides being entirely thorough-drained and sub-soil ploughed, it was otherwise a remarkable place, having become as pleasing to the eye as it was interesting to the intellect and the heart. The fields were conveniently laid off, kept very clean, and fenced generally with pretty white-thorn hedges; or, where the situation required it, with ornamental belts of thriving plantations, which afforded protection to the crops and shelter to the flocks. Water, for the supply of the fields and for the cattle, was obtained from tanks fed by the drains, and pumped into water-troughs by an ingenious but simple

arrangement; and there was not an open ditch on the whole farm. The crops in their season were usually luxuriant, a thorough and uniform dryness having been acquired over the whole surface by the new system of working.⁴⁹

Smith's pioneering work on drainage and subsoil ploughing had won him admirers in America, with one New England farmer arguing that if his methods were 'generally introduced among us, it would be found one of the greatest agricultural improvements of the age'.⁵⁰ For Henry Colman, Smith was 'the eminent agricultural improver, whose system of thorough drainage and subsoiling may be said to constitute an era of agricultural improvement'.⁵¹ While Bickett and Colman were able to see the results of his experiments for themselves on their visits to Deanston, their fellows back home were kept informed by the farming press, which reprinted material on the 'Deanston method' from British journals, including transcripts of lectures given by Smith himself to various agricultural societies in Britain, and reports from local farmers who had tried the method themselves.⁵²

Indeed, it is worth emphasising that while the publications of Sir John Sinclair and other distinguished Scottish agricultural authors were readily available in America to those who either had the means to purchase them or had access to the libraries of agricultural societies, most Americans would have gained their knowledge of farming in Scotland through periodicals such as the *American Agriculturist* and the *New England Farmer*. Some of the material they published was original, such as the series of letters that John P Norton wrote for the *American Agriculturist* while he was studying agricultural chemistry in Scotland.⁵³ Much of it, however, was reprinted from Scottish journals. During the 1830s, for example, subscribers to the *New England Farmer* were able to read articles on the cultivation of potatoes from the *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, on meadow hay from the *Edinburgh Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, on butter making from *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*,⁵⁴ and much else besides. Bickett would have been interested in the detailed description of an Ayrshire farm that was reprinted in the *Farmers' Register*,⁵⁶ and particularly so in the widely reprinted article written by Edinburgh cattle dealer James Dickson on the points by which livestock were judged.⁵⁵ An article from the *Edinburgh Quarterly Journal of Agriculture* that outlined the development of farming in Scotland since the early eighteenth century also gained widespread notice, mainly as it provided a lesson in how an agriculturally backward country had been transformed through the adoption of improved farming

practices.⁵⁷ It was this transformation that made Scotland so worthy of American farmers' attention, as an editorial in the *Cultivator* made clear:

And what has that [Scottish agriculture] to do with American husbandry? Much, we reply. We may learn from what Scotland *was*, and what she *is* in agriculture, many useful lessons in farming. We may learn our own errors in practice; and, if we are not too proud, or too conceited, we may learn, from Scotch lessons in farming how to correct them – we may learn from them how to double at least the products of our agricultural labor. The history of Scotch agriculture for the last fifty years, is invaluable to every farmer who would improve his practice. History is wisdom, teaching by example.⁵⁸

By August, Bickett was back in Ayrshire and evidently making the most of his connections there. He informed Wright that he had spent a day 'in company with the judges who were appointed to award the premiums' (Letter 1), probably the ones that had been offered by Archibald Hamilton of Carcluie for the 'cleanest and best kept farms in the district of Ayr'.⁵⁹ Among the judges were the noted cattle breeders James Finlay of Lyonstone and John Hamilton of Capringstone, both of whom Bickett would have known personally from his time as a dealer in Ayrshire. On the following two days, Bickett joined members of the St Quivox Farmers' Club as they inspected each other's farms. The club had been established in 1838 'by a number of farmers and others interested in agricultural improvement, for the discussion of matters affecting the culture and management of the farm and dairy',⁶⁰ one of many that played a vital role in disseminating new farming ideas and practices across Scotland in the first half of the nineteenth century and beyond. Its endeavours did not go unnoticed in America. In one of his reports for the *American Agriculturist*, John P Norton recorded a recent visit to the club, noting that it was 'distinguished for the zeal of its members in agricultural improvement'.⁶¹ It was also famed for its practice of visiting local farms in a body.⁶² While some commentators focused on the remarkable sight of up to sixty club members and their guests riding around St Quivox on their annual inspection,⁶³ others highlighted its practical impact:

Besides fostering a spirit of inquiry and disseminating information at its meetings, the St. Quivox Farmers' Club took another way of stimulating its members to careful management. Near the beginning of harvest, meetings were held at which the practice was to proceed from farm to farm and see what the members were doing. Much

good was done in this way. The prospect of so many critical eyes made farmers exert themselves in order to have well-cleaned crops and pastures, with headlands, fences, and farm roads in good order. And, in addition to the members, the meetings were attended by intelligent farmers from other parts of the country, who could not fail to profit by such inspections, and carry the influence of the Club over a wide circle.⁶⁴

These clubs also had a social side, and at dinners such as the one Bickett attended at the end of the annual inspection, further news would have been shared and new acquaintances made.

It was perhaps after making the acquaintance of one of its directors during the earlier tour of local farms that Bickett received an invitation to visit the Templemoyle Agricultural Seminary, near Limavady in north-west Ireland. The seminary had been opened in 1827 after the North-west of Ireland Farming Society had put forward an idea for a school, 'in which the sons of farmers would receive a substantially good English education, and also be instructed in the scientific and practical knowledge of farming pursuits'.⁶⁵ The visit coincided with the annual show of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, which was held at May's Market, Belfast, on 30-31 August. Here, the Ayrshires were judged in a class of their own; and five of the eight premiums were won by Ayrshire farmers,⁶⁶ at least one of whom Bickett knew personally. There were also Devons and Shorthorns on show, and the two men no doubt discussed the respective qualities of all three breeds.

Back in Scotland, Bickett continued to gather useful information, in one instance attending a lecture on the constitution of soils and crops given in Glasgow by James F W Johnston, reader in chemistry and mineralogy at Durham University and the chemist for the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland. He also frequented sales for 'high-bred cattle', attended the cattle fair at Ayr and visited various stock farms. These 'excursions amongst cows' gave him the opportunity to meet some of south-west Scotland's leading cattle breeders, including John Young of Kilmaurs Mains, Hugh Kirkwood of High Longmuir and Lawrence Drew of Merryton.

It is clear from the letters that during these excursions, indeed throughout his whole tour of Britain, Bickett was no passive observer: as with Henry Colman, who learned much during his own tour through 'free communication' with 'landlords, and tenants and laborers, in their own domiciles and homesteads, in their stables and fields',⁶⁷ he talked to people wherever he went. London dairymen were asked about milk yields,

a farm worker about turnip cultivation, and farmers everywhere about the respective merits of different breeds of cattle. Bickett even had 'good sport with a gentleman from Hull while on the coach between Newcastle and Coldstream' who 'talked very largely about farming' (Letter 1). He admitted gently mocking this 'good natured John Bull' and was probably equally ready at other times during the tour to voice his own opinion or make sardonic remarks about those who held contrary views. According to Colman and others, Bickett was nonetheless held in respect among the farmers of Ayrshire, and his good, practical knowledge of farming would have lent authority to his opinions, however they were expressed.

While he was in Britain, Bickett received another job offer, this time from William Swain of Naushon Island, Massachusetts. Swain and William Murray Forbes had purchased the island in 1842 and were engaged in an extensive programme of improvements that included draining marshes, planting trees and erecting new farm buildings. Swain wanted Bickett to take over as farm manager, a role that included providing bed and board for the farm servants as well as overseeing their work. The manager was also expected to supply the women who would not only help with the cooking and the washing, but also work in the new, enlarged dairy. Being a larger farm than John Marland's, Bickett thought that succeeding there would do his reputation more good, although he was concerned about its location, being both isolated from other communities and distant from kirk and market. Knowing little more about Naushon, he deferred his decision until he had returned to America and had a chance to see the farm and speak to Swain in person. He asked Wright to find out what we could in the meantime.

Bickett also discussed his plans with Henry Colman, who urged him to consider buying his own farm before agreeing to manage someone else's, recommending in particular some land that John Greig had put up for sale in western New York. Born in Moffatt, Dumfriesshire, in 1779, Greig had emigrated to the United States in 1797, where he found work as a lawyer, mainly as a land agent for various clients. He also speculated for himself, and over the years had bought and sold extensive estates in the Genesee Valley and elsewhere. He had evidently asked Colman to look for potential settlers while in Britain, perhaps Scots in particular, being one himself. Indeed, despite having lived in Canandaigua since 1800, he retained a pronounced Scottishness, as one commentator remembered: '[he was] especially noted for his peculiarities of manner and conversation, for he was a Scotchman and seemed to have inherited the remarkable degree of the peculiarities of his people'.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding, he had a distinguished record of public service and was admired as 'a man

of fine sensibilities and cultivated taste'.⁶⁹ Colman no doubt mentioned Greig's interest in improved agriculture,⁷⁰ an interest that had seen him play a prominent part in the Ontario Agricultural Society. Bickett, however, seems to have been wary of Colman's enthusiasm and once again asked Wright for his advice before making up his mind.

In his second letter to Wright, Bickett laid out in detail how he would go about establishing the Ayrshire breed in New England – if he had the inclination and the means to do so. In the meantime, he appears to have been content sharing his findings with farmers in Massachusetts who had both. He wrote to a 'Mr Randall', for example, informing him of an excellent cow he had seen at Kilmaur Mains. This was probably the aforementioned Captain George Randall, who kept a herd of both imported and bred Ayrshire cattle at his farm in New Bedford. Among them were several cows and bulls bred by the aforementioned Lawrence Drew, including the famous Swinley, which had taken 'more prizes than any cow in Scotland'.⁷¹ While Randall's response goes unrecorded, Wright was impressed enough by Bickett's reports to express an interest in purchasing an Ayrshire cow. Bickett, however, warned him of the cost of purchasing, transporting and feeding a good specimen, and of the breeding risks of importing a single cow. Much better, he advised, to import several specimens or select a single cow from a herd already established in America, such as that owned by John Struthers, a marble mason in Philadelphia.⁷² Wright followed Bickett's advice, purchasing a cow descended from the aforementioned Swinley.

It was not just cows that Bickett was scouting for his friend: Wright (or rather, his wife) was also interested in securing the services of a Scottish maid; and Bickett closed the second of the letters presented here with the news that he was going to visit a potential candidate in Gleniffer, near Paisley. As for his own quest to find a 'Scotch lassie', he was to secure a helpmeet in both senses of the word when he married Charlotte Reid on 21 April 1844. The daughter of John Reid, a farmer at Mid Sanquhar, St Quivox, she was thirty-four years old and had a number of children from a previous marriage. Bickett knew the family from his youth in St Quivox, and Reid was one of the farmers he had suggested Henry Colman visit when in Ayrshire. During this visit, Colman was told that, 'Alex. had not taken the best of the family, but that there was mickle good corn in the crib yet'.⁷³

On 16 May 1844, Bickett and Charlotte set sail from Glasgow on board the *Leodes*, accompanied by his forty-year-old sister Mary. Her motivations for emigrating go unrecorded. On arriving at Boston on 24 June, however, she gave her occupation as 'agriculturist' (as did her two

companions), and it is possible that she was to be part of the team of female helpers Bickett was expected to supply whether he ended up at Marland's farm in Andover or at Swain's on Naushon Island.

The birth of his son John in Andover the following February suggests that Bickett decided to accept Marland's offer. If so, he did not remain in Marland's employment for long, as in the summer of 1845 'Alexander Bickett of Andover' undertook another trip to Britain, this time on behalf of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture.⁷⁴ Its trustees had come round to Henry Colman's view that the practice of awarding premiums at cattle shows was not the best way to improve the dairy stock of the state, the prize more often than not being awarded to an 'accidental cow', *i.e.* a one-off or a good milker purely by chance rather than by breeding. Indeed, they admitted that the thousands of dollars the Society had spent over the past twenty years or so in premiums had been more or less wasted, and that 'it will hardly be pretended that offering and awarding of premiums for this description of cows, has, or ever will have, the effect to improve the dairy stock of the country'.⁷⁵ Having reached the conclusion that Ayrshires and North Devons were the best dairy breeds for Massachusetts, they decided to spend some of their funds instead on importing specimens of each breed from Britain.⁷⁶

The Society had first contacted Bickett in January 1844 (when he was still in Scotland), requesting that he 'select the best cows of the Ayrshire breed, which can be obtained by the expenditure of £100 Stg and send them, with those he is purchasing for himself to this Country'.⁷⁷ Undeterred by Bickett's refusal, they approached him again in 1845, requesting he travel to Britain and select a bull and four cows of both the Ayrshire and the North Devon breed on their behalf.⁷⁸ This time, he acceded. The reasons for the Society's persistence are made clear in Elias Phinney's account of the mission:

[...] in order that there should be no mistake or disappointment as to the character of the respective breeds for the purity of blood, and with a view of obtaining the best animals upon the most reasonable terms, the trustees decided on sending out an agent for the purpose of making the selection. And accordingly, Mr Alexander Bickett, of Lowell, a gentleman of intelligence, and an excellent judge of cattle, who had resided for some years in Scotland, and personally known and highly respected by most of the owners of distinguished herds of cows in and about Ayrshire, was engaged in July last, to proceed to England and make the purchase. Mr Bickett had, within a few years past, attended some of the cattle shows in Scotland, had

noticed the best stock, and knew where he could place his hand upon the best cattle in the country. The acquaintance of Mr Bickett with the respective owners enabled him to treat with them upon terms much more favorable to the Society than could have been done by a stranger.⁷⁹

Bickett spent a number of weeks inspecting the herds of the main cattle breeders in Ayrshire, including those belonging to the aforementioned Hugh Kirkwood and John Young. From the former he bought the bull 'Prince Albert' and from the latter, the cow 'Mirley'. The bull had been bred by Andrew McGregor of Doonholm, and it was from him that Bickett purchased another two cows, 'Flora McDonald' and 'Jeanie Deans'. The fourth cow, 'Charlotte', was bought from John Hamilton of Capringstone. The breeders supplied Bickett with letters that certified the pedigree of his purchases, highlighted their milking qualities, and listed the prizes that they or their sires or dams had won at local shows. In his letter, John Young noted that, 'I would not have sold her [Mirley] if it had not been to favor my friend, Mr. Bickett'.⁸⁰ Further vindication of the Society's choice of agent was provided by John Moore, the editor of the *Ayrshire and Renfrewshire Agriculturist*, who in an open letter to Bickett declared, 'All who have seen your purchases, are loud in praise of your skill and discrimination, and my humble self among the rest'.⁸¹

Bickett was on less familiar ground when it came to selecting the North Devons but knowing that the earl of Leicester's herd in Norfolk was considered to be one of the finest in England, with typical boldness applied to him directly. On learning that Bickett was purchasing the cattle for the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, the earl allowed him to select what he required from his stock 'at a very moderate price'.⁸² Bickett travelled to Norfolk in August and chose four cows from the earl's herd – 'Cypress', 'Honeymoon', 'Stella' and 'Jasper' – all of which were in calf by the celebrated North Devon bull 'Derby'. The earl was unable to part with any of his bulls, but recommended he approach one of his tenants, John Bloomfield of Warham. The bull Bickett most admired turned out to be lame, but another, younger specimen had also caught his eye. Bloomfield was reluctant to part with it, but after 'much importunity'⁸³ Bickett secured it for the Society and so completed his herd of North Devons.

Both herds of cattle were transported to Liverpool docks, where they were loaded on board the sailing ship *Chaos* ready for departure on 25 August 1845. They were housed in a pen that had been erected between the decks and under the main hatchway both to ensure a good supply of

air and to guard against injury from the rolling of the ship, and fed on a generous daily allowance of hay, oil cake, bran and crushed oats. Bickett had made sure that there was enough food and water to last each animal for fifty days, and otherwise tended them throughout the frequently stormy five-week journey 'with so much care and fidelity on his part, that no injury happened to them, and they were in as fine condition when landed in Boston, as when put on board the ship at Liverpool'.⁸⁴ The president and other officers of the Society were present on the wharf to witness the arrival of the two herds (now increased to eleven in number, as one of the North Devons had dropped a calf during the crossing) on 28 September. They were then placed in the keeping of Elias Phinney while a committee appointed by the Society decided how they should be distributed. In due course, Bickett received a letter from the Society thanking him for 'his judicious and thorough fulfillment [*sic*], of the duty he had undertaken'.⁸⁵

Later that year, Bickett resumed his correspondence with the farming press with a letter to the *New England Farmer* on the topic of butter making. The editor of the paper commented, 'We should be pleased to hear often from the intelligent writer of the foregoing, as we know he possesses not a little of that valuable wisdom which accrues from extensive and varied experience and observation'.⁸⁶ Bickett duly obliged with a letter that described the common method of cultivating potatoes in Scotland, an insight again welcomed by the editor: 'We hope to hear from our intelligent correspondent on other processes of cultivation pursued in his native country, whose farmers have a world-wide reputation for their economical and thrifty management in the operations of husbandry'.⁸⁷ In a subsequent letter on cattle feeding, while warning farmers against abandoning 'old truths' for 'new errors', Bickett argued that only by departing from 'the usual course' would agriculture improve and yields increase.⁸⁸ Letters on 'Improved Ayrshire Cattle' and 'Devon Cattle' followed.⁸⁹

Notably, all of these letters were sent from Lowell, not Andover. On returning to the city, he boarded at his brother Francis' old lodgings in Lowell Street for a brief period, before buying a house in Cheever Street, near the Pawtucket Canal on what was then the western outskirts of the city (see Map 2). He had apparently returned to his old mode of life, as in October 1846 he was once again working as an agent for the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, this time at the sale of George Randall's Ayrshire cattle at New Bedford. In the *Lowell Directory* for 1847, however, he was listed as a labourer. This change of occupation might have been occasioned by the death of his wife Charlotte on 16

February that year,⁹⁰ as this left him in charge of their infant son, whose care would require Bickett's presence in Lowell, at least until some other arrangement could be made. It might have been for this purpose that Bickett's oldest sister, Janet, emigrated to Lowell. Her arrival meant that five out of the six Bickett siblings had emigrated to America, with at least four of them settling in Lowell. Their number was reduced the following year when brother Robert died, aged forty-four years. Further tragedies struck the family in 1851, with Janet dying in March and Bickett's six-year-old son John drowning in August.

Bickett did not return to cattle dealing, perhaps realising that approaching fifty years of age he was getting too old for travelling 'several leagues in order to examine good cows'.⁹¹ The *Lowell Directory* for 1849 lists him as a carpenter,⁹² although in the 1850 Census he was recorded as having no occupation.⁹³ The following year, he found work as a dyer or 'woolcolorer' for the Lowell Manufacturing Company.⁹⁴ Both of his brothers had followed the same occupation in Lowell, although by this time Robert was dead and Francis would soon move to work at a carpet mill in Simsbury, Connecticut.

It is possible that Bickett and his brothers found employment as dyers through the influence of his friend Alexander Wright. In the years following Bickett's return to Lowell, Wright had not only continued to act 'with great ability and success'⁹⁵ as the superintendent of the Lowell Manufacturing Company, but also remained prominent in the public life of the city, most notably as a supporter of various causes aimed at improving the lives of its citizens. He also maintained his interest in agriculture, and at the Middlesex Show held at Lowell in September 1851, he won the first premium for a native milch cow.⁹⁶ Wright died suddenly the following June, leaving behind a wife and seven children. Among the tributes that celebrated his successful professional life, one commentator had the following to say: 'He was far more than a safe and skillful manager of mills – he was a public-spirited citizen, a generous and hospitable neighbour and friend, a noble and bountiful man in all the social and domestic relations of life'.⁹⁷ Evidence of this mixture of financial acumen and goodwill can be found in the inventory of his \$25,000 estate, which included a nine-room house in Market Street, seventy-two acres of land west of the city, twelve acres of land and meadow in Chelmsford, cash, investments and securities – and a promissory note from Alexander Bickett for \$174.82.

Bickett continued to work as a dyer in Lowell for the next twenty-five years or so. He retired sometime before 1880, when the census listed him as having no occupation.⁹⁸ He died on 6 June 1883, aged eighty-four, and

was buried beside his wife, daughter, son and brother in Lowell Cemetery. Four pupils from Mary Hamilton's music class were employed to sing at his funeral, which was conducted by the Reverend Robert Court, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and fellow Scot. Bickett had stated in his will that \$1,200 of his savings should be divided between his brother Francis and Francis' two children, with the remainder bequeathed to the American Bible Society. It transpired, however, that his estate only amounted to \$995 after funeral and other expenses had been deducted. His books were given to the Lowell YMCA.

Unlike his friend Alexander Wright, Bickett did not make a fortune nor rise to public prominence. He nevertheless left his mark on the agriculture of Massachusetts not only by sharing his knowledge of improved farming practices, but more enduringly through his role in the importation of Ayrshires and North Devons in 1845 – an achievement recognised in his obituary in the *Lowell Daily Journal and Courier*:

Alexander Bickett died at his home, 333 Broadway, this morning at 7.30 o'clock. He was obliged to give up business several years ago, owing to old age and rheumatism, but was able to get out doors until within six months. He was born in Ayr, Scotland, June 4, 1799, and was, therefore, 84 years old Monday. He came to this country in 1833, was afterwards sent to Scotland and England by one of our agricultural societies to get some imported stock of cattle, which he accomplished. He was in the employ of the Lowell manufacturing company many years.

Mr Bickett united with the First Congregational church under the late Dr Blanchard, and on the formation of the Kirk street church he removed his connection to that and remained until his death. He was connected with the Sabbath school, was quite a Bible student, tenacious of his opinions, and anxious that the standard of religion should be high. He leaves no family, his wife and two children having died some years since.⁹⁹

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NOTES

- ¹ Alexander Bickett signed himself both 'Bicket' (Letter 1) and 'Bickett' (Letter 2). He also appears in contemporary records as 'Becket', 'Beckett', 'Beckit' and even 'Brickett'. 'Bickett' was the form he used most, and so has been adopted here.
- ² *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 16 April 1832, 3.
- ³ Colman had previously experimented with new methods of agriculture at a farm he owned in Lynn, Essex County, while he was the pastor of the Independent Congregational Church in Salem.
- ⁴ Colman, H. 'An address to the Essex Agricultural Society, delivered at Andover, Massachusetts, 29th Sept. 1831, at their Annual Cattle Show', *Transactions of the Essex Agricultural Society, for 1831*, Salem, 1832, 5-22.
- ⁵ Colman, H, *et al.* 'On milch cows and heifers', *Transactions of the Essex Agricultural Society, for 1831*, Salem, 1832, 47-55.
- ⁶ Letter 2 reveals that Bickett had a bank account in Salem, which might point to him having lived there. Colman appears to have kept a house in Salem even after buying Meadowbanks.
- ⁷ Henry Colman visited Lowell in 1836. The report of his visit provides a favourable contemporary picture of the city: Colman, H. 'Lowell, Massachusetts', *New-York Farmer, and American Gardener's Magazine*, 9.4 (April 1836), 102-106.
- ⁸ *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 May 1836, 3.
- ⁹ Bickett, A. 'Cattle – the Ayrshires', *Cultivator*, 9.2 (February 1842), 34.
- ¹⁰ An editorial note to C. 'Ayrshire cow', *Boston Cultivator*, 4.10 (5 March 1842), 1.
- ¹¹ Jameson, E O. *The Biographical Sketches of Prominent Persons ... in Medway, Mass. 1713-1886*, Millis, 1886, 109.
- ¹² Poyen, C. *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England*, Boston, 1837, 120.
- ¹³ A report on the experiment held in Wright's house on 25 March was printed in the *Lowell Advertiser*, 31 March 1837, and reprinted in Poyen, 1837, 162-169.
- ¹⁴ Poyen, 1837, 160.
- ¹⁵ Poyen, 1837, 122. Italics in the original.
- ¹⁶ Poyen, 1837, iii.
- ¹⁷ *A Catalogue of the Library of the Middlesex Mechanic Association, at Lowell, Mass.*, Lowell, 1840.

- 18 An interest in mesmerism and phrenology was by no means restricted to those of Wright's social standing. Lectures given at the Mechanics' Hall and elsewhere, and ready access to the aforementioned books, meant that they also gained a following among mill operatives and other workers in the city.
- 19 Bartlett, E. 'An address delivered at the anniversary celebration of the birth of Spurzheim and of the organisation of the Boston Phrenological Society, January 1, 1838', *American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, 1 (1839), 148-155.
- 20 Letter 1. Bickett's accompanying comments suggest a degree of scepticism, although they might simply reflect the fact that enthusiasm for both mesmerism and phrenology had begun to wane in Scotland by this time. The same apparently cannot be said of Lowell, where a phrenological society was formed in late 1843.
- 21 George Combe (1788-1858) was a successful Edinburgh lawyer and a prominent spokesman for phrenology. He founded the Phrenological Society of Edinburgh in 1820 and went on to promote the subject in both Europe and North America through a series of publications and lectures. Henry Colman visited him when he was in Edinburgh in 1844.
- 22 Some years earlier, Campbell had become the proprietor of a farm of 140 acres, 'some of which stood much in need of improvement'. He subsequently embarked on a programme of improvements and trials, which included the experiment mentioned by Bickett. His introductory letter to the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and a summary of his experiment were printed in Campbell, J. 'On the effects of soaking seeds in chemical solutions', *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, new series, (July 1843-March 1845), 155-160.
- 23 That these various endeavours were seen as having broadly shared intellectual and social goals is shown by the reception that Johann G Spurzheim received among agricultural improvers, which included being the honoured guest of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture at their annual cattle show in 1832. Among the other guests that year was John James Audubon. See *Centennial Year, 1792-1892, the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture*, Salem, 1892, 75.
- 24 Colman, H. *An Address delivered before the Massachusetts Agricultural Society, at the Brighton Cattle Show, October 17th, 1821*, Boston, 1822, 8.
- 25 Colman, H. *Fourth Report of the Agriculture of Massachusetts. Counties of Franklin and Middlesex*, Boston, 1841, 419.
- 26 Anon. 'Cattle Show at Concord, Mass.', *New England Farmer, and Gardener's Journal*, 17.3 (10 October 1839), 110.
- 27 Lathrop, W. 'Milking properties of the improved D. cows', *Genesee Farmer*, 2.11 (November 1841), 174-175.
- 28 Colman, 1841, 258.
- 29 Colman, 1841, 261.
- 30 Colman, 1841, 265.

- 31 Anon. 'Cattle – No. 4', *Monthly Genesee Farmer*, 3.1 (October 1838), 146-147.
- 32 Bickett, A. 'Cattle – the Ayrshires', *Cultivator*, 9.2 (February 1842), 34.
- 33 Bickett, A. 'Ayrshire stock', *New England Farmer*, 20.29 (19 January 1842), 225.
- 34 C. 'Ayrshire cow', *Boston Cultivator*, 4.10 (5 March 1842), 1.
- 35 Bickett, A. 'Ayrshire stock for New England, soil and climate', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 20.40 (6 April 1842), 313-315.
- 36 Bickett, A. 'Cattle – the Ayrshires', *Cultivator*, 9.2 (February 1842), 34.
- 37 Allen, A B. 'Reply to Mr Bickett and others, about Ayrshires', *Cultivator*, 9.6 (June 1842), 97.
- 38 An Onondaga Farmer. 'Importation of cattle', *Cultivator*, 4.6 (February 1842), 1.
- 39 Bickett, A. "'An Onondaga Farmer" and Mr. Allen', *Cultivator*, 9.7 (July 1842), 110.
- 40 An Onondaga Farmer. 'Mr. Bickett and an Onondaga farmer', *Cultivator*, 9.9 (September 1842), 147.
- 41 Stephens, H. *The Book of the Farm*, 3 vols, Edinburgh, 1854, I, 228.
- 42 Colman, H. *European Life and Manners; in Familiar Letters to Friends*, 2 vols, Boston, 1849, I, Letter 76, 29 September 1844.
- 43 Colman, H. *European Agriculture and Rural Economy, from personal observation*, 2 vols, London, 1844-48, I, xiv.
- 44 Colman, 1849, I, Letter 76, 29 September 1844.
- 45 Colman, 1844-48, I, 4.
- 46 Anon. 'Drummond's Agricultural Museum, Stirling', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, 469 (23 January 1841), 8.
- 47 'Speech of Mr Colman at the dinner of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 22.13 (13 September 1843), 84.
- 48 James Smith (1789-1850) was a textile industrialist and agricultural engineer. As well as pioneering new types of agricultural drainage, he designed ploughs and one of the first mechanical reapers. By the time Bickett visited Deanston, Smith had retired to London.
- 49 Anon. 'The late Mr Smith of Deanston', *Journal of Agriculture*, 4 (1851), 451-474, at 465.
- 50 Anon. 'Subsoil plowing', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 22.37 (13 March 1844), 291.

- ⁵¹ Colman, 1844-48, II, 169.
- ⁵² Graham, J R G. 'On the Deanston frequent drain system', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 18.31 (5 February 1840), 261-262 (originally printed in the *Journal of the English Agricultural Society*); 'Lecture on thorough draining and subsoil plowing', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 22.20 (15 November 1843), 156-157 (originally printed in the *Mark Lane Express*); 'Lecture by Mr. Smith, of Deanston, on drainage', *Farmers' Register*, 10.10 (31 October 1842), 463-473 (originally printed in the *London Farmers' Magazine*).
- ⁵³ One of which outlined the speech on drainage that Smith delivered at the annual show of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland held in Glasgow in July 1844. Norton shared Colman's admiration for the 'Deanston method'. See Norton, J P. 'Agriculture in Scotland, No. 2', *American Agriculturist*, 3.11 (November 1844), 330-331.
- ⁵⁴ Anon. 'Experiment on the culture of potatoes', *New England Farmer*, 13.19 (19 November 1834), 146; Miller, P. 'On making meadow hay', *New England Farmer, and Gardener's Journal*, 16.11 (20 September 1837), 85; Anon. 'Making and salting butter', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 17.33 (20 February 1839), 261.
- ⁵⁵ Dickson, J. 'On the points by which livestock are judged': *Cultivator*, 1.9 (November 1834), 134-137; *Farmers' Register*, 2.7 (December 1834), 446-449; and *New England Farmer, and Gardener's Journal*, 14.19 (18 November 1835), 145-147. It originally appeared in the *Edinburgh Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*.
- ⁵⁶ Anon. 'Report of a farm in Kyle, Ayrshire', *Farmers' Register*, 5.12 (1 March 1838), 729-737. It had originally appeared in *British Husbandry*.
- ⁵⁷ It also provides a lesson in the hyperbole of agricultural improvement, with the author describing eighteenth-century (*i.e.* pre-improvement) Scotland as 'a bleak, howling wilderness ... sunk in darkness', its agriculture in the hands of 'ill-educated and ... drunken lairds' (Anon. 'On the improvement in the state of Scotland since the end of the seventeenth century', *Edinburgh Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, 10 (June 1839), 60-75, at 61-62.)
- ⁵⁸ Anon. 'The agricultural state of Scotland', *Cultivator*, 6.8 (September 1839), 129-130.
- ⁵⁹ Anon. 'Farming Competition: District of Ayr', *Farmer's Magazine*, 4.8 (October 1843), 303.
- ⁶⁰ *Directory for Ayr, Newton, Wallacetown, St Quivox, Prestwick and Monkton 1845-46*, Ayr, 1845, 9.
- ⁶¹ Norton, J P. 'Agriculture in Scotland, No. 5', *American Agriculturist*, 4.3 (March 1845), 83.
- ⁶² Morton, J C. 'Agricultural progress: its helps and hindrances', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 12.577 (11 December 1863), 54-69, at 63.
- ⁶³ Anon. 'High farming in Ayrshire', *North British Daily Mail*, 16 August 1850, 4.

- ⁶⁴ Drennan, J. 'Ayrshire agriculture', *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette*, 2 January 1864, 13-14, at 14.
- ⁶⁵ *Account of the Templemoyle Agricultural Seminary*, Templemoyle, 1844, 1.
- ⁶⁶ Anon. 'Meeting of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland at Belfast', *British Farmer's Magazine*, 7.27 (October 1843), 393.
- ⁶⁷ Colman, 1844-48, I, 4.
- ⁶⁸ Conover, G S, ed. *History of Ontario County, New York*, Syracuse, 1893, 165.
- ⁶⁹ Conover, 1893, 166.
- ⁷⁰ Colman knew Greig well and described him as his 'good friend' (Colman, 1849, I, Letter 20, 31 August 1843). In August 1843, not long after he had been with Bickett in Dundee, Colman visited Greig's brother at Myres Castle, Auchtermuchty, Fife.
- ⁷¹ Anon. 'Ayrshire cattle', *Monthly Journal of Agriculture*, 3.7 (January 1848), 304-307, at 304, quoting a letter from Elias Phinney.
- ⁷² John Struthers (1786-1851) was from Irvine, Ayrshire. He had emigrated to America with his family in 1816. Interestingly, Bickett had not heard of Struthers or his herd until returning to Ayrshire, where he happened to meet the breeder of his bull and then the dealer who had purchased the bull and six Ayrshire cows on his behalf.
- ⁷³ Colman, 1849, I, Letter 76, 29 September 1844.
- ⁷⁴ *Centennial Year 1792-1892. The Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture*, Boston, 1892, 131.
- ⁷⁵ Phinney, E. 'Description of the stock recently imported by The Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture', *Abstracts from the Returns of Agricultural Societies in Massachusetts for the year 1845*, Boston, 1846, 184.
- ⁷⁶ This was not an entirely new venture for the Society: in 1835, it had appointed a committee 'with authority to import, if they desire it expedient stock of the Ayrshire breed of cattle not exceeding six in number' (Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture Records, Minutes of Trustee Meetings, 1792-2014, Box 33, Folder 5, vol. 4, 8 January 1825-13 July 1844, 21 November 1835). Three cows and a bull were subsequently imported. The Society had also been importing British cattle on a small scale since 1817.
- ⁷⁷ Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture Records, Minutes of Trustee Meetings, 1792-2014, Box 33, Folder 5, vol. 4, 8 January 1825-13 July 1844, 13 January 1844. If Bickett had travelled to Britain with the intention of purchasing cattle for himself (possibly in his role as cattle dealer, intending to sell them on to customers in New England), then there is no evidence he did so.
- ⁷⁸ For the correspondence relating to Bickett's commission and trip to Britain in 1845, see Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Society for Promoting

Agriculture Records, Correspondence, Box 12, Folder 23, Ayrshire and North Devon Cattle.

- ⁷⁹ Phinney, 1846, 189. It will be noted that by the time this report was written, Bickett was no longer 'of Andover' but 'of Lowell'.
- ⁸⁰ Phinney, 1846, 195.
- ⁸¹ Phinney, 1846, 193.
- ⁸² Phinney, 1846, 190.
- ⁸³ Phinney, 1846, 190.
- ⁸⁴ Phinney, 1846, 190.
- ⁸⁵ Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture Records, Minutes of Trustee Meetings, 1792-2014, Box 33, Folder 6, vol. 5, 13 July 1844-12 April 1856, 13 December 1845.
- ⁸⁶ Editorial note to Bickett, A. 'Butter making', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 24.24 (10 December 1845), 190.
- ⁸⁷ Editorial note to Bickett, A. 'Cultivation of potatoes', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 24.25 (17 December 1845), 198.
- ⁸⁸ Bickett, A. 'The Oaks cow', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 24.32 (4 February 1846), 252-253.
- ⁸⁹ Bickett, A. 'Improved Ayrshire cattle', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 24.40 (1 April 1846), 317; Bickett, A. 'Devon cattle', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 24.47 (20 May 1846), 372.
- ⁹⁰ Their new-born daughter, Agnes, had died four days earlier.
- ⁹¹ Bickett, A. 'Improved Ayrshire cattle', *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, 24.40 (1 April 1846), 317.
- ⁹² *The Lowell Directory and Business Key for 1849*, Lowell, 1849, 32. Interestingly, for much of the 1860s he lived at 165 Broadway with a carpenter employed by the Lowell Manufacturing Company (Stephen Brown); and at the time of the 1880 Census, he was living with another carpenter, Otis Johnson. William Briar, a farmer, lived with Bickett in the mid 1850s. In the 1860 Census, it is likely that the Scots-born mill hand 'Thomas Bickett' living with Stephen Brown in Broadway was Alexander Bickett mis-recorded.
- ⁹³ He was recorded living alone with his five-year-old son, John. There was another Alexander Bickett recorded in the 1850 Census for Lowell. He was also listed as being born in Scotland, but at forty-years-old was ten or so years younger than our correspondent. He was living in what appears to have been a boarding house with an Irish-American family named Burns and a large number of other 'operatives'. This second Alexander Bickett does not appear in any of the city directories of the period.

- ⁹⁴ *The Lowell Directory: containing the City Record ...*, Lowell, 1851, 26.
- ⁹⁵ Hurd, D H. *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, with biographical sketches of many of its pioneers and prominent men*, 2 vols, Philadelphia, 1890, II, 76.
- ⁹⁶ That Wright represented the Middlesex Agricultural Society on the Massachusetts Society's committee on fat cattle shows that his interest in livestock extended beyond the showground.
- ⁹⁷ Hurd, 1890, II, 76.
- ⁹⁸ The 1880 Census lists him living at 333 Broadway with Otis Johnson, a carpenter, and his family. A second Alexander Bickett appears again in this census. His details (aged eighty years, a retired dyer and born in Scotland) match closely those of our correspondent, although he is recorded living in a large boarding house run by Byron Sanborn at 208 Broadway. It is possible that he is the same man listed in the 1850 Census (see endnote 93), although if so, his age is out by ten years. This second Bickett does not appear in the *Lowell Directory* of that year.
- ⁹⁹ Anon. 'Another old citizen gone', *Lowell Courier*, 6 June 1883, 5. The obituarist got the date of his arrival in America wrong by one year.

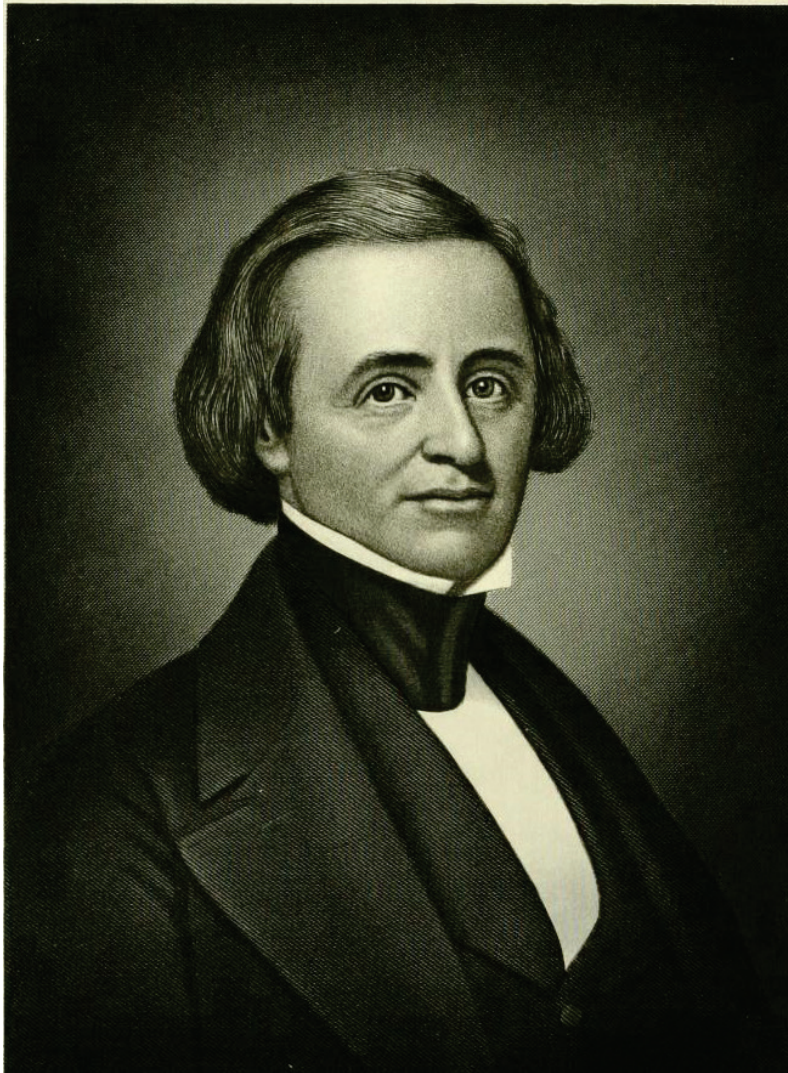


Figure 1. Alexander Wright (1800-1852).
(From F. W. Coburn, *A History of Lowell and its People*,
3 vols, New York, 1920, II, facing 131)



Figure 2. An east view of Lowell, 1839. While the city's mills and other factories dominate the view, the cattle in the foreground suggest its agricultural hinterland.

(From an engraving by J W Barber)

LETTER 1
21-30 AUGUST 1843

Ayr Agust 21st 1843

Mr Wright

Dear Sir

Since I wrote you last I have seen a bit more of John Bulls country.^[1] I have been as far as the “big toon o Lounnun”^[2] & I saw the Queens “hoose”^[3] but I did not see Vic.^[4] herself but I saw some of her men with red coats on, & guns in their hands, & also were standing about the gateway that leads to her hoose, hollering out “alls well”, & perhaps they done the same thing when the sweep was in the pantry eating butter & bread,^[5] a thing which I have no doubt he had a much worse design upon than on the Queen & probably he had just as good a right to his meat as a great many of the folk who live there & have long handles to their names, however it is not for the “like o me” being a loyal subject of Tyler the first^[6] to find fault with the folk at the head quarters here, so far as regards either their eating or sleeping so I shall give it up, & tell you what I think of John Bull as a farmer, & that wont be a long story “nother”^[7] for I will tell you in short meter that John is a bad farmer except in the sense that James Magaraways son was a man viz “amongst sheep, but he was but a sheep amongst men”,^[8] so John is no doubt a good farmer amongst those that are worse but he wou[l]d not apear to the same account amongst those

¹ John Bull was a fictional character who had come to personify Great Britain in general and England in particular.

² *i.e.* London.

³ *i.e.* house (Buckingham Palace).

⁴ *i.e.* Queen Victoria.

⁵ Bickett appears to be referring to an incident in 1838 when a boy entered Buckingham Palace disguised as a sweep.

⁶ *i.e.* John Tyler, the 10th president of the United States of America (1841-1845).

⁷ A non-standard spelling for ‘another’, although the intended meaning here appears to be ‘neither’.

⁸ A version of the more widely known proverb ‘a lion among sheep and a sheep among lions’. Interestingly, it was recorded as being current in the south west of Scotland during the nineteenth century. See Shaw, J. Notes on 30 years’ residence in Tynron, *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 11 (1894-95), 99-107, at 105.

that are better. I have travelled through part of 12 countys viz Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Bucking[ham]shire, Herefordshire, Durham & Northumberland & Lincoln. And the best spot of farming which I saw was in the north part of Lincolnshire between a village called Barton & one called Brigg & I was informed by the natives that there was no better farming in the world so you see that after a long search I was fortunate enough to find out the Worlds Modle [*i.e.* ?model] Spot & it was a discovery which I did not expect to make in England for until I came there I always found (when talking to the people on that subject) good farming in England was like good land in America viz to be found any where but the place you hapened to be in, as that place told its own story & facts are stubborn things. But they were sometimes rather unfortunate in their selection of places for they sometimes mentioned those I had seen & of course I was able to talk about them & said so but was seldom able to please John with my opinions for he no doubt thought he knew “sumut”^[9] as well as me. I had good sport with a gentleman from Hull while on the coach between Newcastle and Coldstream he talked very largely about farming & as every person has their hobby so had he for Bones & Oil Cake were the two chief manures with which he was going to do his great work it seemed to be a matter of little importance to him what kind of soil they were aplyed to, or how the land was prepared except by draining, but just put on Bones and Oil Cake. Now I could not help thinking that this great advocate for bones & oil cake had got one idea (for he had two) more than the great advocates of the “New Husbandry” (for they had only one, viz “dont disturb the sod” & as the poet says “tak fae them that ye lee them naething tae ken them by”^[10]) for if you will just cover up the head of their baby & alow its brains to nest in peace (no matter how dirty (or foul if you like it better) they may be, & therefore liable to produce pestilence over the whole field) you may apply any thing to its poor feet that you please no matter how volatile the aplication may be & therefore ready to be carried off by every breeze, just dont disturb the head & alls well. But after all it is no doubt the height of presumption in any common laddy to dispute the opinions of “Larnd Men”^[11] for if a man who has been through college aint up to every thing “I want to know” who is? But to return to my Bone & Oil Cake friend, for I dont feel “wolfie” in talking about him for

⁹ *i.e.* something.

¹⁰ From ‘Epistle to John Rankin’ by Robert Burns.

¹¹ *i.e.* learned men.

he was a good natured John Bull, & took every thing in good part, however, the direction in which we were traveling might have some influence on us both, for the proverb says that “a cock (Hebiddy)^[12] crows best on his own dunghill” & of course it must be the vice versa, I told him how far the English were behind the scotch in their farming operations, & that he would perceive a considerable difference as we approached the Border, which as I expected hapened to be the case. I pointed out to him how rare a thing it was to see a crooked drill there, while farther south it was a rare thing to see a straight one. But he told me that the scotch had learnd from the English on the south side of the border. I told him that it must have originated with them on the border [*interlined*: then], for they could not have learned it from their southern neighbours but allowing him to be corect in his supossition, it still showed the superiority of [*interlined*: the] scotch in being able to learn from the English borderers what their own countrymen could not do. I told him that the only aproach to good farming which I had seen in the country was the spot already mentioned above, & he caught at the idea like a sinking man at a straw, & told me that such farming could not be beat in the world (you see that there are more people uses that boast than Jonathan^[13]) but not withstanding that knock down argument (& it is a “rail’ fixer” & Jonathan aint slow at using it nother) I took the liberty to differ from him. I told him that the cheif [*sic*] cause of their good crops was that there were a marle^[14] pit in each field, but that their mode of planting & working their turnips was defective, that their rows were too close together being about 14 or 15 inches apart [*interlined*: & drilled on the level] ((a distance by the by that would be considered wide enough if not too wide in many parts of Massachusetts. Mr Merriam^[15] planted his about that width on a piece of ground where he was going to raise 1500 bushels he got about 100 [*interlined*: bushels] about the size of corn cobs he said he did not want them large & he did not get them so, nor did ever any body else get large turnips that adopted the same system, he thin[n]ed them (or at least he told me he would do so) at four different times in order to feed his hogs on the young turnips he no doubt thought that the roots would grow to the size he wished, no

¹² More usually ‘he-biddy’, an Americanism for a cock.

¹³ Jonathan, or more usually Brother Jonathan, was the personification of New England.

¹⁴ Principally a mixture of clay and calcium carbonate, marl was dug from ponds and lakes and used as an agricultural fertiliser.

¹⁵ Perhaps Horatio C Merriam (1806-1872), farmer at Tewksbury, Middlesex (see also note 35 below). There were other Merriams farming at this time in Massachusetts, however, including Royal Augustus Merriam (1786-1864), a physician and farmer in Topsfield, Essex.

matter what treatment he give them, but for some reason or other (he was not to blame of course for he did not go to college & came out such an Ass as not to know how to raise turnips) they were not size enough to come up to 1500 bushel, but it is the other side of the Atlantic & confine them to Kingland^[16] for a little)) a thing that both prevented their being properly wrought between the rows or properly or easily thined as the earth where the ground is level is not so early put away from the turnip (a thing that is necessary for to insure a good crop for a turnip in having it should be, hung by the point, & kept so as much as possable throughout the whole course of its growth) nor can it be put away so well. Another defect in their system is that altho turnips is one of their principle [*i.e.* principal] crops their men have not yet learned to drive their own horse between the rows but they require a "lad" to lead him. I was walking along the road with a man who lived on a farm where they had 200 acres of turnips & he told me that while passing near the spot where we then were that he had seen a lad leading horses where two men were cultivating turnips a thing which he considered a great improvement on the old plan of a lad to each horse. We looked over the fence & sure enough there was the lad walking like a spread Eagle with his hand at each horses head (this happened on the well cultivated spot already mentioned) the drills in the field were wider than common as they were made with the plow & which is considered even here to be the best plan as the dung is put in on the flat with a machine. I have seen from 3 to 6 horses in a plow when doing ordinary work they are generally yoked [*i.e.* yoked] in Indian file & one or two men driving. All the stacks (with a few exceptions) which I have seen are generally well built their hay stacks are often saddle backed & broad on the top (two things that would be considered faults in Scotland) but they are generally well finished & their grain stacks also look well. But when looking at their system of hay making I could not help thinking of the adroitness of John Bull in making the people believe that browned (or as the scotch call it burned) hay was the best for feeding horses, his system (except in very fine weather) prevents him from having any other kind either to eat or sell & he therefore made the best of a bad bargain & he was successfull too in his experiment, but the schoolmaster is more abroad now & the people are coming back from the delusion, the doctrine never got across the Tweed that I know off. In the first place they cock their hay very slovenly they throw it together in heaps like cocks if they were well dressed a thing which is very rare to be seen & in the second place they build their stack by bits & it is therefore kept often all the

¹⁶ *i.e.* Britain.

season or at least for a week or two & when it is not covered with a canvas cloth or something else during the process of building they have often to take as much off the top to dry as was put in on the day previous & in during [sic] heavy showers they often mix up hay & rain together & the consequence of all this is bad colored if not heated hay & I have seen some of it Black both in the stack & in the market. It was only in Northumberland that I saw the scotch system adopted viz building it in large cocks of 2 or 3 tons each & then stacking it (when fit for it) in one or two days. The scotch system is (after the hay is cut) to cock it as soon as possible & shake it out & enlarge the cocks as it dries until they can put 2 or 3 tons of it together & then let it stand till ready for stacking. But as the above is enough of fault finding with John at present I will tell you about something else[sic].

August 26

I have been for 3 days inspecting Farms one in company with the judges who were appointed to award the premiums & two with the farmers Club. There were only another Gentleman besides myself along with the judges (except the farmers interested in the competition) & that was a Sir John Bates^[17] from Ireland one of the Directors & part founder of the Agricultural School near Londonderry so you see there was an Irish & American Gentleman present on the occasion [sic]. I came to the ground with two of the judges with whom I was acquainted & he came with one so that altho he had a handle to his name I had one judge more on my side than he had & that helped to balance the account. The judges were very minute in their examination of the pastures to see if any grasses were getting up that come under the denomination of weeds or foul grasses, now there are only two ways by which these grasses or weeds can be prevented from making their appearance & prevent them (the foul grasses) from coming up & generally both ways are necessary for that purpose. Now how can the cleaning system be carried on according to the principles of the "new Husbandry". I may answer the question & that is just not at all. But perhaps with such wise acres that is a matter of little importance beyond what good hoeing will do for what American (either of the old or New School of Husbandry) ever thought of clearing the land of root weeds except perhaps the Garden but what is good for a Garden is not bad for a field [*interlined: for*] there is not so much difference in things sometimes as in names. But perhaps the New Husbandry men are

¹⁷ Perhaps a mistake for Sir Robert Bateson of Castruse (d. 1870), an Irish landowner who had been one of the founders in 1827 of the Templemoyle Agricultural Seminary.

somewhat like the man who always bought a penny loaf for his dinner no matter what the price of flour was his argument was that a penny loaf was always a penny loaf, so with them grass is perhaps always grass, whether its root is a bad weed or not. I have heard “witch” “piper” “couch” or “Divel” grass highly recommended as a good grass for hay & the Father of the New Husbandry informed his readers that sorel was not so bad as something else that he named I forget what, so that according to his logic (at least as I understood it) and he is a great logician & always to the point & no mistake) sorel was not so bad a thing as it might be & therefore it was good. But after all it is but a foolish piece of bus[i]ness to find fault with a college bred Editor & especially one who has had 50 years experience in farming & who has repeated the fact (if it is one) 50 times as proof positive that what he says must be true & the gullables say Amen. I heard one of the judges remark that he looked more to the pastures on a farm in order to form a correct judgement of its being well managed than to any thing else. We came to a potato field w[h]ere they were doing what ought to have been done several weeks before & one of the judges remarked that “we are rather too early here they are not ready for us yet”, he meant that they had not got the thing [?sleeked] up & of course they set him aside for another year in order that he might have a better [i.e. ?little] more experience. But altho his fields were not first rate every thing about his house & garden was & one of the judges told me before we came to the house how he had found things [*interlined*: formerly] they knew him of old & that was nothing in his favour. The premium was awarded for the best managed Farm. The next two days was spent by the Saint Quivox Farmers Club^[18] in visiting each others farms I do not know how many was present in the fore part of the day but when we went to the last farm (which was considerably out of the way & of course a considerable number had left) I counted thirty, that was the first day. We were not so many on the second day but there were over 20 sat down to dining in the evening. They talk of having three days next year but it would require a week to do the thing right many of their dairys were thrown open for inspection there was only one of them that looked indifferent & it was in the very place that I least expected to find it but I learned since that the mans wife was dead & his daughter who has the charge is sickly. I was told by an old (& an excellent) farmer that since he recollects the breed of cows in this part of Ayrshire had no horns & that they looked very much alike & he told me a story as proof of the fact viz that a Lady who had a

¹⁸ St Quivox, Ayrshire, was Bickett’s home parish. For its farming club (est. 1838), see the Introduction.

number of cows got them all bulled with her fathers all except one (& as he was cow herd at the time the bull money belonged to him & the price was a penny per cow) & she made him believe that it was the same cow all the time that had come back in the bulling. He said that when he found out how the thing was he thought it was small work. And when talking about cows I will just mention that it was the Ayrshires that got the 3 highest prizes at the Highland Societys Show at Dundee for the bes[t] dairy cows of any breed there were no premiums for Ayrshires as it was a little out of their latitude.^[19] But one of the judges remarked that the cow that got the first prize would not get it next year at Glasgow. I was at the Dundee show. There were few if any more kinds of implements shown than what is to be found in any well conducted farm but they were generally us[e]full & that was better than show. I saw a Machine for throwing up water by conecting a pipe to it which has 10 feet of fall [*interlined: in 70 & with 70 feet of pipe*] it will throw water to the height of 300 feet & to any height proportionate to the length of the pipe (at the same incline) under 70 feet but 300 feet is the highest to which it can be extended. It costs £5 without the pipes. I think such a machine would be very usfull on a farm for many purposes & Irigation amongst the rest. The Angus breed of cattle looked very handsome. But w[h]ere proper care & keep can be had the durhams are the favourites as the[y] come to early maturity. But all the farmers which I have talked too [*i.e. to*] on the subject (both those who have them & those who have them not) laugh at the idea of there being the best dairy stock in Britain. The Gentleman whos[e] farm the Club visited last on the first day has some of them he showed me one that had given 18 pint of milk per day (warm milk measured in the pail I supose) & yet when I told him that some people held them up as the best dairy breed he laughed & said that they surely knew nothing of the A[y]rshires.

I visited Mr Roades dairy in London it is now a small affair he has only about 90 cows 40 of which was in the house & the rest at pasture^[20] they were Durhams & Yorkshires those in the house were fine looking cows but those in the pasture did not look so well, they spoke of their best cows giving 24 quarts beer measure & the dealers in Smithfield market talked in the same way but they seldom went above 20 or 21 quarts they asked from 16 to 20 pound for such cows. I asked at a cow keeper how much

¹⁹ The annual show of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland was held at Barrack Park, Dundee, on 8-10 August. See the Introduction.

²⁰ Messrs Rhodes had a dairy in Islington, London. Earlier in the century, between 400 and 600 cows were kept in its sheds and pastures.

milk such cows would give [*interlined: he said*] about 24 quarts “but you must feed them like a baby to do that”. I asked at two men belonging to Alderney dairy (where they keep 200 cows) how much their best cows give & the one told me 26 & the other 22 quarts per day, so you see it is a hard thing to get at the truth. I saw several dairys of cows milked in Hyde Park & the owner of one of them told me that they would probably average about 10 or 12 quarts per day he said that some would give 8 some 15 & he pointed out one that would give 25. I pointed out the best looking milk cow which I saw in one dairy & I was told she would give about 3 gallons. I went into another & was told that their cows give about 2 gallons. I heard a Yorkshire man boasting of having the best breed of shorthorns in his county that was in the country. I asked him how they were as milkers he said “very good if you get a good one of them”. I asked him if he thought the pure bloods good milkers he said “did not think so nor never did” says he “if you get a pure blood look out for a quart”. The best milk cows which I have seen which have had the appearance of Durhams was a[t] Newcastle upon tyne. I saw 600 cows there all grazeing [*sic*] on the “Town Moor”^[21] they were of different breed & the one that had as great if not the greatest appearance of milk of any of them looked very much like an Ayrshire but some of the Durhams had an excellent appearance of milk but they appeared to be crosses of that breed for they were lean lank & angled boned & as good milk cows are so be the breed what it may. Now the pure bred Durham has not angled but very smooth bones & their general shape & many of their properties are at variance with the idea of those requisite in a good milk cow & none but an ignoramus or a quack would try to impose them on any person as a good not to say the best dairy stock even under favourable circumstances & much less under unfavourable ones. Their great merit lays in their producing a great weight of beef at an early age & in that respect they have no rival if they receive the necessary amount of care & keeping & where milk & beef is the object where the climate & soil are suitable for them they are probably the best breed that can be got. But to hold up pure Durhams as the best dairy breed in Britain or that they would be the most suitable for New England is an absurdity too gross to be tolerated. When going round with the Club mentioned above I observed the good effects of guano & there seems to be only one opinion about its paying the first year, viz that it would do so, but I think that it is likely to exhaust itself to great extent the first season. I saw one experiment on turnips where 4 cwt

²¹ The Town Moor was an area of common land in Newcastle upon Tyne where freemen of the city had the right to graze their cattle.

of guano had produced a better crop (in appearance) than 40 load of dung & 2 cwt of guano & one experiment on potatoes where 4 cwt of guano had done better (to appearance) than 60 loads of dung (I supposed it to be barn yard dung).

I was at Smiths farm in Deanston.^[22] It looks very well it contains 150 acres & there are about 70 miles of drains in it. I was in the agricultural muse[u]m in Edinburgh^[23] & saw 40 kinds of oats 124 kinds of wheat 8 kinds of rye 19 of barley 8 of [illegible – page damaged] 22 kinds of grasses. I was also in Drummonds Agricultural Museum in Stirling.^[24] I saw oats growing on [illegible – page damaged] kinds of pure earth such as granite, chalk, lim[e]ston[e], sandston, clay, slat, greenstone, gypsum [illegible – page damaged] & black clay. The chalk produced the best the sandstone second best & the gypsum the worst. A farmer [illegible – page damaged] instruction in it then in the Edinburgh Museum, they keep an agricultural ware house.

I have been fortunate in finding out a man who has made a discovery equal or at least nearly so to the one already made at the Lowell powder mills.^[25] It is as follows viz that a certain kind of preparation (which at present is a secret) for seed will produce crops (even on sandy land) without manure. The preparation is a liquid of some kind into which the seed is put & after remaining several hours (90 hours has produced a better effect than less) it is dried and sown. I saw the apparent good effects of it on garden soil which I was told had not been manured for 11 years, but however that might be there was a great difference between such soil & some besides it may be an exauster rather than a fertilizer. The discoverer offers to prepare the seed for an acre of oats for 6 shilling an acre of barley for 8 & an acre of wheat for 12 or he will prepare it for the

²² For James Smith of Deanston (1789-1850) and the impact of his pioneering work on agricultural drainage, see the Introduction.

²³ The museum of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland. It had recently moved to new premises in George IV Bridge, Edinburgh.

²⁴ The museum had its origins in an agricultural exhibition first staged by Messrs Drummond & Sons, Nursery and Seedsmen, in Stirling in 1831. By 1835, it had developed into a museum housing a wide range of exhibits from grains and soil samples to farming implements and veterinary equipment.

²⁵ Oliver Whipple (1794-1872), who owned a gunpowder mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, had noticed that the vegetation grew better where discarded saltpetre bags had been left on the ground to rot. From the mid 1820s, he began using saltpetre as a manure on his own farm and later claimed that the 'grounds upon which I have used it, have yielded large crops, and have held out much longer than grounds in general' (Colman, H. *Fourth Report of the Agriculture of Massachusetts. Counties of Franklin and Middlesex*, Boston, 1841, 336).

half of the surplus produce & he offers to make up any loss that the farmer may sustain in consequence of its producing an injury, so you see he is “nae quack”. He is a Teacher in Dundee^[26] & he says that he has made chemistry his study for several years & he proffesses to have a knowledge of phrenology & claims acquaintance with Mr Combe.^[27] And what is over all & above all he knows about mesmerism & probably a great many other isms – so you see he is nae dult.^[28] I think he said that he has some thought of writeing on the latter science but his organ of aprobativeness he said was too high & he thought that he might ascribe too much glory to himself (by the bye mesmerism is rather dull in the market here I have seen lectures on it Advertised at 6 pence each with a little rotary thrown into the bargain just to make them sell). His organ (or organs for they say them things are doubles in folks heeds) of hope is also very large & he showed the bump to Mr Colman^[29] (Mr Colman & me called upon him when on our way to the top of a hill [*illegible – page damaged: ?or*] “Law”^[30] above Dundee in order to get a sight [*illegible – page damaged: ?of*] the country) for the purpose as he said [*illegible – page damaged*] what determined his character [*illegible – page damaged*] to him that the organ might be a little too large in so far as regarded the seed preparation he saw perhaps it was. But he is going to make a farther & more corect tryal & report progress. I wished him to make one experiment on sand for I observed to him that it would produce a crop without manure as there seemed to be vegetable matter in the soil on which he had experimented. He admitted the fact & he is going to work now in right earnest & as Mr Colman gave him his adress we will perhaps hear from him again. He says that the real cost of the stuff will not be more than 2 shillings per acre, he thinks that he can make a preparation that will infuse [*illegible – page damaged: ?more*] silex into the strain.

Mr Colman said that if the thing succeeded it would be the greatest discovery ever made in Agriculture. I did not tell him of the powder mills one or perhaps he would have set down the Dundee one as Number 2. But joking aside, there may be some truth in them both but like a great many other doctrines they may be injured by being carried too far. For I think that there is little doubt but the sub soil of such soil (if such stuff deserves

²⁶ James Campbell, a teacher at the Dundee Seminaries. See the Introduction.

²⁷ George Combe (1788-1858), an Edinburgh lawyer and phrenologist. See the Introduction.

²⁸ *i.e.* no dolt.

²⁹ For Henry Colman (1785-1849), see the Introduction.

³⁰ Dundee Law (174 m) is the highest point in the city.

the name of soil) as is to be found in the neighbourhood of the Lowell grain yard & elsewhere will produce better crops than the exhausted top soil but that is no proof that the application of manure would not be more profitable or that the same good effects would be produced by turning down such top soil & turning up poorer subsoil for what would be sause [*i.e.* sause] for goose would not be sause for gander. Mr Colman was highly pleased with what he had seen of the scotch farming the first thing (or at least nearly so) which he said to me in Dundee was that Scotland beat England & I was not sorry to hear it for two reasons one was that it gratified my "National Pride" & another was that I told him in Derby that if he would come to Scotland I would show him as much good farming in 2 square miles as he would see in the half of England.

I intend going to Belfast to attend the great National Agricultural Show of Ireland which is to come off on the 31st ult.^[31] It will no doubt be an excellent show the premiums amounts to about £1000 there are a number of cattle & implements going from this quarter to it there will be some fine Ayrshire cows & bulls there. When in Ireland I intend visiting the Agricultural School near Derry.^[32] I know the man's Father & Grandfather who has charge of the farm he is from Ayrshire.

I received your letter of July 14th & I am sorry to learn that yourself & family have been sick. I hope you are all better.

Mr Colman is very anxious that I should go & see some land that a Mr Gregg or Craig^[33] has for sale (in the western part of New York) before I agree with Mr Marland^[34] or Mister any body he says it is best to go captain of my own ship. I told him how much money I could start with viz [*illegible – the amount has been heavily deleted*] dollars he says it is plenty & that he will help me to a farm there & get Gregg to assist me either to a new or past cultivated one. Gregg has spoke to him to get settlers. Gregg is a Scotchman he told me to think about it & he would [*illegible – page damaged*] me any information I wished he speaks favorably of the country & the inhabitants perhaps too much so for it is a thing he is a little liable to do. Let me know what you think about it.

I would like to know what Merriam said in his paper about my going to Mr Marland if you can get the paper send it.^[35]

³¹ The Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland show was held at May's Market, Belfast, on 31 August.

³² The Templemoyle Agricultural Seminary.

³³ John Greig (1779-1858) of Canandaigua, Ontario County, New York. See the Introduction.

³⁴ John Marland (1802-1865), a mill-owner in Ballardvale, Essex County, Massachusetts. See the Introduction, and Map 1 for the location of Ballardvale.

³⁵ Horatio C Merriam was the editor of the *Farmers' Advocate*.

Agust 30th

I sail for Ireland today at 4 oclock. I will call on Mr Clark as I pass through Paisley.^[36] I saw a wild bull stuffed in the Edinburgh Musen & was told that it cost between 20 & 30 pound. The Ayrshire cow which I saw the drawing of in the Musen had a much greater apearance of milk than the shorthorn or any other breed that is represented there. The Berkshire boar is represented to be a white or a cream color. I have seen few if any Berkshires at the Shows & no "Woburns of 170 lb weight".^[37] I rather think that the Berkshires are geting into the background "but every dog has its day". I will probably be able to send you a paper about the Belfast Show by the steamer of the 4th September. I do not know what encouragement Mr Colman could procure me from Craig or Gregg but [illegible – page damaged] I am almost afraid to risk it without more money than I have got, so far as regards the talked about [illegible – page damaged] "Assistants Knowledge of Farm Duties & Ayrshire Kye" there is ~~know~~ no Mistake but money is [illegible – page damaged] useful besides – tell me what you think.

A. Bicket

Addressed to: Alex Wright esq, Lowell, Mass, U.S. America

Note on cover sheet: Per first steam ship

³⁶ Perhaps James or John Clark, proprietors of J & J Clark & Co., thread manufacturers, Paisley, Renfrewshire. They later established a mill at Newark, New Jersey. Alexander Wright was originally from near Paisley and appears to have known the Clarks.

³⁷ The Woburn was a breed of pig noted for its fattening properties, although by this time it had fallen out of favour due to other, less favourable, characteristics.

LETTER 2
29 JANUARY 1844

Ayr January 29th 1844

Mr Wright

Dear Sir

You would see from my last that I had had a letter from Mr Swain (Forbsses partner).^[1] I wrote him sa[y]ing that he was not to disapoint himself of a man on my account but if he had not got one when I arived I would call on him and we would talk the subject over and if we did not agree we would not last out, I think I told you he said that the man who had charge of the place for the last 16 years had \$500 a year and provided all [t]he female help that was required for the dairy and cooking etc. and that he boarded and washed for the men (four in number) he did not say whether the man provided the eatables for the men or only done the cooking nor does he say what size of a dairy was kept but even in its best estate it was not so good as Marlands offer. He dose [*i.e.* does] not hint whether he would give any more or what he would give but from his mentioning that sum it is pro[b]able that he included it for a standard to be governed by and if so so far as money matters is concerned Marlands is the best place, and yet I would not wish to promise to either of them untill I arived and had seen both places and talked over the matter with the men.

I know nearly as much as is necessary about Marlands and would except [*i.e.* accept] of his offer if I did not know of the other place but that being the case I feel as tho I would like to see it and see what it would be likely to produce before I would settle on taking Marlands. But there is one considerable difficulty in the way of making a choice viz that it is necessary that both of them should know as soon as possable in order to make their proper arangements for the coming season. And without you can help me anere^[2] this difficulty I may veryfy the old proverb viz “amang stools arses fa threw”. I wish you would try an[d] manage the thing as well as you can for I have a great wish to see Swains and Forbes place and hear what they say before I except of Marlands. If Marland would build a boarding house and manage it in the way you speak off [*sic*] it would certainly be a great convenience at the outset for my scotch lassie if I bring one would be apt to “look like a cat in a strange garret” in such a

¹ John Murray Forbes (1813-1898) and William W Swain (1793-1858) were the owners of Naushon Island, Massachusetts. See the Introduction, and Map 1 for the location of Naushon Island.

² *i.e.* unless you can help me answer.

situation untill (like paddy with the wet day) she got used to it. But she would have one advantage on Na[u]shon that she would not have on Marlands viz she would be able to produce a better article in the shape of butter and cheese on the old pasture of the former than on the new pasture of the latter place and that would assist her character very much as a dairy maid and perhaps add a little both to her honor and profit. And as Swain speaks of bringing out two scotch dairy maids he appears [*interlined*: to intend] to turn the dairy to considerable account (by the bye that would be the best thing on both places) and if she succeeded [*sic*] well in that department it might be profitable there and be a recommendation to some other place where it would be so. And from the establishment being so much larger than Marlands altho it would require more mentle [*i.e.* mental] it would require less bodily labor and that would be useful in warm weather at least. And if I happened to succeed well with such an establishment it would be a higher recommendation to another than Marlands would. But it has yae^[3] draw back and maybe twa^[4] viz I suppose that there are no person except those engaged about the establishment lives on the Island and it therefore would be a little solitary it would be a gude distance to baith Kirk an market.^[5] If I knew as much about the place as I do about Marlands I would be able to decide at once but it is for the want of that knowledge that creates the difficulty. And as I said before I wish you would try and help me out of it the best way you can. You will see from what I have said what my opinions are and you will have to give Marland the best answer you can.

I told Swain that I would leave in March or the beginning of April and if I came in a sail ship it would be some time in May before I arived. If it was not for the expense I would prefer the steamer it would alow me longer time here and take me sooner across and if my Lassie happened to be sea sick she would get sooner over it and so forth. But if I came by the steamer I of course would not bring that long talked of cow. Well then let us talk about that cow story a little more for there is a good deal can be said about it as there is a great deal of risk atends it. I will begin the story on next page.

I have had another excursion amongst cows since I wrote you. I found one who beat all Renfrewshire for the last 5 years she was beat last year at Kilbride by a cow owned by the same man. She was not in right "tid"^[6]

³ *i.e.* one.

⁴ *i.e.* two.

⁵ *i.e.* a good distance to both church and market.

⁶ *i.e.* in season.

there as she was not then calved (and she looks best after she calves) but after she calved she was shown again against the same cow at the Paisley show and beat her there. She is a large fine looking cow and of a flash color having a great deal of white her red and white are in large spots her owner says she will feed to 720 lb (50 stone) he got £8 for her calf last year at or about the time it was calved the man afforded him ten pound but he give him two back at least that is one version of the story but there is another one viz the man offered him £10 but said he would come in [*illegible – ink faded*] will for the price of it but he did not expect to have to pay more than 2 or 3 pounds for it but he really paid 8 pound her owner also got £9.10 of prize money so that she produced him £17.10 last season besides her milk he said that he had milked nine pints and a mutchkin^[7] of solid milk from her at one milking and he thought by high feeding she would give 20 pints per day but it is highly probable that 16 pints per day would tie her pretty tight and then she would make a first rate London dairy cow. She is no doubt a first rate Ayrshire cow and she is a first rate price viz £35. She is said to be 8 year old he says he always tells the truth about his cows (horse and cow dealers always do that) but her horn only calls her 6 year old but the horn is not always a true index to the age of a cow where the owner knows the use of a file nor are you always sure what the natural length or thickness of a cows horn is from its present appearance for there is such a thing as shaving down the horn and sawing off[f] the tops and filing the points to the proper taper and doing all up slick. It is only a few days ago that I heard a father say that he told his son while dressing one a short time ago not to make her too young these age makers some times [*illegible – ink faded*] that for all parts of the animal dont look to be of the same age and some times they make them too young for the intended purpose. I heard lately of a horse dealer who when his age maker asked him how old he would make such a horse told him for God sake no tae mak um ower young for the plew.^[8] But however these things may be I know how to find out the age of the cow (referred too [*sic*] above) without looking at her horn. I suppose she is about 8 or 9 year old. I saw a very fine 3 year hieffer [*sic*] of hers her owner told me he was offered £21 for her when 2 year old. I also saw a fine year and half [*interlined: old*] bull [*?out*] of her [*interlined: that cow*] which he had refused £25 for. Now you will see from what I have said that she has been an excellent cow in her day and has had a strong frame and good constitution (her owner says she

⁷ A measure of capacity for liquids, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of an imperial pint (c.426 ml).

⁸ i.e. not to make him over young for the plough.

never had a “tout”^[9]) or she would not have stood so much showing for that is no joke here in fact it is a rare thing to see such a well bred cow so strong in every respect her owner has also a cow for which he got the first prize for being the best bred cow of any breed. But I would rather give £40 for the former cow to take to America than have the latter in a present. A cow cannot be too fine bred provided she has both size and strength of frame and a good constitution but these are very rare accompaniments of the present kind of fine breeding. I have told you all the good qualities of this crack cow you will observe that she had two bad ones viz both her age and her price are too high and she calves about the middle of May and is too near the calving to bring out in spring at least with saf[e]ty. Her rival already refered to is a stronger cow in some respects. She has a stronger and broader back and her hind quarters are flat on top and wide at the points of the hips (one or more of Cushings^[10] cows are so if I recolect right) but that dont show fine breeding a well bred cow (I mean an Ayrshire) is shaped behind much like a well bred horse they have both the droop and round turned hip of the racer. I have seen many exelent milk cows of this shape and it is to me a much hansomer shape than the broad flat “rumple”. The cow last refered to is of the Yankee^[11] she is all red or nearly so but she has but dull apearance beside the other cow he asks £30 for her. I saw another exelent cow belonging to a Mr Young of Kilmars Mains.^[12] I told Mr Randal^[13] about her but I forgot whether I told you or not. She is about the size of the white colored cow mentioned above but her color is generally brown mixed with a little white. I did not hear of her ever being shown at a cattle show but Kirkwood^[14] considers her a better cow than the others and she is a year younger. Finley^[15] offered £25 for her but Young told him not to temp[t] him with money for he did not wish to sell her and it is very

⁹ More usually ‘towt’, a slight or temporary ailment, often of a recurrent nature.

¹⁰ John P Cushing (1787-1862) of Watertown, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. He kept a herd of Ayrshire cows on his estate.

¹¹ Yankee was the name given to a breed of cattle that had developed from the Devons introduced to America by early English settlers. Cows of this breed were also known as ‘old reds’.

¹² John Young of Kilmaurs Mains, near Kilmarnock, Ayrshire.

¹³ Probably Captain George Randall of New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts. He had imported Ayrshire cattle from Scotland.

¹⁴ Probably Hugh Kirkwood, a farmer and cattle breeder from High Longmuir, Kilmaurs, Ayrshire.

¹⁵ Probably John Finlay, a farmer and cattle breeder from Lyonstone, Maybole, Ayrshire.

doubtfull whether he could be temped now or not. I would prefer these two cows for bringing to America above all others I have seen. The last mentioned cows calf (a bull) got the second prize for year old bulls at the county show last season. She would breed darker colored calves than the other cow but suppose she is a superior cow to the prize one and suppose she could be got and suppose they were in the right trim for bringing out (Youngs cow calves about the end of May). You will easily see that in founding a breed which of the cats has the longest tail. I will see some more good cows in a week or two but perhaps not better than I have seen. I am going to a sale of 70 of the cow kind tomorrow they consist of full bred and grade Ayrshires and Durhams.^[16] The best Ayrshire cows I have seen are from 6 to 10 years old some of the younger ones may come up to their mark but that is not certain and where certainty is required the best of guessing and suposing and thinking and so forth wont always do. I could find a number of good cows but many of them could not be bought except above their value for it is only a high price that will temp their owners to part with them but I have seen but few cows that I would like to bring to America. Cows that are suitable to warrant such an expence and stand such criticism (for the criticism of the novice is the most troublesome) are few and far between. There are a great demand for good cows for cattle shows at home they often pay well in that way and there is also a good demand for them to go to England and Ireland. Kirkwood told me today that he was offered £20 for his bull of 20 months to go to Ireland he sent another of the same age (but not so good) his price was £15 he would not sell his own bull now there are plenty of bulls of the same age that could be bought for 3 or 4 pounds and less so you see their [*i.e.* there] is a great difference between the price of a good and an indifferent animal even here where the breed is plentiful and it is therefor of great importance to have a good stock to breed from. I saw a number of bulls in the market to day and I remarked to Kirkwood that I wondered who kept such bulls for the cows and he said it was "a cursed shame to people to do so" proper breeding is but little attended to compared with what it should be and it is therefor easier to get a good cow than a cow of a good kind.

Now I will tell you what I would do if I was inclined and had the means in my power of doing it viz establishing the Ayrshire breed in New England. I would select the number which I wanted of the best cows I could find without regard either to age or price if they were not too old to

¹⁶ A sale of 'celebrated high-bred stock' (*Ayr Observer*, 30 January 1844) was being held on 31 January at Doonside, Maybole, Ayrshire.

have 2 or 3 calves I would (like the man with the one idea) have only one consideration viz is that the best or one of the best cows to breed from which I can purchase and if so is she a suitable cow for that purpose and that question once settled I would make every thing else bend to it. I would also select the best dairy bull I could get which was not related to the cows or the bulls [*sic*] to which they were with calf for I would have them in calf to good bulls before I brought them out if possible (but it is often much eas[i]er talking than doing or there would be a great many more good farmers in the world than there are) he would answer for all the old cows and their first ospring^[17] and the bull or bulls produced from the imported cows the first season (for it is likely that some of them would have a bull calf) would be answerable for his ospring if I could get no better bulls any where else or I should rather say more suitable bulls for it is not always the most superior bull that is most suitable for every cow or every stock of cows altho it is a very general idea that a superior bull will produce a superior calf from every cow to which he is put and when the result is different they wonder how that could happen for they are sure the cow and the bull are superior animals and they stand number so and so in the herd book and ought to have produced a finer calf than that but perhaps they might have accounted for it something in this way viz instead of founding all there [*i.e.* their] expectations on the herd book character of the animals (a thing by the by very good in its way and ought always to go for what it is worth but no more) they should have exersized a little of their own judgment (a thing they likely had not done or perhaps did not know how) in observing whether the defective points of both animals (for we cannot suppose them perfect) were the same and if so then the result was just what might have been expected and the result which they did expect must have been produced by a much inferior bull whos points were good where the cows were bad and hence the cause of haveing several bulls for the purpose of thorough breeding I mean for producing the greatest possible number of good calves from any number of cows for an animal may be thorough bred and for the cows already assigned it may be a very poor affair. I once saw a bull at an Andover show which the card on her pen said was from Mr Clays^[18] stock which meant that he was the real Simon Pure^[19] and no mistake and the card appeared to be all the recommendation he had for his own merits would have said

¹⁷ *i.e.* offspring.

¹⁸ Probably the American statesman Henry Clay (1777-1852), who sought to improve the stock on his estate in Kentucky by importing livestock from Europe.

¹⁹ An American idiom suggesting authenticity or untainted integrity.

the man that caused me to be brought up must either have been [*i.e.* ?had] plenty of milk or scarce judgment or both. He had [*interlined*: the bull] a back shaped like a rideing saddle and his other points were in proportion and yet he was from Mr Clays stock. I atended a sale of “high bred stock” bred from the choise of the Earle of Castles^[20] and since crossed from selections from the Earle Spencer and Mr Bates^[21] and other selebrated breeders at least so said the Advertisment and like the Andover bull it was their only recomendation for they had little or no merits of their own. I heard a farmer make a very just remark viz that they had been like their owner not “very carefull about how they had crossed”. It is not for the want of knowlege how to breed but from the want of being at the requisite expence to put that knowlege into practice that there are so many poor animals bred every person likes the milk but they dont like to be at the expence of feeding the cow you may think that keeping so many bulls would be expensive but raising bad animals might be so also. Now if you will put all I have told you about breeding and feeding together and act up to it I will warrent you to make a good breed out of an indifferent one but whether you would be renumerated for your expence and trouble is another question.

I do not know well what to say about your bringing out a single cow for it is only from the ospring not from the milk that you can expect to be paid and some and perhaps of her first calves might be bulls and in a country where one bull is about as good as another they would not pay much and if her heifers did not hapen to turn out well they would not pay much and all these things may happen for a great deal depends on the bull and how he has been bred but where there are a number of cows you have a chance to breed some good ones you will see that the prize cow I have described would do well to found a stock from if they hapend to turn out well for a long story could be told about her but she would not cost less than £50 set down in Lowell viz price £35 frieght [*i.e.* freight] 10 or 12£ keep and other expences 3 or 4 pound. I question wether Youngs cow could be bought at all and heard a man say that he s[up]posed Young woud not take £50 for her she is with calf to the bull that got the 2nd prize for 2 year old at the county show he belongs to Young. I have told you that the cows own calf got the 2nd prize for year olds. I should like to see these two cows

²⁰ *i.e.* earl of Cassilis, the title held by Archibald Kennedy (1816-1870), grandson and heir of the 1st marquess of Ailsa and breeder of Shorthorn and Ayrshire cattle.

²¹ John Spencer (1782-1845), 3rd Earl Spencer and first president of the Royal Agricultural Society, and Thomas Bates (1775-1849) of Kirklevington, Yorkshire, were noted breeders of Shorthorn cattle.

and some others imported but I would like to do it at a time when there would [be] less risk there would [be] less risk in the fall as they would be light in calf and milk etc. You have got one which is tolerably “well come” and you may have a chance of getting another either from the same herd or some where else and suppose you cannot procure the “Best” yet by giving the 2nd or 3rd rate proper care and treatment and putting them to proper bulls you may in time [*illegible- ink faded*] the best or nearly so give them good care and plenty of vegetable food or [?cooked] or steamed food chaff or cut hay or something which will swell them out and give depth and roundness to the rib and what will develop their milking qualities when young and the same when giving milk and what will assist good breeding wonderfully. There is probably a good stock of Ayrshire in or near Philadelphia [*sic*] they are owned by one Struthers he is a marble cutter^[22] his bull is related to the prize bull of 36 I have seen a daughter of his which give 6 pints of solid milk at a milking last year when 3 year old, it was the breeder of the bull and his daughter that told me about the stock but have since talked to the man who selected them he told me that he hired a byre and picked up a good cow when and where he could find her he sent out 6 and a bull. Now I have told you what I think about importing cows and I wish you to give me your think [*i.e.* thoughts] on the subject and as your next letter will probably be the last I will receive hear [*i.e.* here] I wish you to think right for their [*i.e.* there] will be no time to appeal from the decision. I will attend to what you say as far as possible. I had just time to speak to Mr Drew^[23] at Ayr fair he said he had good expectations from dairy [*sic*]. I will see him shortly again. I saw Mr Clark^[24] in Ayr a few days ago he told me they had bought or rented as large a mill as they now have and they are going ahead he thinks of coming out to see you soon he said he would probably write by first steamer they are well. We had a lecture here a few days ago from Professor Johnston his subject was the constitution of soils and crops and he pleased the farmers very much. He is a Kilmarnock chap and is or was a professor in Durham College he has £500 a year from the Highland Society for lecturing throughout the country etc. he is publishing a chemical catchism [*i.e.* catechism] which he wishes introduced into schools.^[25]

²² John Struthers (1786-1851), marble mason, Philadelphia. See the Introduction.

²³ Lawrence Drew of Merryton (d. 1884), near Hamilton, Lanarkshire, was a noted cattle breeder.

²⁴ See Letter 1.

²⁵ James F W Johnston (1796-1855) was a reader in chemistry and mineralogy at Durham University and the chemist for the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland. Although

I wrote you in my last about money and I repeat it now for fear of any mistake in the letter not reaching you for the want of it would place me in rather an awkward [*i.e.* awkward] condition. I wished you to send me a £100 Bill and if you wish for a cow you will have to remit the probable expence for I may not have enough to spare for that purpose. I do not know how much I have in the Salem and Lowell Banks but you can take it and add the rest yourself and we will arrange the matter when I arrive.

Give my respects to Mrs Wright and tell her that Mr Clark has promised to go with me to see the Gleniffer^[26] maid when I go next time to see the Paisley Buddies.^[27] She (the maid) might be as profitable stock to import as calves for she could do something for herself. Let me know if you can find out what time I would require to be over at farthest so that I may make my arrangements accordingly.

Yours etc.
A. Bickett

Addressed to: Alex Wright esqr, Lowell, Mass, U.S. America

Note on cover sheet: Per first steam ship *and* Per first steamer

Johnston was born in Paisley, Bickett was not entirely wrong in saying he was a 'Kilmarnock chap', as he spent some of his childhood in that Ayrshire town. His *Catechism of Agricultural Chemistry and Geology* was published later that year.

²⁶ Gleniffer, south of Paisley, Renfrewshire.

²⁷ More usually 'buddies', a term used to describe people from Paisley.

FURTHER READING

Concise biographies of the recipient of the two letters, Alexander Wright, can be found in Jameson, E O. *The Biographical Sketches of Prominent Persons and the Genealogical Records of many early and other families in Medway, Mass. 1713-1886*, Millis, 1886, 108-109; Hurd, D H. *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, with biographical sketches of many of its pioneers and prominent men*, 2 vols, Philadelphia, 1890, II, 75-76; and Coburn, F W. *A History of Lowell and its People*, 3 vols, New York, 1920, II, 131-133. For Henry Colman, see Marti, D. 'The Reverend Henry Colman's agricultural ministry', *Agricultural History*, 51.3 (1977), 524-539.

For contemporary accounts of Lowell, see Colman, H. 'Lowell, Massachusetts', *New-York Farmer, and American Gardener's Magazine*, 9.4 (April 1836), 102-106; and Miles, H A. *Lowell, as it was, and as it is*, Lowell, 1846. See also Cowley, C. *A History of Lowell*, Lowell, 1868; and *Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity, Massachusetts*, Lowell, 1897.

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Fenton, A and Veitch, K, eds. *Scottish Life and Society. A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology, volume 2: Farming and the Land*, Edinburgh, 2011, contains a number of pertinent chapters, in particular Hay, R. 'Crops and livestock in the Improvement era', 244-266; Campbell, R H. 'Cattle in the South West', 527-544; Holmes, H. 'The dissemination of agricultural knowledge, 1700-1850', 867-893; and Dornan, D M and Fenton, A. 'Agricultural museums', 924-941.

Agricultural newspapers published in both Britain and the United States of America provide a detailed and wide-ranging insight into current debates and practices. For useful surveys, see Demaree, A L. *The American*

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Further relevant works can be found in the notes to the Introduction.

SOURCES IN LOCAL HISTORY

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