

1838 - Sophia Robertson of Kindrochet to her mother

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Edinburgh 20 Oct 1838 To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmarked: 'OCT W 20 A 1838'. Price: 8 + 'Add '. Seal: Black wax; square device and the word 'CROYEZ' within a circular decorative border. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet Derculich by Dunkeld'. Annotations: none.

25 Royal Circus Edinburgh Octbr 20th 1838 My own dearest Mama Will you think me in rather too great a hurry for I have not allowed quite a fort-night to elapse, however I hope you are beginning to long for a letter from poor me 1.

Oh dear Mama how happy & thankful I was to receive your letter, I hope you reached Derculich in health & happiness on Friday 2. By the bye the parcel arrived on Friday night & when I saw a letter addressed by Marjory come in on Saturday morning it gave me a great fright that I trembled to open it. What a delightful warm cozy shawl dear Anne sent to me; please give her my love & thanks and tell her that I have worn it every day & have found it such a comfort 3.

All our party have made their appearance at last. Miss Emma Duglas the last arrival appears to be a nice lady-like girl she is not a general favorite, but as yet I have found her very agreeable. She is past sixteen, & is an orphan poor thing, so I intend trying to be kind to her.

I like the Miss Learmonths better every day, they are so kind, not the least like Governesses 4. Miss Mary the second is everybody's favorite, but I have found them all very kind & Miss Amor? also. We had our first lesson this season from Mr Turnbull the dancing-master on Tuesday he is the oddest fat little man I ever saw it is perfectly impossible to refrain from laughing, he makes such odd remarks & talks incessantly, however he is a good teacher & attends more to the figures &c than to the mere steps. The two Miss MacEwans & Miss Duglas learn dancing so I am by no means the only great girl in the hopping class. I like Mr Cooper the writing master very much; Oh how much nicer a Master is for writing & arithmetic than a Mistress. He makes every thing so clear and easily understood. I hope I shall improve in my writing; for Mr Cooper always says "A very nice copy Maam, very neat." Miss Shindley also says that I am attentive & is to send me a pretty new piece before my next lesson. I think I hear you say "What a vain little monkey." however it was but a lapsus &c & I do'nt intend being vain any more, but the hope of being able to play you a tune decently when I go home pleases me greatly. Mr Riccarton appears to be a very good French master & I have enough of work to occupy my time without being the least hurried.

I have got my stays at last & they fit very well, Miss Learmonth had paid the woman before I knew of her being there but having the cash I shall pay for my work &c so it will be the same thing at last. I wish you or Aunte would try to think of some work for me; I have finished my purses and the bag is very nearly done, however I will just take to my old friend the trimming and fag 5 away at it. I wish I had thought of asking Aunt to have the kindness to send me some apples for New Hallowed Even, I am sure she would not have been angry; however it is too late now, for the Edinburgh carrier leaves Perth on Thursday I believe; at least he is here on Saturday.

I dined at the Strowans 6 on Saturday, James & Donald were there 7; James told me that he was going to Aberdeen this week & to visit Athole before he came back; so perhaps you may see him but in this nunnery I hear nothing of what is going on, so I do not know if he is gone yet. The Nickles, Frances & I went to the Gardens last Saturday 8. The Nickles sent me an invitation to dine with them, which I was obliged to decline being pre engaged at the Strowans. However we spent a nice forenoon together, & I hope to go some other time. I shall not finish this epistle till to-morrow for Franky & I dine at Mrs Bell's 9 to-morrow & she calls for me at twelve so I shall hear if she knows any thing about James' motions. I must bid you good night dearest Mama & will finish my letter to-morrow if possible. Good night & joy be with you all.

Sophy.

Saturday morning. Good morning! Dearest Mama! I have recommenced scribbling this most sensible & interesting epistle tho' I am sure it will tax your patience to read it but as nobody looks at any of our letters I can scribble away as if I were talking to you. Mr Cooper gave us pens to mend last night & I am writing with them to-day, so I hope you will find me capable of being useful in that line, when I go home. Miss Learmonth has been very poorly for some time, she is now better & with her sisters desires her best compliments to you.

Dr Bell 10 has been vaccinating some of the children; would you wish me to undergo the operation once more? Miss Greig my room fellow has not been at all well poor thing her stomach has plagued her very

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much, she is getting better; but several of the girls have had slight colds &c, and I have been the healthiest & strongest body in the house & have had no greater ailment than a slight headache since you left Edinburgh.

By the bye dear Mama please to send me one of my work boxes, as soon as you conveniently can, for I require it very much. I do not mind which you send, only if my Aunts can get at the one Carry 11 gave me it would not scratch the table so much because as how it has no feet.

I think I have now said all I have got to say & an unconnected mixture of stuff it is but this being Saturday the noise of tongues &c by which I am surrounded is most uncommon; besides I have a great number of my old enemies, in the shape of cotton stockings, to repair and have no good Mama to help me now. Little Anne Cunningham called out to me, "give my love to your Mama", so I declared that down it would go. Tuesday is the birthday of two of the girls but I do not intend setting the fashion of birthday gifts as there would be no end to it. We do not think we shall have any great fun till Hallow'even alas for a saunag 12 I have not left myself room for questions, besides it is better to tell you all about what you do'nt know is it not? & in your letter be sure to tell me every thing about every body. Give my best love to the Edras 13, I hope they will remember to write to me. Give twenty thousand loves to dear dear Aunt. I shall write to her next. Give my love also to Uncle & to my home Aunts when you write. How is Mr Robertson? quite well I hope, remember me to him 14. How is old Miss Menzies? 15 You said I should send for Davie when I wanted a coach; but who do you think Miss Learmonth employs? No other than Donald Stewart, Couldaloskin; he knew me the other day & grinned in my face, till I turned & stared at him & thinking he had a Couldaloskin face I nodded; I afterwards found out who he was 16.

Do you not think I shall become quite a scribbler when I pester you with such long letters, I must leave a corner, in case Franky will have some news. Do write to me soon, I shall weary dreadfully before the end of a fortnight, much less a month. I believe D McDiarmid 17 will leave the country soon; will you write by him, pray do. It is not cold enough for worsted stockings yet, but I will get some by & bye.

Pray dear Mama excuse errors for I cannot think of going carefully over such a long epistle, poor Mama to have to decipher it all. By the bye do not ask the Glen 18to carry any letters or messages for me if he comes here. Frank has just come. She knows nothing about James except that he has not gone yet 19. Willie is expected today 20. I am in the greatest possible haste. Frank sends her love. Believe me my beloved Mama your own affectionate Sophy.

NOTES

1 Sophia Jane Stewart Robertson hereafter Sophy seems to have arrived at the Miss Learmonth's school in Edinburgh in early October 1838. Royal Circus, one of the most striking of William Playfair's designs for the Northern New Town, was built between 1821 and 1823. The house at No. 25 was therefore just about the same age as Sophy. She was then seventeen years old, having been born in March 1821.

2 Sophy's mother, the widowed Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet, was Sophia Stewart, the youngest of the three daughters of Donald Stewart of Shierglass and his wife Sophia, daughter of John Stewart of Bonskeid. In 1838 Mrs Robertson was aged about fifty-eight. At this time she was more or less permanently resident at Derculich in Strath Tay, the home of Alexander Stewart and his wife, her only surviving eldest sister Jean. The Stewarts of Derculich had no children and plenty of money. Mrs Stewart had been in poor health for many years and clearly depended on having her sister living there most of the time as an affectionate and sympathetic companion. This arrangement also probably suited Mrs Robertson; she was not rich and her home Kindrochet House was being made ready for letting to suitable tenants; Kindrochet Cottage next door to it was occupied by her dead husband's three sisters, Sophy's spinster Aunts Helen, Bessie and Ann Robertson.

3 The arrival of the parcel, followed the next day by a letter from Marjory whose handwriting Sophy recognized with alarm, is a minor mystery. The identities of Marjory and Anne are unknown. Note that Sophy did not herself write to thank Anne for the shawl but sent "love and thanks" through her mother. It is possible that Anne was an old but illiterate family servant, which might explain the letter addressed by Marjory and supposedly accompanying the parcel containing the shawl sent and possibly made by Anne. It is possible that both women lived and worked in Perth and that Sophy's mother organized the making and sending of the shawl (see Letter II, Notes 3 and 5).

4 Sophy's unconcealed dislike of Governesses suggests that she may at some time have suffered unkindness from a Governess at first hand.

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5 One of the now obsolete colloquial meanings of the verb 'to fag' was 'to work hard'; nowadays Sophy might have said 'peg away at it'.

6 The Strowans refers to the Robertsons of Struan, the head of which family is Chief of the clan Donnachie (the Robertson Clan and is generally styled Struan Robertson. In 1838 the head of the family was General George Duncan Robertson, then aged 72, who, after a long and distinguished military career, was an inmate of the private mental hospital or asylum at Morningside, to which he had been admitted in 1836. He died in 1842, leaving an only son and heir also named George Duncan Robertson who had been born in 1816; his marriage in April 1839 is mentioned by Sophy in a later letter to her mother (see Letter VI dated 4 June 1839. The General also had two daughters; the elder, named Mary Anne, made what was regarded as an unsuitable marriage to a man named William Jenkins, by whom she had three daughters.

The General's younger daughter, Frances, was one of Sophy's most intimate friends and certainly seems to have been her closest companion in Edinburgh. She is often referred to indiscriminately as Francis, Franky and Frank. It seems clear that she was not a fellow resident with Sophy at the Miss Learmonth's school at 25 Royal Circus and most probably lived with her mother in Alva Street, from which they were shortly to move to a flat in Torphichen Street. Frances Robertson was to die unmarried in 1851.

7 I am uncertain about the identity of James and Donald. They may have been Robertsons of Trinafour. It is possible that James was a soldier from the references to his movements (see also Note 19. He may have been James Stewart, son of Duncan Stewart, an Edinburgh lawyer who died in 1831 and was a cousin of Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet. There are also a number of other candidates, of which the most obvious is Sophy's first cousin, her father's nephew James Robertson, also a lawyer in Edinburgh (see Letter II, Note 4; but it seems unlikely that he would be going to Aberdeen, as one gets the impression that he was tied to his work in Edinburgh; it seems even more unlikely that Frances Robertson would be the person most likely to know the details of his movements. as is suggested twice in later paragraphs of this letter, if the James in question was James Robertson the lawyer.

If Donald was not a Robertson he may have been Donald McDiarmid or Donald Stewart.

8 The Nickles were the family of Major (later Major-Gen. Sir Robert Nickle 1786-1855, formerly in the 88th Regiment, in which Sophy's father had served. Mrs Nickle was born Elizabeth Ann Dallas, the daughter of William Dallas W.S. of Edinburgh and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Carr.

9 I do not know who Mrs Bell may have been; perhaps she was the wife of Dr Bell. But it seems more likely that this Mrs Bell refers to the Bells mentioned in Letter V, who were probably a different family.

10 Whether Dr Bell was or was not the husband of Mrs Bell, with whom Sophy and Frances were due to dine on 21 October, it seems clear that he was already known to Sophy and her mother.

11 It sounds as if Sophy's three Aunts at Kindrochet may have had a tedious task on their hands trying to find this work box. Carry, who gave Sophy this particular one, may have been short for Caroline, in which case I do not know who she was. If, however, Carry was the same person as Charry, mentioned in the second paragraph of Letter V, her proper name was Charlotte Dick.

12 Gaelic word, which I cannot find in the dictionary, whose meaning is akin to a sing-song

13 The 'Edras' was Sophy's usual way of referring to the Stewart-Robertson family, who lived at Edradynate, an ancestral property in Strath Tay less than half a mile to the south-west of Derculich. In 1838 the head of the household was James Stewart-Robertson, born in 1783; his wife, whom he married in 1817, was his cousin Dorothea, daughter of Adam Stewart of Blackhill and Cluny, less than a mile south-west from Edradynate.

14 Sophy frequently includes 'Mr Robertson' among those to whom she sends greetings at the end of letters to her mother at Derculich. There is no clue to his identity and I have no idea who he was. Sophy's messages to him are noticeably formal when compared with those she sent to other people.

15 I do not know who this old Miss Menzies may have been.

16 Davie was presumably one of the many coachmen in Edinburgh whose original homes were in Perthshire. Donald Stewart, his rival for Sophy's custom, came from Couldaloskin, now Cuiltaloskin, which is a farm or holding up Glen Errochty, about two miles west of Kindrochet.

17 D McDiarmid may have been Donald McDiarmid or David McDiarmid. Does leaving the country mean leaving Athole and coming to Edinburgh or leaving Britain and going abroad, maybe by way of Edinburgh, so

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that he could act as letter carrier? He may have been the Donald referred to jokingly as 'Massa Donaldus' at the end of Letter IX or the Donald McDiarmid mentioned in Letter X and elsewhere.

18 If, as seems probable 'the Glen' was Alexander Stewart of Glencripesdale, there is no doubt that Sophy wanted to avoid any unnecessary contact with him. It is not impossible that this was because they had had a troublesome flirtation or that he was still pursuing her against her wishes.

19 This remark about Frances Robertson knowing "nothing about James except that he has not gone yet" reinforces the improbability of this James being James Robertson the lawyer and Sophy's adviser and first cousin.

20 Willie's exact identity remains a mystery, although I am fairly sure that he was a Robertson cousin from Kindrochet, possibly a brother of James Robertson the lawyer.

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Edinburgh 22 Nov 1838 To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmarked: 'NOV S 23 F 1838'. Price: 8 + 'Add '. Seal: Black wax, obliterated. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet Derculich Dunkeld'. Annotations: none.

25 Royal Circus (Edinburgh Novbr 22 1838

My own dear Mama

I daresay it is some time since you heard from me, owing to a very stupid mistake on the part of some of the servants. Francis & I ordered the rusks and when the baker's boy called here for the barrel the servants knew nothing about it; so Franky's letter to you & mine to dear Aunte lay at Mackies (1) among loaves & buns for nearly a week. However the barrel was ferreted out & is now on its northward journey I hope.

I mentioned in Aunt's letter that I had a cold, it was really troublesome at that time, but is now quite gone along with all other ailments. Dr Bell has given me some pills for the nasty froth that used to trouble me so, & I hope they will remove it, for the Dr says, & I feel, that I cannot be perfectly well while it remains. I have also got a bottle of some stuff to strengthen my inward parts & it has the effect of removing my pain (2). So much for health. I will only add that I have been ordered to keep very cozy & warm & have got a nice pair of black knitted looking winter boots, lined with fur (a curly lamb's skin apparently & cork soles. I am not to have a new bonnet, at least as yet I do not require one, having got my straw, lined & trimmed. I have no winter shawl except the one you sent me from Perth (3).

Frances called to-day, she desired me to tell you that the person from whom her Mama got her shawl is in town. Frank wore a very handsome plaid shawl, with a deep border, it was very fine & soft & cost £3 5/. Tell me when you write what I should get, about how much pay & c & c. I cannot say what is the fashion, for velvet, cloth & fur are all common. I am glad we decided on sending my dresses to Miss Hutchison (4) instead of having them done here, for to tell the truth Miss Learmonth, though a very good person. does not appear to my discerning eyes, to be gifted with much economy or method about those matters.

Will you dear Mama have the kindness to write either to Miss Hutchison or Marjory (5) to send my white frock with long sleeves as soon as they please. As to the style of making, every fashion under the sun seems to be worn, so I will leave that part of the matter to Miss H's own taste, only bargaining for simplicity. Pray excuse me for giving you the task of ordering my dress, you will think I might have done that much for myself, but dear Mama you know of all (people) how very helpless I am in matters of business, besides I did not know what to say to Miss H about a box to send my frock in. I shall not require my other dress frock for some time.

Have I not given a goodly length of story about myself & my accoutrements. But I know you will pardon me. Thanks dear Mama to you & my kind Aunt for gratifying all my requests. I assure you that I value my little dictionary as much as you could wish & will take great care of it.

I spent last Saturday at Mrs D Stewart's & liked it pretty well (not so well by half as the Strowans, however). Mrs Stewart was very kind & invited me to go to her every Saturday I was disengaged we'll see about it). The widow, her daughter, & two of my cousins were there (6). Tina (7 & I intended calling for Mrs Izzet (8) but the day was so very cold that the Dr forbade my going so far. I spend next Saturday at the Strowan's & Frances & I intend calling for the Dallases (9). Mrs Robertson leaves Alva Street on Tuesday

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first, she has taken a nice commodious flat in Torphechin St. I do not think George (10) will come to town this winter.

I had a note from James (11) the other day desiring me to tell you that he had had an epistle from Capt Drummond (12) who has been so careless as to lose the Inventory of furniture at Kindrochet which I had such trouble in writing for him. James says that his note was a very civil one & he requests you to send another copy to Condie (13) as soon as you can. James amuses me by his solicitude about my wants, every time I see him he says "now are you quite sure that you do not require pocket money or any thing". However I have more than two pounds of pocket money remaining. I have got my ring, it is a very pretty one & by far the most highly valued of all my ornaments.

A new pupil joined our community the other day. She is a little quiet thing, about thirteen. Her name is Jessie Bruce & she comes from Hamilton. I like my composition class exceedingly, though it gives me a great deal more to do. Miss Amor has not yet returned to us poor soul, but she is getting much better. I continue as happy and fond of the Learmonths (who desire) me to send you (their compliments) as ever, tho' I must confess I begin to think often, very often, of home.

I have had two letters from the Alstons, the last contained accounts of poor Frixie's death, poor fellow, I was very sorry to hear of his early loss (14). The Alstons expect to be in town in January if not sooner. I also had a very kind letter from Miss Irvine (15). I was greatly astonished some time ago by the receipt of an epistle from Clemy Stewart Glenlyon House (16), by Post too. I have not answered it, nor am I at all sure about doing so, for I think of Glenlyon & every thing belonging to it as seldom as possible & with anything but pleasureable sensations. I had a letter from Emily & one from Aunt Ann (17) along with my workbox (18 which I was delighted to receive. I have finished my everlasting bag, all but a few stitches, & expect to give it its *coup de grace* to-morrow.

I hope you will admit that I cram a great many words in my letters, but dearest Mama I never weary of writing to you. It is a sad business to write here, for one is so often interrupted & the clamour is so overpowering.

Now dear Mama I have filled my paper & have left a great many things unsaid, however I intend to write once or twice before Christmas. Please give many many loves to dear dear Aunt, I am anxious to hear how she is (19). Give my love also to Uncle. Remember me very kindly to Mr Robertson & give my kindest love to the Edras. How are all Findynate friends? (20) Do dear Mama write me soon, I am so much disappointed when the post comes & no letter for me. I expected Willie & D McDiarmid to call for me to-day but the truants have not appeared (21). Frances said that you were talking of getting a shawl like her Mama's except in colour. Please tell me about it.

Goodbye darling Mama Ever ever your very affectionate Sophy Jane

NOTES1 Mackies was for many years a well-known bakery in Edinburgh, and latterly also a tea-shop and restaurant in Princes Street.

2 For no particular reason I suspect that the "nasty froth" from which Sophy suffered was intestinal and accompanied defaecation; it does not seem to have given rise to any troublesome physical symptoms. On the other hand, the "bottle of stuff to strengthen" her "inward parts" was clearly designed to relieve menstrual pain and seems to have done so successfully. It is interesting to see such matters being discussed in such a straightforward manner in letters from a daughter to her mother; this is quite unlike some of the more idiotic stereotypes of attitudes and behaviour at a time which was undoubtedly "Early Victorian".

3 This sentence adds to the probability of Sophy's mother being the instigator of Anne sending a shawl to her; see Letter I, Note 3.

4 Miss Hutchison was possibly a dressmaker in Perth who did work for Sophy and her mother and other members of the family.

5 It seems very probable that Marjory worked for Miss Hutchison; she was clearly well-known to Sophy.

6 Mrs Stewart was the widow of Duncan Stewart W.S., an Edinburgh lawyer who was also a cousin of Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet. He died in 1831. The identities of "two of my cousins" are not known. The daughter mentioned was almost certainly Tina, one of Sophy's close friends in Edinburgh, whose name occurs in the next sentence of this letter; Tina was probably short for Clementina. Another Stewart daughter was Eliza, who married John McNicoll, an accountant whose name crops up from time to time in Kindrochet affairs

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and who is mentioned in Letter VII below. He was later one of the Trustees of Sophy's marriage contract in 1844. Mrs Stewart also had at least one son James; Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet's support of his application for a commission in the army in 1831 was sought in a letter written to him in that year by Kindrochet's nephew James Robertson (see Note 11 below).

7 See Note 6 above.

8 Mrs Izett was the wife (or perhaps the widow) of Mr Izett, at one time the proprietor of the Kinnaird estate in Strath Tay. He is said to have made his fortune as a hatter patronized by George IV.

9 'The Dallases' were presumably the family of Mrs Robert Nickle, born Elizabeth Ann Dallas (see Letter I Note 8).

It may be noted that throughout her letters Sophy uses the words 'calling for' to describe what was later known as 'calling on' and might now be termed 'visiting'. This may then have been customary and in general use; or it may have been an idiom peculiar to the Stewart and Robertson families and their circle. I do not know which.

10 George was presumably George Duncan Robertson 1816-1864, only son of Mrs Robertson and her husband General Robertson of Struan.

11 James Robertson was at this time a young lawyer in practice in Edinburgh. He was the nephew of Captain Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet and thus Sophy's first cousin. His mother was Margaret Robertson, Sophy's father's sister and probably the only one of his sisters to marry. Her husband, the young lawyer's father, was yet another Duncan Robertson, the tenant of Mill of Invervack, which is about two miles downstream from Kindrochet. In 1824 young James had been made one of the trustees of his uncle Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet's Trust Disposition and Deed of Settlement. As a result he seems to have been in charge of Sophy's affairs, seeing to it that she was paid her allowance. It is also clear that when she was at school in Edinburgh he took a protective interest in her general well-being.

It is possible, but unlikely, that he was the James mentioned as a fellow dinner guest at the Struan Robertsons in Sophy's first letter to her mother: see Letter I, Note 7.

12 Captain Drummond and his family were the tenants of Kindrochet House.

13 Condie was the name of the lawyer in Perth who dealt with the affairs of the Kindrochet estate.

14 The Alstons were the proprietors of Urrard, a property near Killiecrankie owned and occupied by the Stewart of Urrard since the 15th century. Charlotte Stewart of Urrard married Major James Alston of Achnard, who added the name Stewart to his own when his wife's brother, the last Stewart laird, died unmarried in 1818. In spite of this they were generally referred to by Sophy and her mother, and no doubt by everyone else, as the Alstons.

I do not know who Frixie was. He was clearly male and young and may have been one of the Alston's family.

15 Miss Irvine was Clementina Anne Stewart Irvine 1808-1840, eldest daughter of the Revd Dr Alexander Irvine, formerly Minister of Dunkeld, and his wife Jessie, sister of Major-General David Stewart of Garth. She married Charles Alexander McDiarmid, who was her cousin, in 1839; Sophy's anxieties about acting as her bridesmaid are mentioned more than once in later letters.

16 Clemy Stewart, Glenlyon House, was almost certainly Clementina, daughter of Donald Stewart of Glencripesdale and his wife Grace McDiarmid, and sister of Alexander Stewart of Glencripesdale (see Letter I, Note 18. She later married, as his 2nd wife, her first cousin Charles Alexander McDiarmid, whose first wife was Clementina Irvine (see Note 15 above).

17 I do not know who Emily was; she may have been a Robertson cousin and perhaps a sister of Willie, if he was also (as I suspect) a Robertson cousin. Emily is mentioned again in the first paragraph of Letter VIII. In this context, with the implied conjunction of her letter and that from Aunt Ann, she may have been living at Kindrochet Cottage with Sophy's Aunts.

18 See Letter I, Note 11.

19 The way in which Sophy expresses her affection for, and concern about, her Aunt Jean, her mother's sister, is very different from that in which she writes about her father's sisters, to whom elsewhere she refers as her "home Aunts".

20 Edradynate, frequently mentioned in the concluding sentences of Sophy's letters, is virtually next door to Derculich, as already indicated in Letter I, Note 13.

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Findynate was another ancestral property in Strath Tay, about one mile down-stream and north-east of Derculich. Although Sophy frequently sends messages to its occupants, the terms she uses are not as warm as those she uses as when sending her "love" to the people at Edradynate.

Nevertheless, the use of the word 'friends' in relation to the occupants of Findynate is interesting because of its implications for the kinship terminology then employed by the upper class in Athole and quite probably at all social levels in Perthshire and elsewhere. The Stewarts of Findynate were neighbours of the Stewarts of Derculich and also friends and relatives and members of the Atholl network of gentlepeople. The category 'friends' quite clearly includes what may be called 'kith and kin' outside the immediate family; that is, it includes people to whom one is related through blood or marriage outside the small group of first degree relatives. It also includes people who are not necessarily recognized as relatives but with whom kinship ties probably exist but are vague and distant. At most social levels in districts such as Athole, where virtually all one's neighbours were classifiable as kin if or when it was convenient or suitable, the category 'friends' really meant 'social equals' and therefore included people who might be regarded as potential relatives through marriage.

In the case of Findynate, the members of that household consisted of Doctor John Stewart of Findynate, his wife and his two daughters. John Stewart was a first cousin of Sophy's father; he was also a rather dominating, even a domineering character, as one might expect from a former naval surgeon. His mother was a sister of Sophy's paternal grandmother Jean Stewart, eldest daughter of William Stewart, tacksman of the Miln at Blair Athole. That William Stewart had a son of the same name who became William Stewart, tenant of Dalchalloch in Glen Errochty; the younger William Stewart was therefore a maternal uncle of Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet and also of John Stewart of Findynate. There were also relationships of various kinds between Sophy and the Doctor's wife, who was Elizabeth Stewart, daughter of John Stewart of Glencripesdale. Alexander Stewart of Glencripesdale and his sister Clemy were therefore nephew and niece of Mrs Stewart of Findynate.

It would be tedious to explore this topic any further. But these details serve to show that the word 'friends' in this context had greater reverberations at that time and place than it generally has today.

21 Who were "the truants" Willie and D McDiarmid? The former, as already indicated, was probably a Robertson of Kindrochet cousin. The latter may have been Donald or David, one of the sons of Charles McDiarmid 1784-c1850, known as 'Old Bohally', and his wife Jean, daughter of John Stewart younger of Foss, and brother of Charles Alexander McDiarmid MD (see Notes 15 and 16 above).

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Edinburgh 4 Mar 183 To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmarked: 'MAR W 4 F 1839'. Price: '8' pence + 'Add '. Seal: Black wax with crude heptagon enclosing words 'I AM WELL'. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet Derculich Dunkeld'. Annotations: 'Answered March 15th' in Sophy's mother's hand.

25 Royal Circus Edinburgh March 4th 1839 My dearest Mamma I fear you are beginning to think me the most thoughtless chit possible, indeed I would have written sooner but always delayed in the hope of getting a private chat with James relative to the state of the funds &c &c. But James has been so busy that I have never been able to get hold of him, & fearing that you would be anxious I resolved to write without waiting for old James any longer (1).

Dearest Mamma you have made a considerable mistake (in Miss Learmonth's favour) while reckoning my quarters; the 2nd quarter does not end till the 1st April, instead of March, so my not having written sooner is of no consequence so far. I am very much nonplussed about how to decide in the question of staying or going. Surely you will believe that inclination would lead me home, to all my dear friends there, but on the other hand I think I am improving a little here I fear you will say very little amelioration is exhibited in what you see viz handwriting, but while writing I am always in such a hurry, besides I am sorry to leave Edinburgh for there is no knowing if I shall ever see it again. But the real great consideration which has most weight in making me wish to remain another three months is the hope of tiring out that pest I was greatly inclined to call him a worse name Glencripesdale & the dread of being once more subjected to Dr Stewart's

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intrusive & indelicate interference. I love the Dr very much but certainly will not submit again to his management. It is very tiresome that Alie & Clemy are coming here again, however surely they will not stay longer than a month (2).

Now dear Mamma I am merely stating my reasons for & against, but just tell me whatever you wish & I shall do it with good will, I never could judge well for myself nor can I now. I shall write again after I have received a letter from you & seen James. Many thanks for your kindness in desiring me to ask James for a birthday gift, I have availed myself of it by taking a ticket Pr 5s for a concert which is to be given this evening by Signr Boucher; he is our singing master, so Miss Learmonth & all her chickens are to honour him with their powerful patronage. Guilani & several other great performers are to assist, so we expect a great treat.

I called for Mrs Bowie Campbell the other day, both she & Mrs Stewart were out (3). I met Jamie Edra who like myself had been disappointed of admission. I did not know Jamie in the least till he came up & spoke, he is very much grown & like all growing boys is looking uncommonly ugly (4). Donald McDiarmid came to town the other day, he brought me a letter from Aunt Helen (5).

By the by I quite forgot to say that living with the Strowans is quite out of the question. I would not live there while George is in the house for anything I ever saw, besides I have not been asked. George leaves in the beginning of April, & if they choose to invite me then I shall be delighted to go (6).

The Menzies were here some time ago & asked the Learmonths' permission for me to go to the Infirmary Ball with them, Miss L. gave a positive refusal, she "could not really, without your written permission, allow me". She told me nothing of the matter, but I found it out from Lady Strowan. Miss Learmonth is not particularly fond of the Menzies no more am I so she merely wanted an excuse I suspect to be off, she says that if Franky goes to an assembly she will not object to my accompany her (7).

I think it will be as well to get one of my muslin frocks washed & made up here, for the carriage from Perth would nearly pay that expense, independent of the accumulation of boxes & the crushing. Miss Hamilton, who makes for the girls, makes a silk dress very well too for four or five shil lings is not that cheap. I have been very economical since I came here, not a new frock, collar or bonnet, scarf boots & only 2 Pr Shoes for one of which I paid myself have I got since you left. Now I in pity to you must conclude this beautiful epistle. I have a long essay, An imaginary history of a Bible, to write for to-morrow, and do not know what to say, or where to send this Bible, or when to make it live, or in short anything about it, however Mr Oliphant says my compositions are generally pretty well done. Do you think my trumpeter is dead?

Give my very very best love to my dear dear Aunt & to Uncle & comp ts to Mr Robertson. Love to the Edras. How are Kitty &c &c & old Janny you never tell me about her (8). Now adieu my own dear Mama pray do write me soon. I shall be impatient for your next letter even more than usual for it is to decide my fate. O I wish you could take a trip here but I must not be unreasonable for dear Aunt's sake.

Believe me ever your own affect Sophy Jane

NOTES1 One aspect of Sophy's relationship with her lawyer cousin James Robertson is well illustrated here. See Letter II, Note 11.

2 It seems that the suggestions already made about Sophy's relationship with Alexander Stewart of Glencripesdale (see Letter I, Note 18) were justified. It also looks as if his continuing pestering of her may have been encouraged by his uncle by marriage, Dr John Stewart of Findynate, who was no doubt capable of forceful matchmaking. Even so, it seems, from her remark about Alie and Clemy, that Sophy could not escape Glencripesdale and his sister if they were shortly coming to spend a month in Edinburgh.

3 The identities of these two women cannot be established. Perhaps Mrs Bowie Campbell was another of the daughters of Mrs Stewart the lawyer's widow (see Letter II, Note 6).

4 Jamie Edra was almost certainly James Stewart-Robertson of Edradynate, born in May 1823; in the light of Sophy's frequent and affectionate messages to the 'Edras' (see Letter I, Note 13) it is strange that she did not instantly recognize Jamie. Perhaps it should be remembered that in March 1839 he was an adolescent coming up to his sixteenth birthday; perhaps also Sophy's remark about his "looking uncommonly ugly" was a reference to the afflictions of acne.

5 Donald McDiarmid is frequently mentioned in these letters but the quality of that family's relationship with Kindrochet is hard to determine. For Donald himself, see Letter I, Note 17, Letter II, Note 21, and notes to later letters.

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6 The notion that Sophy might go to live with the Struan Robertsons may have been an economy measure or because of her close friendship with Frances. It is evident that Sophy had a deep dislike of George; that did not stop her from getting a new frock for attending his wedding in April 1839, which she thought perfectly good enough to wear again when she was reluctantly a bridesmaid at Clementina Irvine's wedding later that year. See Letter VI.

7 It is hard to say which Menzies family this was, of which neither Sophy nor Miss Learmonth was fond, and how it was that "Lady Strowan" came to be Sophy's informant. Miss Learmonth's approval of the Struan family is obvious from her readiness to approve of Franky as Sophy's companion and chaperone.

8 Sophy's enquiries about those who were evidently servants at Derculich carries a very mild implied rebuke. In a postscript to Letter V she again enquires about Kitty as one of what she calls "the down stairs folks". As is often the case with the only daughters of elderly upper class parents, Sophy may have got to know the female servants at Derculich better than her mother and her childless aunt ever did, and to have grown very attached to them.

From SOPHY ROBERTSON 25 Apr 1839 To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich.
25 Royal Circus Edinburgh April 25th 1839

My dear Mamma

Are you not surprised to see another letter from me after the voluminous epistle which I suppose you received last week? But you know my last packet did not go by post so I feel no compunction in sending this so closely on its heels.

The because however of my writing so soon is Mr Oliphant leaves off his class next week, I shall then have nothing but music & an hour of writing to attend to with Masters, tho' were the matters left to my decision I would find plenty to occupy my time some how or other, but Miss Mary & Granny alias Miss Learmonth keep croak croaking about idleness, waste of time, the pity of paying for staying here & doing nothing but what we could do at home viz read & work & a deal to the same purpose, the McEwans were even more idle than I, but Miss Mary made them take lessons in flower painting from a poor lame lady a Miss Bird, who teaches very well but her terms are the same with Simpson's the drawing master. The Learmonths wished me to begin drawing last quarter but I thought you would not wish it, besides I do not like Chalk heads with cherry lips &c & Simpson's style of landscape is not a pretty one. Now, however, that the composition class is over they have begun again the same story, when I left off French Miss Mary thought & not far wrong that I had asked leave to do so, & told the McEwans & I that we were very lazy, so I just resolved upon writing you at once on the question of painting or no painting. I wish we were rich Mama! then I would get lessons in singing & painting too, but as we are not I shall be content without either if you think it necessary, & pray my own Mama do not think that I am writing & trying to persuade wright (sic) or wrong, as you used sometimes to say I did, I would not have mentioned the subject had not Miss Mary hinted & hinted till in an evil hour I promised to mention to you how idle I would be for two months. Of course should I begin painting I could only learn half a quarter but I know a very little of the art already & certainly painting flowers from nature would be a nice amusement in the country, next best to my favorite Landscapes, since I cannot do them. Miss Mary desires me to say that we all require an elocution master for a few lessons, I agree with her for in truth most of us read horribly, that will not be at all an expensive, though a very useful, class, so I hope I may attend it, it will be more servicable than painting or singing.

I have not mentioned any thing about the Learmonths wishes or my own, to James, for he cannot bear to refuse me any thing, at least he never does so but says I am by no means extravagant (1). By the by, should I learn painting Aunt's kind present will enable me to buy a drawing box with every requisite & leave me some pocket money besides) so that will be no additional expense to you.

Do you know I am quite a heroine now. Miss Morison's aunt died some weeks ago & as her Mama is delicate Margaretta has gone home for a week or two, to be with her so I have a bedroom to myself & sleep alone at last with perfect nonchalance, you cannot think how proud & glad I am of the achievement (2).

On Saturday I am to dine at the Stewart's to meet old Mrs Stewart & Maria Menzies Culdres & some others (3). Mrs McInroy wishes the Alstons & I to take tea there to-night but I cannot go, bother our rules (4).

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The Learmonths are very kind, but sometimes they become so cross for a while that we all begin to fear that they are becoming downright school- mistresses, however it is very ill-natured in me to say so for they have been so kind to me; besides poor bodies they have all been very poorly. Miss Mary, knowing what I am writing about, has let me write in school hours but I must make haste.

O pray now Mama do write very soon. This day fortnight is the fast day but of course I remain at home during the Sacrament holidays. Miss Learmonth is to ask Mrs McFarlane (5) to take me to her seat on Sunday & I shall attend with her, for none of the girls here have communicated.

Now my dear dear Mama remember to write. Give my best love to dear Aunt &c &c. Believe me ever your truly affect Sophy Jane

PS I am ashamed to send this scrawl, it is as like Aunt Helen's as two pins (6).

NOTES 1 This sentence adds to the picture which is already emerging of Sophy's amused and slightly patronising relationship with her lawyer cousin James; see Letter II, Note 11, and Letter III, Note 1.

2 If, as seems possible, this was the first time in her life, rather than just at 25 Royal Circus, that Sophy had slept in a bedroom on her own, it is worthy of notice.

3 Maria Menzies was the elder daughter of Steuart Menzies of Culdares; her mother was a daughter of Stewart of Fasnacloich, co.Argyll. Old Mrs Stewart may therefore have been the maternal grandmother of Maria Menzies. The Culdares family had complicated and more or less close connexions with the Menzies family of Chesthill and with various branches of Robertsons and Stewarts.

4 Mrs McInroy was probably the widow of James McInroy of Lude, formerly an estate owned and occupied for many years by members of the oldest branch of the Robertson clan and situated next door to the estate of the Duke of Atholl's home at Blair Castle. In the 1820s, when General William Robertson faced financial ruin after a series of legal disputes with the Duke, he sold Lude to James McInroy, a local man who had made a fortune in the West Indies. For the Alstons see Letter II, Note 14.

5 I do not know who Mrs McFarlane was.

6 Sophy's remark about Aunt Helen's bad handwriting may have been as much a matter of playing on her mother's feelings about her sisters-in-law at Kindrochet as of apologizing for her own scrawl.

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Edinburgh 24 May 1839 To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmarked: 'MAY C 25 A 1839'. Price: '8' + 'Add '. Seal: Red wax hexagon enclosing unidentifiable object. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet Derculich Dunkeld'. Annotations: none.

25 Royal Circus Edinburgh May 24th 1839 My dear Mama My journal makes such very slow progress that I have resolved to interline by sending a letter post, particularly as I perceive that there is no hope of receiving a letter from home except in answer to mine, dear Mama you are in very truth & deed a fashionable correspondent.

As for news I may just say I am well, I hope you are well, so we are all well together; for really there is nothing else of any interest within my ken. But what am I thinking of nothing new indeed, when we heard tidings no longer ago than yesterday that Charlotte Dick was to be married on the 3rd April the same day as Mary Menzies to Capt'n Campbell, brother to Campbell of Inverneil nr Inverary. Her family, & what is of more consequence herself is very much pleased with the husband gained within three months of Charry's arrival in India. I think Calcutta still seems a good mart for single ladies (1).

So Charles McDiarmid has prevailed on Miss Irvine to become his compagnon de voyage, the better for him, but very much the worse for her friends, I for one will miss her very much (2). I suppose Missie's marriage is no secret in the Strath (indeed what is but if it is not generally known please dont tell for I heard the news in confidence.

I hope you have wished the Queen many happy returns of her natal day. It was celebrated in a very so manner yesterday, tho' this is the real birthday, I believe the reason was that a Drawing room can never be held on Friday.

The Bells are in town, I dined there on Saturday, poor Jamie has been very ill, but Dr Ross thinks his last attack has been rather beneficial than otherwise, as it seems to have shaken off an illness which has been

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hanging about the child for some time. He now looks much better, much more sensible, than ever he did. The Bells intend going to Glasgow the end of this month (3).

Dearest Mama I have taken no notice of your letter, your very very welcome & longed for letter, because I have answered it in full in my journal, which I have much pleasure in continuing, since it is capable of affording any pleasure to you & my dear dear Aunt. How is Aunt? Oh! I trust she is better & I do hope she takes some little care of herself.

I have been as busy as a bee this quarter. My half-quarter of painting & singing will be about one quarter of Drawing (in expense I mean) between them. It is a desperate business to procure an account in this house, Miss Bird got my paint-box, & Miss Mary says as the account has not come in, it will be better to let James settle that matter when he pays other accounts, so I have (to be even with her) taken summer dresses into my own hands and pay for them on the spot. I wish I knew if my pink muslin is let downable, as if it is I shall get one fewer. As for nightgowns & indeed slips, I shall return to you in rags or next thing to it. I have got a by no means expensive straw bonnet & have trimmed it myself. That is my best bonnet, my old one is a capital send & the white silk shall be dyed if worth it, which I think it is, & will do for a while before winter cleeding (sic) commences. I have got Lyle thread gloves for 6d & d o mits 4, they are capital things for the garden &c. Work I have little or no time for, I have just finished a collar. When you write to my dear Kindrochet Aunts please tell them that I would have written by Sandy Cameron's wife but she was off ere I knew of it (4).

I cannot close my letter without thanking you Oh! how gratefully about that toad Alie Stewart, but poor soul he has offended me in no way since I came here, Oh dear no, my dislike to him is all of Genuine Strath Tay growth. Clemy is off, as well for her, she made no figure here tho' well enough at her home but shame on me for she was very kind to me (5). I am going to dine with the Strowans to-morrow & I am happy to have at last been able to accept one of the Dallas' many invitations to take tea with them.

My own Mama is it possible that I shall see you in five or six weeks Oh the joy of meeting all at home again. Frances says I must stay at least a week with them before leaving Edinburgh & I daresay one week will be necessary to get calls made &c &c after getting out of my cage. What say you? We have got a new Miss Learmonth fresh from London so now we have four guardians to watch over us most terrible to relate but Miss Eliza is a very nice person.

Now Mama I really must conclude I fear my character for improvement in writing will be lost by this epistle. Give my dearest Aunt my very best of love. Love also to Uncle, compts to Mr R. Love to the Edras &c &c. The old cry write soon soon to your own Sophy Jane.

How are the down stairs folks? Kitty (6) PS in a corner I sealed my letter wrong & was obliged to open & reseal it which accounts for the untidy impression.

NOTES 1 Charlotte Susan, daughter of Abercromby Dick, married in Calcutta in 1839, as his first wife, Archibald Lorne Campbell, by whom she had a son and two daughters. Her husband, who later became a Major General and died in 1883, had been born in the East Indies, fourth son of Duncan Campbell of Inverneill 1771-1840, a Judge in the service of the East India Company, and his wife Elizabeth Cooper, of Gravesend, Kent, whom he married in Calcutta in 1798.

It is of interest to note that Sophy was quite clear about the possibilities of going out to India in what used to be called 'the fishing fleet' in search of a suitable husband. The use of the word 'mart' is a tribute to Sophy's realism and sense of humour. Clementina Stewart, Glencripesdale, seems later to have embarked on the same enterprise according to the final paragraph of Letter XI.

2 Charles Alexander McDiarmid MD, who was soon to emigrate to Australia, married Clementina Anne Stewart Irvine in July 1839; she died on the voyage on 24th January 1840. Sophy's first inkling of this impending marriage may have been that mentioned in Letter II, Note 15.

3 These Bells are probably those mentioned in Letter I, Note 9.

4 I do not know who Sandy Cameron was; the nameless reference to his wife somehow suggests that he may have been a Kindrochet tenant or neighbour, perhaps a local farmer.

5 The Glencripesdales visit to Edinburgh was not as troublesome as Sophy feared; see Letter III, Note 2. Seeing them away from their home ground in Strath Tay seems to have made Sophy feel so very much their sophisticated social superior that she could afford to be charitable about them.

6 See Letter III, Note 8.

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From SOPHY ROBERTSON Edinburgh 4 Jun 1839 T SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmarked: 'JUN 5 F 1839'. Price: '8' + 'Add '. Seal: Red wax small hexagon enclosing a shield bearing the initial 'S'. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet Derculich Dunkeld'. Annotations: none.
25 Royal Circus Edinburgh June 4th 1839 My dearest Mama

You will think my letters never ending, but probably you are already aware of the subject of this.

I received a very very kind letter from my dear Miss Irvine yesterday, announcing her marriage at last & inviting me to be her bridesmaid. It was an old Kindrochet promise which I never expected her to remember, but she expresses a very particular wish to have me & I am sure I shall be delighted to go if you have no objections. The misfortune is Clementina says the day, tho' not quite fixed, will probably be before the end of this month, so going North in time will not only deprive me of nearly a week's lessons but will prevent me from paying a short visit to the Strowans. However when her wedding's in the case I would gladly let all other things give place (1).

To be sure I shall be sorry not to see more of the Strowans & I wonder that Clementina has not invited Frances to her bridal but I don't think she intends doing so, for she has charged me to announce the event to the Strowans & to them alone. Missie says she was to write to you immediately & I trust dearest Mama that you will let me hear from you in double quick time as I wish much to let Clementina know what my plans are, for she says she will not ask any bridesmaid till she hears from me.

By the by, that Crook in my lot Glencrispisdale (2) is to be bridegroom's man, how horrid, but even that I would put up with rather than not see Miss Irvine 'ere she goes to Australia, for it is by no means improbable that we may never meet again, as neither she nor I are the most robust people in the world (3).

As the time for going home draws near my impatience to see you all increases ten-fold, can it be that in five weeks at farthest I shall see my own Mama, Aunt &c &c.

I should like to make some little present to Miss Irvine, whether I be her bridesmaid or not, do you think I should work a white satin bag in cheinille (sic), or net one of those little Devil purses, white with silver pins & ring which would cost 3 shillings, no very costly gift, but every Lady need not know the price.

In your letter tell me how I am to address Missie, as Clementina which I never called her or Miss Irvine. I am afraid she will long for an answer to her epistle but being at Mrs Duncan Stewart's I only received it yesterday, hers is dated Friday May 31st. I am so taken up about this marriage that I cannot write about any thing else with any pleasure. She was always such a favorite of yours & of my dear dear Father's as well as of my own, that I am as interested in her welfare as though she were (what she never never never will be) my cousin (4).

Mrs Stewart had a letter from the Craig yesterday containing a very kind & pressing invitation for me to visit them in August before which it is hoped every thing will be well over (5). Mrs Stewart sets off on Friday, for Eliza has a kind of presentiment that she will be confined on Sunday which is generally her day of fate. Tina & I went to Newington last night or yesterday evening, poor Mrs Izzet was confined to her room with influenza but she is recovering & Miss Shepherd hopes will be well very soon.

I fear this is too late for this day's post but surely you will have it on Thursday, then if you write on Friday I shall have your letter I think by nine on Saturday then if I write to Missie on Saturday she will have time in case of my declining her invite to provide herself with another damsel equally or nearly so capable of drawing the snow white glove off her lily hand. If I were once across the Ferry I would not mind going to Perth alone if someone was ready to meet me there & I would prefer going all my journey in one day to staying a night in Perth but those things are secondary considerations. If I do go I shan't get any new frock, the one which was worn only at my chief's nuptials may surely do, after it is washed, for anyone who cannot boast the longevity of our clan (6).

Now goodbye dearest Mama I shall be in a perfect fever till I have your answer & indeed my head aches enough at this present moment tho' not from anxiety.

My very best love to dear Aunt & all, my own Mama, your ever affection ate Sophy Jane

NOTES 1. Clementina Irvine, aged 31, married Charles MacDiarmid, aged 27, at the parish church of Moulin on 11 July 1839. As there is no known description of the wedding, by Sophy or anyone else, we do not know if

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Sophy acted as bridesmaid. As will be seen, Sophy refers to the bride as 'Clementina', as 'Miss Irvine' and (most commonly) as 'Missie'. This last may have been a nickname in general use. But Sophy was strangely worried about how to address her, as appears later in this letter.

2 There were a number of good reasons for the choice of Alexander Stewart of Glencrisdale to act as the bridegroom's principal supporter, not least the fact that they were first cousins.

3 This premonition was justified. Clementina Irvine or McDiarmid was dead less than a year later; see Letter V, Note 2. There is no known medical evidence for Sophy's contention that neither she nor Clementina were "the most robust people in the world"; but Sophy herself died young (see Note 4 below).

4 This claim that Clementina would "never never never" be her "cousin" may possibly suggest that Sophy already had very mixed feelings, the existence of which she did not wish to acknowledge, about Clementina's 33 year old widowed brother, Alexander Robertson Irvine, Minister of Foss. She did perhaps protest too much, for she became his second wife in 1844 after he had become Minister of the United Parish of Strowan and Blair Atholl; it was there that she bore him six children and there that she died in 1856, at the age of 35.

5 Mrs Stewart, who has already been mentioned in earlier letters, was the widow of Duncan Stewart, a cousin of Sophy's father and a lawyer in Edinburgh who drew up the 1816 Contract of Marriage between Sophy's father and mother. He died in or about 1831. Mrs Stewart was now expected to go to Craig, near Alyth, in order to be present at the birth of her daughter Eliza's child. See also Letter II, Note 6 and see Letter VII, which was written by Sophy when she was visiting them at Craig, the property of Mrs Stewart's son-in-law John McNicoll.

6 The phrase "my chief's nuptials" refers to the marriage, on 3 April 1839, of George Duncan Robertson, son of General and Mrs Robertson of Struan, to Mary Stuart, daughter of Major Archibald Menzies, of Avondale, co.Stirling, 42nd Highlanders. See also Letter III, Note 6.

My dear dear Mama. I have received your letter, & as the family here (1) are so kindly anxious to amuse me as to visit all the Shew places in the neighbourhood while I am here, we are going to fish at Loch Linrathen to-day, so I have but a few minutes to write. Many thanks to you & dear Aunt for your kindness in letting me have the choice of going to Sir Robert's ball. But dear Mama I think, & by your manner of writing I suspect you think, that when the question of duty to friends or the pleasures of a ball arises it would be paying my dear Athole & its inhabitants a poor compliment not to prefer them. So with your approbation dear Mama I give up the Ball. If you positively wished me to go you could send the gig notwithstanding & I would meet it & go to Derculich, but I do not think, indeed I am sure, that I would not enjoy a Ball at Weem very much now (2). So if you can convey word to my Aunts to meet me at Blair on Saturday good & well; if not, I can remain with Mrs Fenwick (3), if nothing better offers itself. Mrs Stewart desires me to send her best love, she hopes to see you in Edinburgh. We are to have a little dance to-night, among ourselves, by way of house-heating to a new business room built by Mr McNicoll. The Ramsays (4) are uncommonly fine boys. I have no time for any more, for Tina is calling haste. With best love to all, ever ever ever your own Sophy Jane.

Write to me at Kindrochet if you have time & opportunity. SR

NOTES Version Number One

1 There is enough evidence in this letter to suggest that the Craig "family", as Sophy calls it, was a party of about ten people, if not more. It probably consisted of John McNicoll and his wife Eliza, with at least one child; Eliza's mother and sister, Mrs Duncan Stewart and Tina; and two or more Ramsay boys, who were John McNicoll's nephews, the sons of his sister Mary.

2 Sophy seemed to feel, or pretended to her mother that she felt, that she owed a "duty to friends" among the "inhabitants" of her "dear Athole" which prevailed over "the pleasures of a ball" at Castle Menzies. I suspect that this was a light-hearted way of saying that something lay behind her writing that she "would not enjoy a Ball at Weem very much now", where the word "now" is underlined for emphasis. From what she says, in what was probably her next letter to her mother (see Letter VIII, she may have thought she ought to go straight back to Kindrochet because of the serious illness of Jeanie, whose identity is unknown, or because of

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the presence there of visiting "cockney cousins", as she calls them, whose identities are also unknown. As will also be seen from Letter VIII, she was also at least provisionally committed to a series of engagements at various houses in Athole.

3 For Mrs Fenwick, see Letter VIII, Note 3.

4 The Ramsay boys were probably aged between ten and twenty. If they had been older it seems unlikely that Sophy would have referred to them as "uncommonly fine". In the course of a letter dated Edinburgh, 5 January 1822, James Robertson tells his uncle Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet that "Mrs Ramsay alias Mary McNicoll is in the family way". This was probably her first pregnancy; if it were not it is probable that he would either have said so or, more probably, that he would not have mentioned it. Mrs Ramsay may have been the wife of the Minister of Alyth; in the course of a letter to his uncle written later in the same year, dated Edinburgh, 1 May 1822, James Robertson refers to those attending the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and writes "Mr Ramsay of Alyth is likewise a member Mrs R will not accompany him to Edinburgh", which she would no doubt be reluctant to do if she were still breast feeding a new baby.

It should be remembered that Mrs Ramsay was currently likely to become the sister-in-law of Eliza Stewart, who through her father Duncan Stewart was a cousin of the Robertsons of Kindrochet; see Letter VI, Note 5.

NOTES Version Number Two

1 Sophy addressed this letter to Derculich in Strath Tay because her widowed mother was staying there with her elder sister, Sophy's aunt Jean, and her husband, Alexander Stewart of Derculich. Mrs Robertson spent most of her time there after the death of her husband, Sophy's father, because she would otherwise have had to share Kindrochet with her unmarried Robertson sisters-in-law.

From this letter it seems that the Craig "family", as Sophy calls it, was a party of about ten people, if not more. It probably consisted of John McNicoll and his wife Eliza, with at least one child; Eliza's mother and sister, Mrs Duncan Stewart and Tina; and two or more Ramsay boys, who were John McNicoll's nephews, the sons of his sister Mary.

2 Sophy seemed to feel, or pretended to her mother that she felt, that she owed a "duty to friends" among the "inhabitants" of her "dear Athole" which prevailed over "the pleasures of a ball" at Castle Menzies. I suspect that this was a light-hearted way of saying that something lay behind her writing that she "would not enjoy a Ball at Weem very much now", where the word "now" is underlined for emphasis. From what she says, in what was probably her next letter to her mother, she may have thought she ought to go straight back to Kindrochet because of the serious illness of Jeanie, whose identity is unknown, or because of the presence there of visiting "cockney cousins", as she calls them, whose identities are also unknown. As will also be seen from her next letter, she was also at least provisionally committed to a series of engagements at various houses in Athole.

3 Mrs Fenwick and her husband were almost certainly the proprietors or managers of the hotel in Blair Atholl, where Sophy said that she might spend the night en route for Kindrochet if nothing better could be arranged; in the event the Fenwick's place turned out to be crammed with people. Mr Fenwick was as kind and helpful to Sophy as was his wife, despite what seems to have been some past disagreement involving the supply of hay. But in the end, as shown in the next letter, Sophy decided that she preferred to go up the road in a hired "droshky" and then cross the River Garry to her Aunt and Uncle's place at Milton of Invervack and spend the night there.

4 The Ramsay boys were probably aged between ten and twenty. If they had been older it seems unlikely that Sophy would have referred to them as "uncommonly fine". In the course of a letter dated Edinburgh, 5 January 1822, James Robertson tells his uncle Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet that "Mrs Ramsay alias Mary McNicoll is in the family way". This was probably her first pregnancy; if it were not it is probable that he would either have said so or, more probably, that he would not have mentioned it. Mrs Ramsay may have been the wife of the Minister of Alyth; in the course of a letter to his uncle written later in the same year, dated Edinburgh, 1 May 1822, James Robertson refers to those attending the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and writes "Mr Ramsay of Alyth is likewise a member Mrs R will not accompany him to Edinburgh", which she would no doubt be reluctant to do if she were still breast feeding a new baby.

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It should be remembered that Mrs Ramsay was currently likely to become the sister-in-law of Eliza Stewart, who through her father Duncan Stewart was a cousin of the Robertsons of Kindrochet; see Letter VI, Note 5.

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Kindrochet ?late Summer 1839 To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmark: none. Price: none. Seal: Black wax but no identifiable device. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson of Kindrochet Derculich'. Annotations: none.

Kindrochet Cottage Monday Evening probably August 1839 My dearest Mama

That nasty abominable James, I was in a rage at him at first, however perhaps it is as well as it has happened (1). I was not disappointed because I did not expect to meet him, tho' I do regret it a little now; however Willie is here & Emily came home yesterday in great spirits, for Jeanie is considered much better & out of danger (2). Besides it would not have been very decent in me to have been figuring at the Ball, & poor Jeanie considered dying, as she was at the time I left Craig.

I got on very well with my journey. Tina Stewart (3) accompanied me to Dunkeld and saw me off. I took an outside seat to Balinluig & then got inside to Blair. I was sadly disappointed, & a little frightened, at finding no one to meet me. However Mrs Fenwick was very kind & so was her husband, Malgre the Hay (4). I would not have liked to remain all night for the house was crammed, so I got a Droskie (5) & went to the boat house, then sent back the Droskie & the boat man carried my bag to Milton where I found Aunt & Uncle & Aunt Helen, the others were all at Ranglin & returned thence yesterday, so I just finished my visit to Milton by remaining all night and I have just arrived here & was very much astonished to find Kitty (6) before me.

My Aunts had opened your letter as they did not know when I would come from Milton. I am most thankful to hear that dearest Aunt is so well as to be able to think of going to Kilikrankie, I will if possible meet her there. Till I got your letter Willie & I had decided that I was to send for the poney & he was to ride over with me as he intended going to Strath Tay at any rate. I wonder if Uncle will allow Willie a day's shooting. I will tell him your message when he comes in (he is out with our cockney cousins).

Aunt Bessie took the Lease to the Dominie (7) immediately on Kitty's arrival, he is afraid that he cannot manage it but if he can he will. Aunt Bessie desires me to say that the Masons Wrights wish to put the sink or troughs of water into the kitchen window which she thinks a very bad plan & as the Plumbers will not come for some days she begged of Makylashen ?sicnot to place the trough till she sent to you about it, would it not be better placed in the corner where the shelves used to be?

2ndly Aunt Bessie desires me to say she has got a note from Drummond requesting her to order and directs a sufficient stock of peats to be made for his family; the letter arrived only on Friday. Capt Drummond must really have great skill in country matters, fancy making peats at this season. Aunt Bessie is in a pickle about what to say to him. I suppose you will give him all the peats made & those that remain since last year, for a consideration. If dear Mama you would write by to-morrows post we would get the letter on Wednesday and tell what to say to Drummond.

Willie has just come down from Kindrochet & thinks that the carpenters have bungled the closet he thinks that the cup-closet would be quite sufficient without the other & that the dressing room is entirely thrown away by having the closet in the window according to the present plan. The expense would not have been greater & all purposes would have been answered without sacrificing a room. The only objection they had to fitting up the cup-closet is that it would not be so easy to get the water into it but that is no objection at all, for it is as easy to get it into the one place as to the other, only a few more feet of pipe would be required. However I am afraid it is too late now, as the men have proceeded so far with the work that it would be difficult for them to get matters into a proper train again. If they have done so much without your authority, might not they be compelled to remedy the mistake by putting things to rights in the way you wished? The carpenter says that he had positive orders from Mitchell to take off the door between the Bedroom & the dressing-closet & to plaster it up, & to shorten the door so as to answer the cup closet. I suppose that Glapher's only reason for knocking the two closets into one was the order he received to plaster up the door way & shorten the door. Pray give

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particular & distinct directions in your letter, what you wish done & whether they have proceeded according to your directions.

Willie has dictated all about the closets word for word but I very much question whether we have not made as bungled a matter of it as the men made of the closets (8).

Between you & I, I think it would be much better to leave the closet, as the men have gone on so far that I am sure they will make a fuss about taking down their work again. But Aunt Bessie & Willie were so indignant especially the former that I was obliged to speak of it to you. I shall hope to hear from you on Wednesday positively and tell about the cistern in the kitchen - the closets - & the peats.

I hope to get my frocks ready in time (9) but as yet I have not had time to think of them, for as yet I have not got time to put off my shawl. And to help me in my progress, Willie is laughing and telling stories to Aunt Ann & I am lifting my pen to enjoy a titter.

If dear Aunt finds herself unable or unwilling to come to Killiecrankie I very much fear she will be the worse of it do not let her do so on my account, for Willie is anxious to go with me & if she does come I will meet her, if not perhaps Uncle will send the money on Friday evening which will prevent my attempting to get to Urrard. I suppose if Aunt goes she will call at Urrard so even tho' I cannot get there on Saturday I will take care to be early Monday and get at least a long call made.

I feel no bad effects from my fatigues except that my eyes are hot & sore but I suppose that arises from the wind &c. I am sadly afraid that if Aunt comes to Killiecrankie she will not be able to go to Edinburgh soon. But she knows her own strength best. I will send as many things as I can by Kitty but if I call at Lude, visit the Manse & Urrard &c, I will need most of my frocks, however they will make no difference as they do not require washing. I have no room for more. With many loves to you all from all.

Believe me your own Sophy

PS if you can read this you deserve a premium, forgive it my own own Mama, with all the other faults of your affectionate Sophy.

NOTES 1 Assuming that this was her cousin James Robertson, it is hard to see why she was in a rage except that she may have expected him to see her safely home to Kindrochet. From Sophy's remarks about Jeanie (see next footnote it seems that Sophy did not go to the Ball, which was presumably the Menzies Ball at Weem which forms the main reason for her having written the preceding letter to her mother from Craig.

2 Willie's identity remains uncertain. He may have been a Robertson cousin: he was clearly very much at home at Kindrochet. It is not impossible that he was from Canada, perhaps a son of William Robertson MD, Sophy's uncle. Emily and Jean are not yet identified; in the case of Emily the reference to 'home' suggests that Emily may also have been a Robertson cousin. Something suggests that Jeanie may have been a child related to Emily, who was in 'great spirits' because Jeanie was 'out of danger'. Sophy clearly knew that Jeanie was seriously ill when she left Craig but does not seem to have been deeply concerned, other than for the sake of appearances, if she had attended the Ball when Jeanie was dying.

3 Tina Stewart was the friend with whom Sophy had been staying at Craig and was possibly her cousin, descended not from the Shierglass Stewarts but from the Stewart family of her father's mother, Jean Stewart from the Miln of Blair Athole. In that case she may have been a daughter or granddaughter of Duncan Stewart, writer in in Edinburgh, who prepared the 1816 marriage contract of Duncan Robertson younger of Kindrochet and handled his affairs after the death in the same year of his brother-in-law John Stewart of Shierglass. From what is said towards the end of Sophy's letter of 4 June 1839 it is clear that Tina's sister Eliza was the then pregnant wife of John McNicoll of Craig; the girls' mother Mrs Stewart had by then been summoned to be present at Eliza's confinement. It should be noted that in 1844 John McNicoll was one of the trustees of Sophy's marriage contract which suggests a close and long-lasting relationship.

4 My guess is that the Fenwicks were the proprietors of the hotel in Blair Atholl, where Sophy had said, in her undated letter from Craig, that she might spend the night if nothing better could be arranged; in the event the Fenwick's place turned out to be crammed with people. Mr Fenwick seems to have been as kind to Sophy as his wife was, despite what may have been some past disagreement involving hay. But Sophy decided that she preferred to go up the road and across the river to her Aunt and Uncle's place at Milton of Invervack and spend the night there.

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5 A Droskie, properly 'Droshky', was originally the Russian for a low four-wheeled carriage; in German it was transferred to apply to any small four-wheeled carriage standing or plying for hire, from which it came to apply in English to any four-wheeled hackney cab.

6 'Aunt & Uncle & Aunt Helen' were, in that order, Margaret Robertson (Sophy's father's married sister and her husband Duncan Robertson, tenant of Milton of Invervack (which is on the south bank of the River Garry, about two miles upstream from Blair Atholl and about two miles downstream from Kindrochet. Aunt Helen was one of the three unmarried Robertson aunts, sisters of Sophy's father. Who the others were who were at 'Ranglin' I do not know; they were probably the other two Robertson aunts, Anne and Bessie, probably accompanied by Cousin Willie (supposing that he was a Robertson cousin). Who Kitty was I do not know; from the terms of the reference to her in the last paragraph of this letter it seems possible that she was a servant.

7 The word 'dominie' refers either to a schoolmaster or a minister; in this case it is clear from the reference in the letter of 8 October that in this case it was the minister who seems to have been asked to check or copy or witness or do something to or with a Lease. It may well have been concerned with Captain Drummond and his family, who moved into Kindrochet as tenants not long after this letter was written.

8 Willie's close concern with the alterations to the interior of Kindrochet reinforce the probability that he was a Robertson cousin.

9 From what is said in the following paragraphs it is clear that Sophy was shortly setting out on another round of visits, possibly including a journey to Edinburgh, from which she seems to have returned at the time of her next letter, written at the beginning of September.

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Kindrochet To SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Derculich. Postmark: none. Price: none. Seal: Paper embossed 'GIBSON'; sealed in red wax with the device of an 'S' within a hexagonal 'shield'. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson / of Kindrochet / Derculich'. Annotations: none. Kindrochet Cottage Novber 3rd Sunday 1839 My own dearest Mama

The schoolmaster has just let me know that he is going to Strath Tay to-morrow morning at seven o'clock so, as I am very anxious to hear from you, I hope it is not doing very very wrong to snatch a few minutes from Sunday to beg of you to write me a long epistle by the Dominie.

I hope you received my last letter of the 29th. Your page, with the letter it enclosed, were delivered to me at Blair Inn on the evening of Lord Glenlyon's wedding. I went to the wedding, at least to see the arrival, with Mrs Drummond & the Auchleekses & enjoyed everything very much, I'll tell you all about it when I return.

Aunt Ann is very anxious to accompany me as far as Cluny if she can get a steed. John Milton intends returning to Athole this week before Willie leaves, & if he brings his little pony Aunt Ann can perhaps ride her & I'll take Don. I think I will be more independant by keeping him & riding him home than if I were to send him by the schoolmaster.

I have not had Mrs Irvine's invite but perhaps it will come to-morrow by the bread-cart.

Do you know, dear Mamy I think it would be pleasanter for me to ride over the hill from Cluny than to meet you at Church, it is such a long way to Logirait, & the day might be bad, or something might come in the way. Indeed it is not safe to be restricted to any particular day at this season when the weather is so very uncertain. Besides if John should not come till Saturday Aunt Ann could not go till Monday, so all these things considered (since you leave it to Aunt's & my managing won't it be as well to go on generals, & say the end of this week or early next (which is most probable, as Aunt Helen is amind to put every keepan in the way of my departure.

Willie got a reprieve & is still in the country, he is very useful in the way of riding with me. On Friday Aunt Ann took Willie's mare & I mounted Don & off we set, accompanied by the Mare's master in the capacity of running footman, to pay a farewell visit at Auchleeks & Dalchalloch. Mrs Robertson Alexandria is negotiating at the latter place. I was very sorry to part from the Auchleekses, Bridget & I are to keep up such a correspondence as never was.

The Drummonds leave Kindrochet on Tuesday the 5th, sooner than they intended, but Mrs Drummond's father wishes to see her. I am rather glad they will be gone a few days before me, as I'll get my

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rummage through the west garret &c performed in peace. Do tell me, when the Dominie comes, the things you want out of Kindrochet, the closet &c. I mentioned the matter in my last letter.

Now dear Mama I must conclude. I hope not to be long of seeing you now. Do you know I have a great & very pleasant secret to tell you when we meet but I am forbid to mention it till then, so don't say a word about the matter please, unfortunately it has little of personal interest for you or me, but we'll rejoice in other people's anticipated happiness. Perhaps Cousin James will be in Athole about the end of December, pray don't mention that in case it may not be true.

My Aunts all desire their very best loves, give many loves from me to dear Aunt &c. The Dominie will give you all the news of this part of the world.

No news of Franky, surely she won't come. Do dear Mama make up your mind not to be perfectly shocked by the small quantity of work I have done, for truly I've scarcely been a week at home since I came here.

Any word of Clemy Glencripisdale's Indian excursion? Have the Edras come? Good bye darling
Mama. Your own affecte Sophy Jane
Oh pens pens ye are torment to S R.

From SOPHIA ROBERTSON Gorgie To JAMES ROBERTSON probably in TOBERMORY This letter was written and cross-written on a single sheet of paper measuring 37.75 cm by 22.75 cm. No envelope survives. Gorgie Cottage March 7th 1843 My dear James, I should really feel very penitent at having been so long of writing, were it not that the recollection of your scrimpy three pages, in reply to my long letter, quite lulls my conscience. I was very sorry for your wounded finger, but you must or at least you ought to allow that it would have been only kind in you to have relieved my filial (2) anxiety by sending me accounts of its recovery. As it is vain to hope for more than letters about (it), I should have had you in my debt ere now had it not been for the confusion in which we have kept ourselves for three or four weeks, by our changes about going North (3).

When Donald (4) left town Emily (5) was quite resolved to set off immediately and when Mama in compliance with a request from Aunt Robertson (6), allowed me to stay a fortnight with Caroline (7), my well-beloved cousin thought it utterly impossible that she should remain such a time - however here we both rest very quietly for yet another week, and our "last farewells" have been repeated so often that now no body looks even sentimental when we talk of going.

What is the use of my prating about all this to you tho', when I am sure you have heard of our purposes and delays from Emily, and nothing can be more stupid than a twice told tale. I do not know what news in the world to give you dear James, you know all that is going on in the home circle (66 Gt King Street, Gorgie, London and Albany Street, to wit) (8) and we go little beyond it. Kate (9) and I have been out a little of late. We dined at the McInroys (10), and a few nights ago William (11) accompanied them to the Theatre, the same evening Kate and I dined and then went with the Auchleeks (12) to see Mr and Mrs C Mathews (13) act. Chesthill (14) and one or two other gentlemen were of our party and I now feel if possible more than ever convinced that he and the fair Milly (15) are scarcely friends even, much less lovers, as the chattering part of the community will have it. We were perfectly delighted with the acting, what that old Madame Vestris (16) does to herself I cannot imagine, but she absolutely does not appear thirty, and is a fine-looking and pretty woman. The Auchleeks seem to enjoy their visit to Edinburgh and do not think of returning to the Glen (17) this month.

We spent last night very merrily and I do wish you had been of the party at 66. Mrs McNiel (18) was there with her daughters, four ladies and no gentlemen from the well stocked mansion of Gorgie (19), and our beaux were Willie, Jamie Edra and "the portly Billy Skene" (20) as the Valentine has it. Miss McNiel (21) is certainly a very pretty girl, but I admire our two bonny lassies, Kate and Georgie, much more, they have such beautiful and expressive eyes, and they are the least pleasing parts of Miss Hester's countenance. Jamie and Willie donned their kilts and "gausie and grand they lookit in them" (22), poor old Skene, as Kate calls him, appeared so shabby like beside our Highlanders, and I think he felt it as he sneaked off early. Mrs McNiel is a strange little personage is she not?

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Duncan (23 has just had a note from his Mama, dear Uncle finds the climate of London too damp, he has had two slight attacks of ague and has become so alarmed for a return of the complaint that he insists on returning to Scotland this week, they leave London on Wednesday (24). Aunt and the girls (25 seem to have been enchanted with their trip to the South, they have met with great attention from their old friends The Guards, and indeed from many whom they had known in Canada. Has Donald written any descriptions of the moustachioed heroes he has met at his Uncle's? (26) Some of his portraits from real life are inimitable tho' I don't much admire my favorite red coats being chosen as the subjects. Uncle and Aunt intended coming to Athole immediately on their return, but they will I fear be prevented from doing so for some time as the Campbells Skipness have announced a visit (27). Caroline half expects "The Old Forest Ranger" (28) and his Lady this week, I should like very much to see them, Captain Campbell I think must be a nice agreeable person, albeit a Campbell.

I had a note from dear Mama this morning, she is beginning to lose patience at my long stay, and indeed it is no wonder, but Aunt Milton (29) and she have both been very indulgent. John and Jane (30) were to be at Milton yesterday, and Aunt Helen had gone down to be with Aunt, poor Aunt Bessie is confined to her room, or to the house at least, with a cold, and Aunt Anne is waxing wroth at our prolonged absence (31).

Were it not a sin in itself, and a cruel wish to poor Mrs Stewart, we the parishioners of Blair and Strowan, would be sorely tempted to wish the old minister (32) poor man in the land o' the leal, so as to get rid of Athole before he does more mischief.

We have had a number on the sick list here for ten days. First little Jim was not very well and we all heard of it; then Willie and Frank (33) had a turn of it, then Kate and I had colds which appeared on our noses to our great horror, and at the present moment poor Mr Cunynghame is looking wretched and complaining of pain in his side, and Carry and William are in the silent enjoyment of a fit of toothache; heard you ever such a chapter of woe.

I have been in a most unclerkly mood all day and now the children are all in bed, the room quiet, and I begin to feel disposed for a paper crack, but alas I have written, yea crossed all my paper, and must conclude. I must not however forget one piece of Athole news, or rather news of an Athole lady. Tina Alston (your favorite) is to be married to a young and handsome and very good English clergyman whom she met at Leamington (34). Her family are quite pleased with the marriage, and I am very glad the poor girl is likely to have a happy home for herself and her sister, for I daresay Anne will live with her.

But I must say goodnight to my dear and respected God Father. All have gone to bed except Mr Cunynghame, Carry, and William, the former is puffing away at a long pipe and I having a cold already am very nearly suffocated, the latter is asleep in an easy chair, and Carry and I are the only sprightly beings of the party. She unites with me in best love to you my dear James, I hope for a very different letter from the last very soon and Believe me ever to remain your truly affectionate Sophy J S Robertson

PS I had very nearly forgotten to express my great wrath and indignation at the conclusion of your last epistle, well well! see my thanks for the pains I took to save you from the remorse of having broken the good Doctor's heart (35), but no matter, you shall be left to your fate and I am not without hope of seeing you sighing like a furnace at the feet of one of our new cousins ere long, and then see if I will help you, no not a bit of me. SR

Gorgie Cottage was presumably near or in the grounds of Gorgie House, which was demolished many years ago. Gorgie House was probably contemporary with early 17th century Dalry House or with Easter Dalry House, a small 18th century mansion, neither of which was very far from Gorgie. The area is now completely covered with 19th and 20th century housing estates. It was less than 2 miles south-west of the west end of Princes Street and therefore within easy walking distance of the centre of Edinburgh. Although termed a cottage, it was a house large enough to have room for at least six adults and three children, together with servants. Sophy later refers to it, no doubt partly in joke, as "the well stocked mansion of Gorgie" (see Note 19. (2 James was Sophy's unmarried first cousin, her dead father's eldest sister's son; he was a lawyer more than twenty years her senior who had for some years kept a fatherly eye on her welfare. When she makes sympathetic noises about his wounded finger, Sophy seems to think he is making a fuss and shows that she is teasing him by her use of the word "filial", underlined. That word of course refers to the relationship of child to parent; but although James was in fact her Godfather, it seems likely that she was also pulling his leg about

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the age gap between them. The tone of the letter also suggests that at this time they were in regular affectionate correspondence.

(3) This mention of going north must mean that at least some of the party were due to leave Edinburgh and go up to Athole.

(4) Donald Robertson was the elder of James's two younger brothers; the youngest was William. When this letter was written Donald was away in London with his uncle's party there. He was a lawyer in practice at 66 Great King Street in Edinburgh, where James himself had also lived and practised in partnership with W. F. Skene until June 1841, when the firm of Skene and Robertson was dissolved and he was appointed Sheriff Substitute of Ross-shire, then appointed to Tobermory and later, and finally, to Kirkwall.

(5) Emily Robertson was James's younger, unmarried sister. Her determination to go home to Athole when Donald left Edinburgh for London suggests that she may have been needed there and that she did not relish the prospect of remaining any longer at Gorgie with her cousins.

(6) Aunt Robertson was Eliza, the wife of Dr William Robertson.

(7) Caroline Robertson or Cunyngame was the second, or possibly the third, daughter of Uncle William and his wife Eliza. She was baptized Hannah Caroline Robertson but we do not yet know her date of birth. She had an elder sister Eliza, her parents' eldest daughter, who is mentioned in letters written in 1818 and 1821 by Sophy's mother Sophia to her husband Duncan Robertson, sending news from the family in Canada that the girl was severely, perhaps permanently, crippled as a result of an ankle injury. Sophy does not name Eliza as being among the visiting cousins.

In 1830 Caroline married Francis Thurlow Cunyngame, known as Frank. He was born in 1808; she was probably born round about 1810. She was therefore very much one of Sophy's elder female cousins. Many years later, when Frank and Caroline were old, Frank succeeded his nephew, Sir Edward Thurlow Cunyngame, 7th Bart, in 1877 and became Sir Francis Cunyngame, 8th Bart. He died later in the same year, when he was succeeded as 9th Bart by Caroline's eldest surviving son Sir Francis George Thurlow Cunyngame, who is mentioned later in the letter as a child named Frank (see Note 33).

Caroline had visited Scotland at least once since her marriage, probably in 1834; this is mentioned in a letter she wrote from Ottawa in 1836 to her uncle Duncan Robertson of Kindrochet, asking him to be godfather to her newborn eldest daughter Mary Sophia Thurlow Cunyngame. In that letter she says she has heard that "Sophy has improved very much since she went to Elgin" and implies, without much enthusiasm, that a visit to Canada by Sophy had been mooted. At some stage it seems likely that Caroline gave Sophy a work box or sewing basket; in a letter to her mother dated 20 October 1838 from school in Edinburgh Sophy asks for one of her work boxes to be sent to her, preferably "the one Carry gave me".

(8) Referring to the home circle, Sophy's meaning is clear. Even if he was temporarily away in London, Donald was at 66 Great King Street, where he lived and was in practice as a partner with Archy McNeill and W.F. Skene (see Notes 4 and 20. Uncle William was in London with what Sophy later calls "Aunt and the girls"; they may have been based in Albany Street, near Regent's Park.

(9) Kate's identity is uncertain but it seems highly probable that she and Georgie, who was presumably her sister, were two of the Canadian cousins who had not accompanied their parents and sisters on the trip to London. Kate was clearly a member of the Gorgie household, and so was Georgie according to the list of who was at the party at 66 Great King Street (see Note 19); Sophy later reports that she and Kate had recently had colds at the same time. The fact that Kate and Georgie are not mentioned in the last paragraph of the letter as being in the room when Sophy was writing it was presumably because they, and their brother Duncan (see Note 23), had gone to bed.

(10) The McInroys of Lude had by this time become well established in Atholl; about twenty years before the date of this letter they bought Lude from one of the most ancient branches of the Robertsons.

(11) There is no reason for not thinking that William was anyone other than James's youngest brother, William Robertson. Invervack. He seems to have been of the party at Gorgie (see Note 20).

(12) Robert Robertson 1777-1859 was head of the family of Robertson of Auchleeks, which is in Glen Errochty. The Auchleekses, as Sophy calls them, were kinsmen of the Robertsons of Kindrochet; the eldest daughter Bridget Robertson, born in 1819, was one of Sophy's great friends.

(13) "Mr & Mrs C Mathews" is a reference to Charles James Mathews 1803-1878 and his wife (see Note 16. Mathews was the son of the famous comedian and actor Charles Mathews 1776-1835 and became a popular

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actor himself. He started life as an architect who was trained by Pugin and worked for John Nash and as district surveyor at Bow in London and did not take to the stage as a professional until 1835. This visit to Edinburgh in 1843 was during the period following an unsuccessful American tour in 1838 and the unsuccessful management of Covent Garden from 1839 to 1842, but before his success in opening the Lyceum in London in 1847. No wonder Sophy was enthusiastic; the Mathews couple were what would now be called world stars of the top rank.

(14 "Chesthill" was John Stewart-Menzies 1804-1867 of Chesthill and Foss, only son of Joseph Stewart of Foss and Elizabeth Menzies. He was the brother of Margaret Stewart-Menzies. 1st wife of the Revd Alexander Robertson Irvine, then Minister of Foss. Sophy became his 2nd wife in 1844, after he had become Minister of Blair Atholl and Strowan.

(15 "The fair Milly" seems likely to have been of the party which went to the theatre. She may have been Amelia, the second daughter of the Auchleekses, who married Edward Walter Garland in 1844.

(16 In 1843 "Old Madame Vestris" was aged 46. She was Lucia Elizabeth, otherwise Elizabetta, Bartalozzi 1797-1856; in 1835 she married Charles James Mathews (see Note 13. She was the daughter of Gaetano Stefano Bartalozzi 1757-1821, an engraver. Her grandfather was Francesco Bartalozzi 1727-1815, also an engraver, born in Florence, who came to England in 1764. She was a very accomplished actress and, having started her stage career in opera, was considered unrivalled as a stage singer.

(17 Auchleeks is in "the Glen", that is, in Glen Errochty, to the west of, and a few miles up stream from Kindrochet.

(18 If, as seems probable, Mrs McNeill was the wife of Alexander McNeill of Colonsay 1790-1850, she had three daughters - Cecil Anne McNeill, Helen McNeill and Hester Mary McNeill. Alexander McNeill and his wife and two of his daughters, Cecil Anne and Hester Mary, were drowned in a shipwreck in June 1850.

(19 If four ladies, but no gentlemen, went from "the well stocked mansion of Gorgie" to the party at 66 Great King Street on the night of 6 March 1843, it is hard to think who they can have been if they were not Caroline, Sophy, Kate and Georgie; reference to the latter as "our two bonny lassies, Kate and Georgie" surely confirms that they were members of the Gorgie party see Note 8.

(20 It is possible that there were two men named William Robertson at Gorgie (see Note 11, one being James's brother and the other a Canadian cousin mentioned as Willie in an 1822 letter from his father as Sophy's exact contemporary. If he this was he, it is interesting that he had his own kilt. Jamie Edra was James Stewart Robertson, born 1823, son of James Stewart Robertson of Edradynate. Billy Skene was William Forbes Skene W.S. 1809-1892, friend and former partner of James Robertson and now, in 1843, in partnership with Archy McNeill and Donald Robertson at 66 Great King Street; he became clerk of the bills in the court of session and was made historiographer of Scotland in 1881.

(21 There is little doubt that Sophy means "Miss McNeill" to refer to "Miss Hester", as she is called a few lines later. Perhaps Sophy did not realise that Hester was the youngest of the three McNeill girls. She does not give the impression of knowing them at all well.

(22 This phrase sounds as if it may have been a quotation from a popular song or jingle. "Gausie", also spelt "gaucie, gaucy, gawcy and gawsy", was a Scots word meaning portly or jolly.

(23 Duncan was clearly another of the Canadian cousins; he does not seem to have accompanied his parents and sisters to London and did not go to the party at 66 Great King Street.

(24 Dr William Robertson seems to have been susceptible to attacks of ague for many years; he or his wife mentions them frequently in letters from Canada twenty or thirty years earlier.

(25 There is no hint anywhere of the names of the two or more Robertson daughters, sisters of Caroline, who went south to England with their parents.

(26 Donald had obviously joined his uncle and the party in London for a couple of weeks (see Note 4. This seems to have made Emily decide to leave the Edinburgh party and go home (see Note 5).

(27 The Campbells may have been Robert Campbell of Skipness, Kintyre, the 2nd son of Walter Campbell 1741-1816 of Schawfield, Islay, Woodhall, Skipness, Ardrpatrick and other properties. In 1806 Robert Campbell married Eugenia Josephine, daughter of Richard Wynne; they had three sons and one daughter. By 1843 Robert Campbell would have been about 65 years old. He had inherited his father's property at Skipness in 1816. His eldest son and his youngest son ended up as Colonels in the Army. The second son married but died without issue in 1841. It seems probable that the impending visitors were Robert Campbell's eldest son

1838 - Sophia Robertson of Kindrochet to her mother

Walter William Thomas Beaujolais Campbell, born in 1807, and his wife. This surmise is based on a connexion mentioned in one of Dr William Robertson's early letters. Mrs Campbell was Anna Henrietta, daughter of a Lieut-Col. Loring.

A family named Loring is mentioned more than once by William Robertson in his letters home as having been among his friends and close neighbours in Canada.

(28 "The Old Forest Ranger" was presumably a joking name by which Captain Campbell was known; how he fitted in to the Campbells of Skipness, if he did, cannot be worked out. It is possible, of course, that he was the 65 year old Robert Campbell himself.

(29 Aunt Milton was Margaret Robertson, wife of Duncan Robertson, Milton of Invervack. She was, of course, James's mother and Sophy's aunt, her father's eldest sister.

(30 John Robertson was the eldest of the four sons of Duncan Robertson, Milton of Invervack, and his wife Margaret Robertson; James was the second son. John was a farmer at Banchor, Newtonmore. Jane was his wife; they had no children.

(31 Sophy's and James's three Robertson aunts at Kindrochet seem to have been involved, one way or another, in worries about whatever may have been going on at Milton of Invervack. Sophy's words carry a hint of some kind of crisis of which James would already have been aware. Aunt Anne "waxing wroth" at Sophy's failure to return home suggests that Sophy may have been needed or expected to come home to help. It is possible that Duncan Robertson, Milton of Invervack, James's father, was already seriously ill. He died in 1846.

(32 The Revd John Stewart had been Minister of Blair Atholl and Struan for more than twenty years. He died not long after this letter was written. Perhaps there were already more reasons than one for Sophy to wish for the death of the old man. In due course Sophy's future husband, the Revd Alexander Robertson Irvine, succeeded him and Sophy spent the remainder of her life at the Manse at Blair Atholl until she died in 1856 at the age of thirty five.

(33 "Little Jim", whose illness seems to have made him cry loudly, was Caroline's 4th son James Robertson Thurlow Cunynghame (1840-1890. Later in life he probably emigrated to Australia because in 1878 he married Alice Carter of Melbourne, by whom he had one son and two daughters.

"Willie & Frank" were William Cunynghame, born 1833, and Francis George Thurlow Cunynghame, born 1835. They were Caroline's 2nd and 3rd sons. Her first born son, David Thurlow Cunynghame, died at the age of seven months in 1832. Willie died unmarried in 1876 and nothing more is known of him.

Frank, who succeeded his father in 1877 and became Sir Francis Cunynghame 9th Bart, was a Major in the 3rd battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and in the 5th battalion of the Rifle Brigade. He died in 1900, leaving two sons and four daughters. He was succeeded as 10th Bart by his elder son Percy Cunynghame 1867-1941, who was Caroline's grandson and the grandfather of the present 12th Bart.

(34 Tina Alston was most probably a daughter of Major James Alston of Achnard, who married Charlotte Stewart, sister of John Stewart of Urrard, who died in 1818. The suggestion that "the poor girl is likely to have a happy home for herself and her sister" when she married her English clergyman may give some idea of what life was like for the daughters of Alston Stewart of Urrard.

(35 The reference to breaking "the good Doctor's heart" may refer to the disposition of the robust and outspoken Dr John Stewart of Findynate to make judgments about, and interfere in, the private lives of his relations, friends and neighbours, especially as a match maker. Sophy is of course making an affectionate jibe about James's unmarried state and warning him that he may succumb to the charms of one of the Canadian visitors. James did not in fact marry until 1859, three years after Sophy's death.

From SOPHY ROBERTSON Findynate to SOPHIA STEWART or ROBERTSON Kindrochet. Written vertically and horizontally on virtually the whole of both sides of a sheet of paper measuring approximately 23 cm by 18.5 cm and folded three times in order to fit into an envelope bearing a One Penny stamp and Postmarked: 'DUNKELD MY 29 1843'. Seal: red wax (part missing impressed with the device of a miniature Robertson crest within a draped shield. Addressed to: 'Mrs Robertson / of Kindrochet / Blair Athole'. Annotations: none. Findynate Monday Morning 6 o'clock 29 May 1843

1838 - Sophia Robertson of Kindrochet to her mother

My dearest Mama, In the hope of your receiving this to-morrow from or at the roup I have got out of bed to write a few hurried lines, tho' I have so little time that the billêt will "scarcely be worth even a queen's head" (1).

For our journey (2), it was performed very comfortably tho' in the rain, the Guard gave us his plaid and the Driver a great shaggy deer skin coat, and we had two umbrellas, so the showers affected our High Mightinesses very little. Lord Berrodale (3) had been visiting at Urrard and got on the coach at the gate but only as far as Pitlochrie where he and Mr Drummond the Factor from Perth had to post it to Balinluig where we got off and they got on. We got nicely to Logierait, where we found the kind Doctor's gig, boy and pony waiting for us (4). My dear Uncle (5) was very well and quiet all the way, he came inside from Blair to oblige a young lady who had never seen our country before.

Uncle was delighted to see old Findynate. Yesterday the Dr stayed at home with Uncle all the others went to chapel. The gentlemen went to walk and the servant, thinking we were all to chapel together said so to poor Uncle Derculich who called in the forenoon, so he saw no one then, however Miss Hardy desired me to send him and Mrs Robertson down to tea, and down they came (6). Sophia (7) wished to see the Edras (8) and we walked there after dinner, I went to Derculich on my way. Dear Aunt did not know me in the least at first, indeed I'm not sure that she recognized me all the time I stayed, tho after a while she kissed me, and took me with her to the garden. Mrs Young and she get on very well indeed now, and poor little Mrs Young (9) seems quite delighted at it. Dear Aunt looks better than I expected, tho' old, and thinner than when we last were here. Her hair has grown and is smoothed on her forehead, and her dress was nicely put on yesterday, she is much gentler they all say. Mr Stewart asked very anxiously (10) when you were coming, but I had so few minutes to speak to him that I could get nothing said rightly, I am going there to-day and will very likely write tomorrow to tell you whether or not we get Miss Menzies' gig (11). Uncle D thinking it a very nice common thing, the Doctor again abused it as a dridling thing and says the wheels are so low they would not run if there were four inches of snow on the ground. Miss Hardy again says the Doctor may be too particular, for that we won't be using the machine much when there is a depth of snow on the road. So I am at a loss, with the different advisers, however I'll try and go this morning before the sale begins and look at it myself fine judge I am! They think I may get it complete for £6 or £9, so that's not deadly. Sophia is up and I must dress, so goodbye my dearest Mamma. Be sure to write me in a day or two. I wish your peat folks and so on (12) were set agoing and that you could come over while I am here. Dear Sophia desires her best love to every body at Kindrochet.

You have heard of poor Mrs Stewart Kinychan's death (13), I am so distressed none of us went to see her, it is a pity you and Aunt Bessie or one of them couldn't cart it as you once proposed by the West road to see them. (14)

Goodbye for a little while dearest Mama. Give best love to my Aunts. Ever your most affectionate
Sophy J S Robertson

If we (15) get the gig I'll write by the Post to-morrow morning, so that you will have a chance of getting my note before the Manse Carriage is sold. (16) Tell me how you are keeping. I saw Dr Irvine (17) at Pitlochrie and asked him to send you some more of your former pills.

1838 - Sophia Robertson of Kindrochet to her mother