

Memoir  
Of  
Mrs Trail

Christian Robertson

1780

daughter of the reverent Harry Robertson DD and of Anne Forbes was born in the Manse of Kiltearn, on the 30th of December 1780. Her childhood was passed in that charming spot under the Eye of her parents. The mansion lies on the fertile shores of the Firth of Cromarty, in a beautiful district, consisting of well cultivated slopes, interspersed with trees, terminated by a series of wooded hills, and backed by the vast mass of Ben Wives, a mountain ridge of about 4000 feet in height, crowned with perennial wreathes of snow.

1786

When five and a half years old she was invited by Mrs Forbes, the widow of an uncle, to visit Campbelton, where

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she was accompanied by her aunt & her Father.<sup>1</sup> Their route lay through Edinburgh and Glasgow. At the latter city they embarked in a small coasting vessel for Campbelton; but were driven by a storm into Lamlash in Arran, where they were for several days hospitably entertained by the Clergyman of that place.

The striking novelties of Edinburgh and Glasgow seem to have made less impression on her infant mind than the wild features of this picturesque Island; for while she had retained but imperfect recollections of the two great cities, on revisiting Arran in the year 1832, she recognised the scenery around the Bay of Lamlash, and pointed out the situation of the former Manse, which had then disappeared; having been removed some years before to less elevated site.

At the earnest request of Mrs Forbes, Christy was left under her care, and remained at Campbelton until the following year; when her aunt marrying Captain White as a second husband, it was judged best that the young Christy should return to her friends, and she was brought back

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs Forbes must have been the widow of one of the four brothers who died in Barbados - see f9.

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1787

to Ross-shire by her father. In after life she used to amuse her friends by stating, how important a person she appeared, after her travels, in her own eyes, and in those of the junior branches of her family. The little articles of dress furnished by the kindness of her aunt, when under her roof at Campbelton, were objects of envy or of imitation of her sisters and afforded opportunities of obliging them by the loan of her finery. Indeed her disposition, which at this early age was remarkably cheerful and kind, made her a great favourite with every member of her own family; and also with numerous visitors, whom the uncommon hospitality of Dr & Mrs Robertson continually drew to the happy mansion of Kiltearn.

The education of the female branches of this family was entrusted to a Miss Foster, who resided as a governess in the house; but they all owed much to the instruction of Mr Alexander MacGregor, a man

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of taste, learning, and integrity; for whom his pupils ever afterwards retained the affection usually felt towards a kind brother – and who, when he became the Rector of the Academy at Inverness, always spent his holidays at Kiltearn.

1796

Years rolled on – and, as Christy approached womanhood, she was greatly admired for an ingenuous pleasing countenance, and elegant symmetry of form; but above all for most lively and fascinating manners. In the four following years, various suitors for her hand appeared. Besides the numerous guests received at her fathers mansion, she was often on a visit at Novar House, the seat of General Sir Hector Munro; with whose daughter Jane, afterwards the wife of General Sir Ronald Ferguson, she had contracted a strong friendship. She was thus much thrown among a genteel society of strangers; and her manners, naturally elegant,

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acquired an easy polish, rarely seen in a young girl, wholly educated in the country.

Without perfect regularity of features, her countenance had an indescribable charm, from the blended expression of feminine softness, with vivacity and active benevolence – a delicate, but healthy complexion – soft blue eyes – a profusion of light brown, almost flaxen hair – a skin as

smooth and fair as polished Ivory – a well shaped head, admirably joined to the bust by a neck of dazzling whiteness – a rounded symmetrical form, just above the middle size, adapted to graceful flexibility of movement – all united to constitute a meet tenement for a spirit as pure, ingenuous, and affectionate, as ever warmed a female bosom.

1798

In October 1798 Miss Christy Robertson, then in the full bloom of youthful beauty was first seen by her future husband, Mr James Watson, a Lieutenant in the Regiment of the Isles, then quartered at Inverness. They first met at a Ball, during the festivities of the Northern Meeting, in Inverness; at which Miss Robertson

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made her first public appearance. Her elegant dancing and engaging manners attracted general notice and she was led out by Lord Macdonald the Colonel of the Regiment.

Mr Watson was introduced to the young lady by an intimate friend of the family; and early sought an opportunity of seeing her at Kiltarn.

Mr Watson was about ten years her senior – a man not of shewy manners – but of gentle address, of considerable reading, of natural good taste; an excellent musician, of strong good sense, and of sterling worth. His discrimination speedily discovered the excellent qualities of Miss Christy and he was assiduous in his attentions. He soon left the Militia, on receiving, through the recommendation of his friend Mr Miller of Dalwinston, the Management of the Orkney Estates of Lord Dundas.

In the end of the year 1799, Miss Robertson received a formal proposal of marriage from Mr Watson

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by a letter, written from Edinburgh in December. To this Miss Robertson replied on the 25th of December 1799, in a letter delicately feminine and ingenuous; which though it did not positively accept his offer, gave him such encouragement that he persevered in his suit, and was successful.

1800

In April 1800, they were formally engaged, with the full consent of her parents. He appears to have visited Kiltarn, on his way to Orkney.

Her first letter to him in Orkney (the second she appears to have written to Mr Watson) is dated 17th April of that year – and the only other letter, she seems to have addressed to him before marriage, is dated on the 10th of May; when their marriage day was fixed for the ensuing month.

James Watson became the happy husband of Christian Robertson, at Kiltarn, at 6 pm of Friday – 6th of June.

The new married pair remained at Kiltarn until Friday 13th when

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they set out for their future home in Orkney, stopping at the houses of a few friends by the way; and on the 21 of June reached their own house at Crantit, where the bride was received by the venerable mother of Laing the Historian of Scotland & her daughters; her first and to the last her steady friends in that Country.

Next day the new married pair were invited to dine at Mr Laings, and I, then on a visit in Orkney, was invited to meet them. I had been acquainted with Mr Watson from the previous year, and we were rather intimate before his marriage – and was now introduced to the the fair Bride, whose appearance and manners were such as above described.

This party was considered not as a formal party; and to reach the house Mrs Watson made her first entry into Kirkwall, mounted on a spirited horse and attired in a blue riding habit. She had taken an admirable seat on horseback, & managed her steed with grace and address.

f9/1

Few women indeed excelled her, in early life in this exercise.

Mrs Watson speedily became an universal favourite in Orkney, and her society was courted by all the most respectable persons in the county. During my short stay in Orkney that season I had the pleasure of meeting her at several parties, and warmly congratulated my friend on his admirable choice of a wife; but my studies soon recalled me to Edinburgh, and I saw but little of the new married pair, until the following autumn.

In September 1800 Mrs Watson lost her maternal grandmother, Mrs Forbes, who died at an advanced age. That lady had been the parent of six sons & of four daughters, all of whom, except Mrs Robertson of Kiltarn and Mrs MacCulloch of Loth, she survived. Four of her sons lived to man's estate William, the eldest was attorney general of Barbados for a period of 25 years, & died esteemed in 1789. George, James, and Duncan Forbes

f9/2

also died in Barbados. James was killed by a fall from his horse. Alexander and John Forbes died in infancy. One of the sons of Mrs Forbes acquired a considerable estate in Tobago; a portion of which, afterwards devolved on William Robertson, Mrs Watson's eldest brother; but, just at that time, a great crisis in West Indian affairs rendered this legacy of little avail to poor, generous hearted William.

Eliza Robertson the youngest surviving sister of Mrs Watson, was sent to a genteel boarding school at Edinburgh in 1800. Her father and mother, with her sister, Miss Robertson, went in the end of autumn to place their youngest child Hugh Munro Robertson at College. They left Kiltarn on 28th of October 1800, on a Wednesday; and by easy journies reached Aberdeen before the end of the week. After a short stay there, her Father returned to his pastoral duties in Ross-shire; the rest of the party

f10/1

1801

wintered in Aberdeen, where they afterwards were joined by Eliza. During this visit the honorary degree of D. D. was conferred on Mr Robertson by his College.

The letters of Mrs Robertson to Mrs Watson from Aberdeen were numerous; and exhibit the devoted attachment of a fond mother, anxious for the welfare and comfort of a beloved daughter, who was then in a situation the most interesting to the feelings of a parent. Mrs R was very desirous of being with her daughter in her expected accouchement; but as this was found impracticable she wrote her minute and judicious directions, interspersed with those encouragements which are most soothing to an inexperienced matron.

1801

Mrs Watson was delivered of her first born Harry Robertson Watson at Crantit, on the 8th of July 1801.

f10/2

In August if this year, accompanied by a friend, I made an extensive excursion through the Highlands on horseback. In passing through the village of Drummond, Invergordon, on the evening of Sunday 9th, I accidentally met with a party of ladies and gentlemen, in an adjoining lane, and struck with a resemblance between the matron of the party and Mrs Watson, I could not forbear requesting to know if her name was Robertson; at the same time apologizing for this address from a

stranger, by offering, if my conjecture were right, to convey any commands, with which I might be honoured, to her daughter in Orkney. The lady replied that Mrs Watson was indeed her daughter; and that if I and [my] friend would take the trouble to accompany them to Kiltearn, which was close at hand, she would request me to convey a letter and a small package to

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her daughter. We dismounted, walked with the party to the manse, and at door met the worthy Doctor who himself welcomed the travellers, and would not hear of their leaving his house that night. The famed hospitality of Dr Robertson, the engaging smiles of his Lady, and the witching eyes of their youngest daughter Eliza, then just a woman, were too irresistible; and the sturdy resolution of the travellers was soon vanquished. They consented to remain. Little did I then imagine that in this family I was destined to meet with the most faithful of friends – that I was to enjoy the inestimable happiness of becoming a son in law to the worthy couple, who now lavished their disinterested kindness on a stranger.

The evening was closed by a short but very impressive family worship and afterwards by an elegant repast.

At an early breakfast, ?????? were made that the travellers would delay their journey

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for a day or two. This was impossible; and they tore themselves away, after receiving letters and a packet for the friends of the family in Orkney, which were punctually delivered at Crantit, on the evening before the Christening of young Harry Watson – a ceremony at which I was invited to attend.

After the event I became a frequent visitor at Crantit, during my holidays; but I was soon obliged to return to Edinburgh, where I took my degree as M.D. in the following autumn.

1802

In the early summer Mr & Mrs Watson came to Edinburgh where they remained five or six weeks. Mr Watson came up to settle his accounts with the agents of Lord Dundas. During this period I saw but little of them; they were engaged with other friends; and I busy with my ????? studies & preparations

f13/1

for my examinations.

In the end of 1802 I returned to Orkney and renewed my very agreeable intercourse with Mr and Mrs Watson, and soon became an intimate and zealous friend of both.

1803

The late crop had been exceedingly deficient in Orkney and considerable distress was experienced by the poor. To aid the subscriptions which were set on foot to alleviate their misery, I proposed to give a course of Lectures on Chemistry and Natural History. The idea was cordially seconded by the ladies and gentlemen of Kirkwall, and in January of that year I made my first appearance as a Lecturer to a large audience.

Among the most constant and attentive auditors were my friends from Crantit. Neither the badness

f13/2

of the roads, nor the severity of the weather, deterred them from attending twice a week, throughout the winter. Mr Watson readily took up these ?????? though quite new to him; and Mrs Watson became a very apt pupil, readily comprehended the general principles of the science, and estimating their application to explain various phenomena of nature.

On the 22d of July of this year Mrs Watson gave birth to their second son Andrew Watson. On the 3d of August she and her husband had the pleasure of receiving in their house those respected relatives Dr & Mrs Robertson who were hospitably received by all their Orkney friends. After a sojourn of four weeks the worthy couple left Orkney on Monday 29th of August, and reached Kiltarn on the evening of the 31st after a beautiful passage. I had

f13/3

not the satisfaction of seeing my Ross-shire friends at that time – as circumstance had then called me to Edinburgh.

1804

In the commencement of the year I repeated my Lectures for the same reason that caused the first course, the sufferings of the poor; and they were equally successful. Mr & Mrs Watson were again my most attentive auditors; and, as they showed a predilection for the study of chemistry, I repeated the practical part of my course to them at their own house twice a week. Both experimented with

their own hands, and went through a practical course of chemistry; in the course of which Mrs Watson

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a neat and successful experimentalist, on which accounts, when I had resolved on leaving Orkney, I presented my dear friends at Crantit with a small portable chemical apparatus.

During the summer of this year, Mr & Mrs Watson had intended to visit her parents at Kiltearn, but, when the time arrived for leaving Orkney, Mr Watson was detained by the business of his employer; and I was entrusted with the precious charge of escorting his wife and his two children to Ross-shire. A navy cutter, commanded by a friend, Captain Cameron, was at that time on the Orkney station; and that gentleman, who had met with much attention from the family at Crantit, engaged to land the party at Cromarty. They embarked on 23d of June. In the afternoon of Monday, the signal for clearing for action was given, on the approach of a suspicious looking vessel, thro' a dense fog. It proved a false alarm; but the calm fortitude of Mrs Watson,

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while the preparations for removing her & her children to the guard room, the only accommodation below water in this little vessel, was very remarkable.

The party landed at Cromarty, after a tedious pull, during a calm, in the cutters gig, on the 25th June. That night, after sunset, they reached Kiltearn, and were most affectionately received by the family. There they remained till the end of July.

On this occasion I had a full opportunity of estimating the value of the worthy heads of the family at Kiltearn. The Revd Doctor united, with a store of classic lore, the sound divinity of a well educated clergyman of the Scottish church; the warm heart, and somewhat warm temper of a Highland gentleman, with the most unbounded hospitality ad charitable benevolence. He was a remarkably handsome, tall man, of polished manners – and good address, fluent in the the pulpit, and a great favourite with his parishioners. His lady was

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one of the most amiable and delightful beings that were issued from the hands of her creator. A calm, unruffled, serenity of temper, united to the most affectionate disposition, with a ????? soundness of judgement, and discretion – forming a rare but happy union of all that is most valuable and interesting in a female. Although a grandmother, I thought her the most beautiful I had ever seen. Clear dark eyes, a very fine complexion, set off by her own black or dark brown hair, &



regular white teeth, but above all a fascinating smile which played about her mouth when she spoke, prepossessed the beholder in her favour. Her manners were those of a lady; her conversation was that of a person who had cultivated excellent natural talents by reading and

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still more by reflection. She had a predilection for Botany, and had acquired a more than common knowledge of medicine; which was often of essential service to the poor in her vicinity. I often accompanied her on her visits to the sick; and was surprised at the accuracy of her discrimination of the symptoms of disease, and the judiciousness of her prescriptions.

During this visit, I saw how much the family of Kiltarn were beloved and esteemed – and, through them, I had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the principal families in that part of Ross-shire. I also had an opportunity then of becoming acquainted with Mr McGregor of Inverness, and with his pupil Hugh Robertson; the first a learned and able gentleman; the other a warm hearted ingenuous youth. During our stay at Kiltarn, William Robertson, the eldest of Dr Robertson's sons, returned to Scotland

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after a considerable residence in the West Indies, where his constitution had been impaired.

While at Kiltarn, Mrs Watson was much engaged in receiving & returning the visits of the friends of her youth, while her correspondence with a beloved husband was maintained by very affectionate letters. Five of these were found in Mr Watson's possession at his death.

On Sunday 29th of July, as the family returned from church, the boat of Captain Cameron was seen approaching the shore. This gentleman had promised to call about this time, to bring back Mrs Watson to Orkney. Her lovely children, it had been agreed, to leave with her parents; and, after an early dinner, she bade adieu to them & her ????? parents. Embarking with Captain Cameron, we were soon on board his vessel; which lay at Cromarty, and immediately as we entered, was under sail for Orkney, where we are arrived on the afternoon of Tuesday 31st July.

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Not long afterwards a young lady to whom I had been long engaged, returned to Orkney; and Mrs Watson, told how my secret was well known, did all in her power to second my wishes, by bringing us frequently together. But some obstacles of a frivolous nature, raised by the mother of the young lady to her marriage, at that period, rendered the endeavours of my friends at Crantit unavailing;

and the same capricious conduct of the mother finally broke off a match, which had received the approbation of the father of Miss R.

In the course of this and the two preceding winters numerous shipwrecks had occurred on the coast of Orkney. Mr Watson, as Deputy-Admiral of Orkney, wished to put a stop to nefarious collusions, often formed between the masters of such vessels and persons residing in the county. This led him into disputes with one or two captains of wrecked ships and with petty-fogging limbs of the law in Orkney. Everybody allowed that

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his intentions were honourable to him, and advantageous to the underwriters; but the indignation of an honourable mind at attempted rouguery, led him to adopt proceedings, which were injudicious, and occasionally of questionable legality. These involved him in vexatious and protracted legal suits; which were the source of the only unhappiness experienced by his wife, during their union: for a more attached husband, or a more faithful and devoted wife never existed.

Mr Watson had early detected a few false friends among those with whom he daily mingled in society: but a great majority of the principal persons in Orkney were warmly attached to the family at Crantit. Mrs Watson especially was an universal favourite. No party was considered as complete, in which she did not appear; and never did any other individual so completely gain the favours and good will of a whole community, naturally prone to a jealousy of strangers, as did Mrs Watson, during their residence in Orkney.

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1805

I had determined to quit Orkney, and to settle as a physician in England; and finding that Mr & Mrs Watson intended to visit Edinburgh in the spring, we agreed to proceed southward at the same time.

We quitted Orkney on 25th of March, in a fishing smack and were landed at Aberdeen, on the 27th. On this very day our much valued friend Mr McGregor was buried, but his death was then unknown to us. This excellent man had caught a cold some time before, which terminated in a consumption, that proved fatal to him, on 24th of March, much to the sorrow of his friends at Kiltarn. A very feeling letter on this subject, from her mother, was received by Mrs Watson in Edinburgh, shortly afterwards.

The travellers agreed to post by the shore road to Edinburgh. They visited Dunnotar Castle, the stronghold to the Earls Marishall, and were struck with the shattered ruins of the ancient fortress perched on a bold promontory of pudding stone. They visited with patriotic feelings the remains of Arbroath or Aberbrothwick Abbey; in which the nobles

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of Bruce drew up their remarkable remonstrance to the pope against the secret encouragement given to the English Edward by the Holy See; they viewed the commercial bustle of the thriving port of Dundee; they sighed over the grey ruins of St Andrews; saw its antiquities then took the road by Cupar to Falkland. Near Cupar they remarked the ruins of Dairsy Castle, the seat of the ancestors of the Traills of Orkney; the beautiful unfinished palace of Falkland, as a monument of the architectural taste of James V. They thence passed Loch Levin, dropt a tear to the memory of Queen Mary; and reached Edinburgh; where Mr & Mrs Watson took up their abode with their friends Mr & Mrs Shaw; and I betook myself to private lodgings.

After transacting business with the Edinburgh agents of Lord Dundas, Mr Watson went to London, to see his Lordship,

f24/25

and to manage his affairs with the underwriters. About the same time I set off for the west of England, and furnished with strong letters of recommendation from Mrs Watson to her sister Eliza Mrs Sandbach of Liverpool, I finally settled in that town as a physician in the month of April 1805.

During Mr Watson's detention in England, he received twelve letters from his wife, between the 5th of April and the beginning of August; which were remarkable no less for their warmth of affection than for the sound judgement on persons and things which they exhibited. Her prudent advices to him regarding his intercourse with those with whom he had been engaged in law suits on admiralty affairs, and on his deportment towards Lord Dundas, whom malicious persons had endeavoured to prejudice against him, are most excellent, and give a high opinion of both her head and her heart. It is to be regretted that they are so mingled with the overflowings of a heart devoted to her husband and his children, as to render their committal to the

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flames a sacred duty for him to whom she had afterwards confided the custody of those precious relics, with the understanding that they were never to be seen by less partial eyes than his own.

The period of Mrs Watson's accouchement approached. She was therefore obliged to set out for Kiltarn before business permitted Mr Watson to leave London. She got safely to Kiltarn in the end of May, and was confined of a third son, Peter Miller Watson, in the house of her father, on the 15 of June. The confinement was favourable; so that on the 30 of that month she was able to write an account of her recovery to her husband, still detained in England.

During an excursion through the centre of England, I accidentally met my friend Mr Watson at Litchfield. The coach permitted us but a short greeting, during which I learnt, with great satisfaction, that Mr Watson's controversies about admiralty affairs were settled; and that his Principal, Lord Dundas, was so satisfied with his conduct, after preparing his completed accounts, as to grant him a large increase of salary. We parted with mutual good wishes for prosperity & happiness; but were fated never more to meet in this world.

After passing a few days with his wife's relatives in Liverpool, Mr Watson hastened

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to Ross-shire to join his wife, who was much delighted at the success of his protracted stay in London. They all took their departure from Kiltarn about the 21st of July, and soon reached Orkney.

1806

Little remarkable happened this year in Orkney; except that Mr Watson fortified by the approbation of Lord Dundas, and by receiving an agent from the Committee of London Underwriters, was very instrumental in saving wrecked property from plunder. This naturally drew on him the hostility of certain scoundrels whose machinations he defeated, especially as regarded the wrecks of a valuable ship on the island of Burrey [sic], where he was detained for 10 days. While there his wife penned three letters to her husband remarkable for their sound sense; and he appears justly to have set the highest value on her judgement and inviolable attachment.

Mrs Watson was interested in two other events that occurred during this year. The one was the arrival of Mrs W's sister Miss Robertson with her

[Note inserted on f26v]

niece Anne Sandbach at Kiltarn. They had travelled with me from Liverpool by the lakes of Cumberland, Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso, and Lawder to Edinburgh. I saw them across the Forth at Queensferry & then returned to Edinburgh; they arrived in Ross-shire in August.

The second event was the decease of their kind old friend Sir Hector Munro, the hero of Bunas, and conqueror of Sujah Dowla. He died on the 17th December of that year.

f28/1

1807

In the beginning of this year Mrs Watsons health suffered so much as greatly to alarm her devoted friend the Revd Robert Yule, who wrote in great anxiety on her account to entreat me to consider well her ease, and to order from Edinburgh the proper medicines: a request which from such a quarter, and in such a case, was immediately complied with.

It was also during that winter that a large Dutch frigate was wrecked on the island of Sandey. Plunder was here attempted, even by those in the station of gentlemen. Mr Watson was immediately on the spot, and checked those scandalous proceedings. His activity in this duty was so distasteful to a certain officer of the army, who had mixed himself up with this affair, without any shadow of right to interfere, that he thought to frighten Mr Watson from discharging his duty by a challenge; which Watson very properly put into the hands of his attorney; and it cost the gallant officer something in purse & more in reputation. This fracas had an unfavourable effect on Mrs Watsons delicate health;

f28/2

and she was now approaching her fourth accouchement. On the 15th of May William Robertson Watson was born at Crantit; and the Mother had a slow recovery, which increased the anxiety of her friends; but a naturally vigorous constitution finally overturned the crisis though she remained more delicate than usual during the succeeding weeks.

1808

In the summer of this year it was judged advisable that she should try the influence of her native air for the restoration of her health. She accordingly left Orkney in an open pleasure boat on the 4th of July, accompanied by her four children; and after a beautiful passage landed on the night of the 6th at Kiltarn.

A residence of two months in the place of her nativity completely restored her health and strength; but the difficulty of finding any means of returning to Orkney detained her at Kiltarn until the beginning of October. During this long period of separation from her husband she wrote him 18 letters, all showing the goodness of her understanding. She was now to have the additional

trial of parting with her first born Harry; who was sent to school at Inverness, but was to reside with the family of a most

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kind & judicious friend, Mr John Young, a bookseller & enterprising mercantile man in that Town. This separation took place before Mrs Watson left Ross-shire – Harry, a manly little fellow, was soon reconciled to the change; and was far less affected than his mother, when she finally parted with him at Inverness.

Her last letter from Kiltarn to Mr Watson was dated October 2d 1808. She left Kiltarn in the night of Thursday, the 6th, her father accompanied her to Cromarty; whence at midnight, she embarked in a small coasting sloop, with Peter and Andrew (William being left with his grandmother) and was landed on the evening of Friday the 7th, just in time to escape a tremendous storm; which might have been fatal to their frail bark.

The happy meeting with her husband was soon fated to be clouded with misfortune. Exposure to cold in the discharge of his various duties, in the month of December, produced a fatal influence on lungs, which had once suffered by a long submersion, from which he was recovered with difficulty.

After about a week of severe suffering, Mr Watson breathed his last in her arms, on the 27th of December 1808.

f28

During that week of unutterable agony and suspense, Mrs Watson was never undressed. While sensibility remained, her husband took an affectionate leave of her and their children, recommended them to the protection of her friends, among whom the name of Dr Traill was not forgotten; blessed them repeatedly; forgave his enemies “if he had any”, sunk into a stupor, from which he woke no more.

Mr Watson was buried in the cathedral of Kirkwall on the 31st of December 1808 in the burial place of his friend, the Revd Robert Yule, the senior clergyman of Kirkwall.

1809

This sudden and most unexpected blow deprived Mrs Watson of a most loving husband; and was still more afflicting, as their children were left without any provision for support; and she was then

also pregnant. But the energies the faithful and most affectionate wife, were now directed to the duties of the judicious mother.

Under the guidance of Mr Yule

f31/1

the steady and zealous friend of her late husband, and cheered by the kind solicitude of his excellent wife, Mrs Watson remained in Orkney, to wind up the complicated concerns of Mr Watson.

Her announcement of his death, and of her intention to perform this painful duty, were communicated to Lord Dundas, in a letter admirable for its propriety and feeling. The particulars of the terrible clarity which overwhelmed her were contained in another letter to her mother dated 19th January 1809; in which the anguish of an affectionate heart is depicted with a truth and pathos that have never been surpassed. This letter is no laboured effort to express overwhelming grief – it is the outpouring of a bursting heart, to a beloved & affectionate parent. Few persons have ever excelled her in the ease and grace of ordinary epistolary correspondence – still fewer in the unpremeditated expression of powerful emotion.

f31/2

Extract of a letter to her Mother

Crantit 19 Jany 1809

Thursday

Never before did I feel writing to you, my dear Mother, a painful task – but when I consider how differently I am now situated to what I was when I last addressed you, it almost overpowers me. Oh, my dear mother, how shall I enter on the subject of my affliction – the thought of doing so almost distracts me – I surely am one of the most unfortunate of human beings – to be so early doomed to mourn the loss of a kind indulgent husband, whose affection for me knew no bounds, & who possessed every amiable quality that could endear him to my heart. Our happiness was such as seldom falls to the share of mortals to experience. Had I but reflected, I must have seen it was too complete to last long – Alas, how deplorable is my situation – and how hard my fate. I mean not to offend my God; for his decrees are just, and must

f31/3

be fulfilled. But it is time alone that can mitigate sorrow such as mine. I have one great consolation which is, that I mourn for one whose upright conduct and strict integrity have secured him the good

opinion of all who knew him – above all, I trust he has made a happy change, and he is now enjoying the rewards of a well spent life.

You will naturally be anxious to know all the particulars of his last illness – and I shall endeavour to give you an account of them; tho' from the confused state of my mind it can not be such as I would wish to offer you.

I had scarcely left the room since he was taken ill, and for the last few days was constantly in ??????. On Monday he took my promise that I would not leave him till all was over and hoped that I would do the last offices for him – that as God had hitherto supported me he would not forsake me – and would you believe it mother, I saw him breathe his last

[inserted in f31/2v]

and my hands closed his eyes. What followed I leave you to judge. I can say no more.

The boys are well and happy – poor innocents! Quite unconscious of their inexpressible loss.

Your unfortunate & unhappy, but affectionate daughter

C Watson

f32

In the midst of her sufferings, no small aggravation of her distress arose from the appearance of a bad typhus fever in her household at Crantit. The first care of her friend Mr Yule was to take her and her children to his own house; where she met with every soothing attention until the dangerous malady had subsided, and there was no risk of infection. In the summer, she returned to Crantit, where, on the 11th of July she gave birth to James Watson, her fifth son, whom she usually styled “the child of her affliction” – who was, on account of the melancholy circumstances of his birth, doubly dear to her.

She had also the painful task of performing the duties of hospitality to the successor of her husband as Lord Dundas's Factor; who, with his wife, were utter strangers in Orkney. All this she underwent with a calmness & propriety that astonished her friends.

1810

The Factory accounts were formally made up; Mrs Watson's farm stock and furniture were sold, while she once more became the guest of Mr Yule; after bidding a final adieu to Crantit with a

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mixture of feeling & firmness that even her best friends had scarcely dared to hope. His intercourse with Mrs Watson, at this trying juncture, raised Mr Yule's admiration of this excellent woman to the highest enthusiasm. No fond parent could have laboured more assiduously for the interest of a darling child, than did Mr Yule for the widow and her orphans; and when the time approached that Mrs Watson was to avail herself of the urgent entreaties of her parents, to make their house her future house, the worthy clergyman, though long an invalid, rather than that she should leave Orkney without a proper escort, volunteered his services to conduct her and her children to Kiltarn. The kind offer was gratefully accepted; and they prepared for their short voyage.

Mrs Watson finally quitted Orkney, the scene of much of her happiness, & of her deepest affliction, on the 10th of May 1810; and safely arrived at Kiltarn, on the 12th after a favourable passage.

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It is easy to conceive how different must have been the feelings of Mrs Watson on this and on her former visits to Kiltarn. All that the affection of her parents could do to cheer and comfort her were willingly afford it. But to find herself dependant, even on parental affection, where she had last appeared as the mistress of a comfortable establishment – to know that she had lost the protection of a loving husband, the father of his children – were bitter afflictions. Whatever she felt – she betrayed no selfish complaints. The meeting with her parents & her other children, the assiduous care of her invalid friend, and the prospect of a speedy meeting with her sisters from Liverpool, occupied her mind usefully, and ??? her from dwelling exclusively on her own sufferings.

On the 26th May of this year, Mr & Mrs Sandbach, with their whole family and Miss Robertson, left Liverpool for Scotland. They proceeded first to Glasgow, and then took the road to Ross-shire, where they arrived on the 10th of June. This brought together three strongly attached sisters, who had not all met since they were young ladies, under the paternal roof. Absence had not blinded their natural affection, which had been sustained by frequent correspondence: Mrs Watson's emotions, on this meeting, must have been of a mingled character; yet they were soothing on the whole.

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In the meantime, having learnt from Mrs Sandbach, before her departure from Liverpool, that two of the friends whom I most valued, Mrs Watson and Mr Yule, were to arrive in the month of May at Kiltarn, I had determined to pay them a visit. Mrs S undertook to inform me of their

arrival, and my intention was to surprize them by my unexpected apparition at Kiltarn. On receiving Mrs Sandbach's note, I immediately put this resolution into effect.

Passing by the mail to Edinburgh, and the thence by the coach to Inverness, I rode straight to Kinnairdy, where I had heard that the whole Kiltarn party were assembled at dinner. My probable arrival had been hinted to some of the party, on whom surprize might have produced an unpleasant effect. The company were still at the dinner table, when I alighted from my horse; and on entering the room, was led by Miss B Reid, an esteemed friend, to a chair between Mrs Watson and Mr Yule.

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Our ????? meeting was affecting to us both. Since we had last parted Mrs Watson had lost a devoted husband – I a most valued friend. The change to her had indeed been most afflicting: but our conversation soon assumed the tone sanctioned by long and intimate friendship exulted by esteem. My arrival was greeted by my uncle Mr Yule with a burst of affectionate regard, which a father welcomes a favourite son. My reception by Mrs Robertson and the rest of the party was of that cordial description which I have ever experienced from that amiable family, and their Ross-shire friends.

During a residence of several weeks at Kiltarn, which flew away with unwonted ???ity, I enjoyed many opportunities of conversation with Mrs Watson whom I found calm & resigned, though feelingly alive to her misfortunes, which seemed to have imparted an unwonted charm to her society. But I was not long understanding that what I had at first imagined was merely a feeling of disinterested friendship towards a

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young & interesting woman in distress, had imperceptibly made a transition into Love, – so strong and sincere, that I determined to make an offer of my hand.

From delicacy to Mrs Watson's peculiar situation, I did not personally urge my suit; and I have since learnt, that the only person who was wholly unconscious of her power over me, ere I left Kiltarn, was the amiable being who had captivated my heart. I resolved to make the communication by a letter, which was left with Mr Yule, to be delivered after my departure from Kiltarn.

My uncle, delighted at the prospect of the happiness of the two persons whom (after his own wife) he regarded most, readily undertook the task; and on the evening of the day in which I bade

farewell to Kiltarn, delivered into Mrs Watson's hands the letter, which conveyed the sentiments of respect and affection of the writer.

I had reached Liverpool for some days before I received an answer. It was dated 30th of July

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and expressed with much feeling and delicacy her acceptance of me as a lover – provided I had “sufficiently considered all the disadvantages under which she laboured”. These she fully explained; and she gave me perfect liberty to retract if they were previously unknown, or had not been sufficiently considered. But my attachment to her was no sudden caprice – it was formed on my knowledge of the purity of her character, an intimate acquaintance with her amiable disposition, & good sense, and the full conviction that of all the women with whom I had ever been acquainted, she was the best qualified to secure my happiness – while I had full knowledge of her situation. I was too happy to secure the prize I most valued, not to reject the offered alternative.

From that period we corresponded at first under cover to Mr Yule, and afterwards of Mrs Sandbach, who, with her worthy husband was soon entrusted with our secret. Mrs Sandbach and her family left Kiltarn on the 3rd of October; and immediately after Miss Robertson who remained at home was made privy to our

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engagement.

Mrs Watson remained at Kiltarn until the middle of December when she went to Edinburgh in the hope of obtaining a final settlement of her late husband's accounts with Lord Dundas. Mrs Sandbach had reached Liverpool in the middle of October and Mrs Watson's children were left under the care of her mother – while Miss Robertson superintended their education. The accounts above referred to included Mr Watson's management of the large property of Lord Dundas in Orkney for several years; and were exceedingly complicated, from the nature of the estate consisting of proprietary rents, feu duties as lord superior paid in kind, and the payments to many persons engaged in the manufacture of kelp. The men of business at Edinburgh were surprised at the accuracy & beauty of the accounts until Mr Watson's death; but they required a long and careful examination by regular accountants. This protracted Mrs Watson's absence from Ross-shire much beyond her calculations.

While this examination was pending Mrs Watson paid a visit

[Inserted on f38v]

to the brothers and sister of her late husband at Dumfries. For this purpose she left Edinburgh on the 8th of January, and arrived the same night at Dumfries. She found them, as she was prepared to expect plain but very

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respectable persons. Her very ingenuous & beautiful letter to me, dated the 15, from that town expresses her feelings on this occasion in a manner that if possible [word omitted?] my esteem and admiration. On the 17th she returned to Edinburgh.

Afterwards she accepted an invitation from her cousin Mrs Parker to visit Glasgow, near which that lady resided. There she had passed some days when she was strongly urged by Mrs Sandbach to visit Liverpool. This she at first declined: but the settlement of the account being still delayed, and Mr Sandbach having been brought to Glasgow by business, she accompanied her brother in law on his return to England, and arrived in Liverpool by the mail, at two in the morning of the 15th of February when she was [met] by her sister and her ????? lover.

We now met under circumstances totally different from what we had ever done before; & daily & familiar intercourse merely served to ???? more strongly my enthusiastic attachment.

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On Saturday, the 6th of April Mrs Watson left Liverpool by the mail – and was overtaken by a snowstorm, before she reached Edinburgh. At that time the Edinburgh Mail always stopped 4 or 5 hours at Carlisle. This allowed her to call on a young lady, Miss Faulder; with whom she afterwards became most intimate. On the morning of the eighth she arrived in safety at Edinburgh, and immediately relieved her friends in Liverpool by a few lines, written at 6 in the morning (while breakfast was preparing) after two successive nights in the mail.

On Saturday the 13th of April, Mrs Watson obtained a final settlement of the accounts of her late husband, and a full release: but contrary to what Mr Handyside, Lord Dundas's law agent in Edinburgh had a led her to expect, his Lordship refused to make her any allowance for extra expenses, and extra trouble, in making up the complicated and laborious accounts of his Orkney property, since Mr Watson's death. To this both his law agents thought her fairly entitled. In her feeling and desponding letter, written just after signing & receiving the mutual release, she states, that after settling all the claims

f42

against her late husband she would be left almost penniless. In reply I instantly wrote offering my purse & credit to settle immediately every claim: but it was unnecessary; for the sale of her farming stock & furniture in Orkney, and the small remains of a legacy bequeathed to her several years before by her paternal uncle Mr George Robertson of Demerary were sufficient to liquidate all demands, and left her sufficient for her immediate occasions. Yet her disappointment was considerable – she had hoped to have brought as much at least as we would have partly furnished a new house in Liverpool. To me it was immaterial – she was just as welcome to me as if she had brought the largest dowry.

During this whole period the only parties who knew of our engagement were Mr Yule, Mr and Mrs Sandbach, and Miss Robertson. Hitherto there had been obvious reasons for keeping our engagement concealed; and neither of us

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were ambitious of becoming the subject of idle gossip.

On the 25th of April Mrs Watson bade adieu to her kind friends in Edinburgh, where she had received much attention from various persons who had often shared the hospitality of Crantit, and from numerous other friends in Edinburgh. During this visit, her home had been the house of an excellent Ross-shire lady, the widow of Colonel Sutherland. She travelled north by the Inverness coach. Her fellow passengers were her cousin Harry Rainy, now Professor Rainy of Glasgow, Sir George Mackenzie of Coull, and two ladies. The party was agreeable but the axle of the coach broke between Pitmain and Aviemore; Mrs W, Sir George & Mr Rainy, after walking a considerable distance procured a chaise, which brought them to Inverness in the evening of the 27th.

She remained all next day, with her son Harry, at Mr Young's; and on the 29th she arrived at Kiltarn, in her father's gig, which had been sent forward to meet her at Conan-ferry. On reaching home, the first news she learnt was that

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the scarlet fever had attacked one of her children in a mild form. The other two took it in succession: but all went through the disease well. On the appearance of this formidable disease last year in Easter Ross, I had at her desire written out particular directions how to treat its more

ordinary forms, and particularly how to use Gargles, and the cold effusion. The directions were implicitly obeyed –; and appeared to mitigate the symptoms.

On the 3d of May, the receipt of a letter from me gave Mrs Watson an opportunity of communicating to her fond parents the engagement which she had made. They were pleased highly to approve the step we had taken. Mrs R, with whom I was always a favourite said, “she believed heaven had preserved him unengaged to be a protector and a blessing to my beloved daughter” and with warmth of his heart, Dr Robertson insisted on “taking charge of all her children while he lived”: This of course could not be: the “child of her affliction” I insisted should not be separated from his mother. It was

f45

finally arranged that Harry should continue at Inverness Academy, with his kind friend Mr Young, & the three next in age should, for a time, remain with Dr Robertson.

Soon after Mrs Robertson, who had suffered from rheumatism through the winter, after a partial relief, became intolerably indisposed. It now evidently assumed the severest form of rheumatic gout, and much of Mrs Watson’s close correspondence with me was occupied with the case of this most excellent, most beloved parent. The agony of her sufferings was terrible, and caused the distortion of hands, which, last year, were uncommonly beautiful. By the employment of frequent warm baths, doses of L’Eau Medicinale D’Husson, and afterwards of the arsenical solution, Mrs Robertson was gradually relieved; and, before the beginning of July, was again able to move about.

An uninterrupted correspondence was carried on between us during our separation: but letters, to avoid the curiosity of a country post office, were addressed to and by Mrs Sandbach. My aunt, Mrs Yule, was greatly delighted to learn, that the happiness of her

f46

nephew, to whom, from early infancy, she acted the part of a mother, was to be secured by her union with one, whom she had long regarded as the best and most amiable of women. The parties themselves were much gratified by the approbation of all their most valued friends.

In the month of June I had given directions for preparing a marriage settlement, securing to my future wife, all I had to bestow. By this she was to have, in the event of my death, a life rent of my patrimonial estate in Orkney, then valued at £500 or £600 a year, and the entire property of my moveables, with remainders to her children by Mr Watson, provided that we had no children. In

case of her death, I bound myself for the maintenance and education of her children till they were 18 years of age. Those terms were unknown to her or her friends, until the completed deeds were sent for the signature of the parties; and were most gratifying to her feelings – as

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she testified in a letter written to me on the 8th of July, the day when the Deed & her Infetment on the Estate of Tirlot came into her possession.

Our marriage day had been fixed for the 29th of July; but, at my entreaties, it was changed to the 27th, and finally to the 26 of the month, by a letter received in the house of my excellent friend Mr Samuel Laing, on my arrival in Edinburgh on Monday the 22d of July.

On the following Wednesday I was in my way to Inverness. On the 24 Mrs Watson addressed to me her last letter, which I found in my arrival at Inverness on the evening of the 25th – and I addressed her by that name for the last time the same evening to announce my arrival within 25 miles of her dwelling.

By her special desire I carried Mr Young from Inverness, and Dr Wishart from Dingwall to be witnesses of the ceremony, as friends of her

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family. Dr Wishart was to be groomsman – and Miss Betsy Reid, who had once before officiated in that capacity for her friend, was again to be Bridesmaid.

Mr Young & I met Dr Wishart at Dingwall; where it was arranged that we should dine, and proceed to Kiltarn about 9 o'clock in the evening.

The happy hour so eagerly wished for by the Bridegroom, at last arrived – the chaise stopped at the door of Kiltarn, a hurried greeting was given to the assembled friends, when the bridegroom flew to find his chiefest treasure. The preliminaries were soon arranged – the deeds were duly signed, in the presence of the whole party, and between 8 and 9 o'clock of a glorious, serene summer evening, Dr Robertson gave away his dear daughter, and united me to the woman of my heart, in a short but impressive ceremony. It was the happiest moment of my existence – and after more than thirty years experience of wedded life, I consider it as the most fortunate.

f48/2

The lover or the husband are not considered the most faithful delineators of the character of the object of their affection. We shall therefore here give a sketch of Mrs Traill, drawn by the hand of a master, who was intimately acquainted with her in seasons of joy & sorrow, the Revd Robert Yule.

“Of all the women I have ever known she is the most agreeable and interesting – Imagine all the charms of character, mind, and disposition, united in the highest degree; nay even those of external appearance, though she is not beautiful. Imagine, above all, a manner the most gracefully charming, such is the Enchantress! Her soul, inexpressively active, gives to her features & expression, a delightful and dazzling animation. If her features taken separately be not such as a painter would have chosen; yet, all together, they have such an effect as the pencil of a Titian would in vain attempt to imitate; while her figure and deportment are such, as to communicate to her whole person a most interesting character. She talks with ease and

f48/3

Fluency; and says the best things to the whole company, & teach particular.

Above all, her heart is excellent; her kindness inexhaustible. I have ever found her the sincerest and the best of friends – most active, most steady, most deeply interested in whatever concerned me. Indeed in obliging all who have any claim on her goodness, she exerts the most uniform & unwearied activity – and all with an air so soft & engaging, that you would be tempted to suspect artifice; could artifice have ever assumed that continued and unalterable Equality, which is the distinctive mark of Nature; and the only of her appearances, which art could never imitate. Such is that delightful, that fascinating woman – and such is that delightful manner in which she is able to animate, to embellish, and, as it were, to spread enchantment around her!”