

(family)

The Family Man

When he became an influential journalist Robert frequently exhorted his readers against early marriage, which he considered a curse, indeed one of the main causes of poverty and hardship. The literate who were his public were not really those he should have been targeting, and he did eventually come to see why the very poor, with no hopes of ever bettering themselves, and seeing no point in waiting for good times ahead, should rush into matrimony. Before the days of compulsory education, even very young children could become wage earners, and be an asset in the market place. Generally speaking the poorer you were the earlier you married, and there was logic in the choice.

Robert himself married at twenty seven, a little earlier than he recommended for others, and had twelve children, certainly more than was prudent according to his notions of thrift and saving. From references to wet nurses, and the fact that his wife left very young children in the care of others, it seems that she could not feed any of them. Robert was an advocate of breast feeding; like others he suspected that taints, both physical and mental, were passed on in milk. So it seems that Anne simply could not feed her babies, and this may help to explain the speed with which she became pregnant again.

They met at the beginning of 1829, his first letter to her dated January 27th. Where they met is not mentioned, and their courtship was a little irregular because of their circumstances. Anne was nineteen and an orphan, under the care of an aunt in Edinburgh, but working as a companion to a rich family called Bell where she lived in. Her father had worked for the Customs in Glasgow and she had been well educated, particularly in music, which was her abiding passion. There is no talk of a tocher or dowry, so it seems she had not inherited much if anything; when their own daughters were married large sums of money were handed over with each, and marriage contracts signed to ensure the future safety of the girls. Robert's calculations as to whether he could afford a wife rested entirely on his own earnings, and the aunt who was Anne's guardian expressed some doubts at first. Anne was being courted at the time by an army Captain who might have seemed a better proposition.

It appeared that Anne started the ball rolling by sending Robert some of the appalling poetry this Captain had written, and then visiting him in his shop in Hanover Street for his opinion. From the letters it seems that she went to see him most Saturdays, once as late as ten p.m. which is surprising; an unchaperoned girl allowed such freedom was perhaps unusual, and a reflection of their positions; he long independent, with a widowed mother with whom he stayed in a hotel in St Andrews Street, but who had little control over his affairs; she with only an elderly guardian at hand, living out and not obliged to report her movements. When they decided to marry they hoped for the blessing of their relations, but would have gone ahead without.

Robert's first letter to My Dear Madam at 14, Royal Circus, began "I'm vexed to the last degree that I missed you to-night"; Anne had come uninvited after dark on a January evening, bearing one of the Captain's poems as an excuse. and had then written to him about his shop; "You astonish me by the strange insinuation you hint regarding my dusky and dirty, but innocent back room." Robert complained. Throughout the correspondence he was slightly on the defensive about his background; his mother running a hotel, his poverty in the early days, his father's downfall; evidently feeling himself socially her inferior.

This diffidence was balanced by an unwavering self confidence in his eventual success, a confidence that grew quite quickly but never made him insensitive to the fears and insecurities of others. This first

letter ended "in expectation of your visit on Saturday", and a weekly meeting had to sustain their love affair. Lovers had so few chances of being alone together their frustration must have been extreme; Robert railed against the six empty days between their meetings, but in spite of this was able to declare his love and introduce her to his family within three months.

He is not a great letter writer, and the interest in the correspondence lies in what he tells Anne about his family and young days. On March 13th she was to make her first visit to St Andrews Street; he had been laid up with a sore throat so his brother would call for her at her aunt's and escort her, a little before six, to his "home." "The house to which you will be brought is a hotel. My mother keeps it. She is a widow and a woman of extremely active disposition; she is also of a very independent turn of mind; and she has a family of which only the older half win their own bread...You must therefore my dearest Miss Anne be prepared to feel no surprise in the sort of lodgings in which you find me."

He was plainly more worried about what Anne would think of his family and background, than the reverse. His mother was then fifty one years old, past the age that a respectable lady would be having to make a living, and Robert wanted to insist that she was simply energetic and independent, not particularly needy. His brother William was twenty nine, his sister Margaret twenty four, James twenty two, Janet sixteen and David nine. "William is in every way a good fellow except in one - that from constant application to mere business and seeing little of society in its more familiar aspects, he has acquired a stern intolerance...thus he sometimes... gives offence when his better nature does not intend it." In plain language William was gauche and tactless and unworldly. This brother, with whom his life was to be so intimately and prosperously linked, yet was to cause the only real friction in his personal relationships.

"Margaret my elder sister is a most worthy, sober, unpretending character - possessing I think little genius but estimable in a high degree on account of her high feeling and of her good principles." Margaret was worthy, nice, dull. Anne's brother Alexander Kirkwood provided a husband for her the following year, and after that she made little impact on Robert's life. "James is a clever boy of twenty" (born in 1807 Robert's memory at fault here) but "Janet my younger sister is the dearest of the whole family, the wit, the acuteness the comprehensive sense of this girl are astonishing. She also possesses what must in all forms be considered a little better quality, great good temper...I am sure if Janet had been born of another family (sic) and therefore able to push her way in the world, she would have cut a most distinguished figure." Janet in fact did quite well by marrying W.H.Wills, who after he left the assistant editorship of **Chambers Journal**, became editor and confidant of Charles Dickens. Janet later amused Dickens with her mimicry, and is often mentioned in the great man's letters to her husband

The meeting went off well, everyone liked Anne, and this released a torrent of love and longing and they became engaged. On March 30th Robert went to have an interview with "my chief publisher and best friend Tait", the result of which was so cheering that they could marry sooner than planned. Anne, rising twenty, was suddenly wary, and wanted time to think. On April 5th Robert wrote a baffled, almost angry letter; "It seems to me most strange that love in our case or rather I should say in yours, should not lead to matrimony." Can her feelings "have suddenly changed to aversion on my being presented to you in the light of a husband?" he asks, and reminds her darkly "If love is not answered it will exercise itself upon dogs and parrots as we see every day." Beautiful and talented, Anne was unlikely to meet this fate for a good many years, and she must have written back to reassure him, because two days later he apologised: "Pardon, pardon I pray the doubts...with my usual diffidence regarding myself" he was over hasty; he realised all she wanted was time to get to know him better, though when she suggested a year apart he was not enthusiastic.

On April 13th he unburdened himself of the past though "I was just a little afraid that your being made fully aware of the degradation of my youth would alarm you." Nevertheless he felt the need to come clean. "I used to be in great distress for want of fire. I could not afford either that or candle to myself, so I have often sat beside her kitchen fire"- (the Peebles widow) - "if fire it could be called which was only a little heap of embers - reading Horace and conning my dictionary by a light which

required me to hold the books almost close to the grate...Our food was meal...milk and cheese. The whole matter cost us eighteen pence a week each. My father's prospects darkened towards the end of that winter" and he could not pay even the three shillings a week for their board. In fact "My father by a frightful act of imprudence which I cannot disclose to you, lost about fifty pounds which belonged to his employers and was soon after discharged." His mother then opened a tavern, and five years later took the White Horse Inn in the Canongate.

As Anne's side of the correspondence has been lost, these revelations may or may not have upset her; but they did not make any difference to her feelings for him, indeed his next letter answered one of hers expressing anxiety as to whether his mother liked her and what she thought of "our proposed alliance." Robert explained that he and his mother were very close "I was her companion and fellow sufferer for her misfortunes - her servant, her friend...Thus she loves me so much that, as you may easily conceive, the idea of resigning me to any other woman is not agreeable to her." She was also nervous that Anne was used to a grander lifestyle, and would be unable to manage an ordinary household, but Robert could assure her that the "aristocratic house" Anne was at present living in was not what she had been used to. "I feel increased confidence in the probability of our connubial happiness" he declared stiltedly, but in the next paragraph used words that described his lifelong love of her, the gentle, protective tenderness she never ceased to inspire.

"My affection disposes me to press you to my bosom, to my very heart of hearts, to make you part of myself - to guard you from all harm - to strain and struggle for your happiness. I never yet was more anxious for my own interest than I am for yours. You fairly divide the principle of self-love and self-preservation with me. You have a half. Every triumph - every good - every pleasure I can secure in this world, I am disposed to share with you. It will have an additional relish in being participated in by you. Life itself is now more valuable to me than before, since it is enriched with the hope of being spent in your presence and in your behalf."

He went on to explain how he was going to care for her in practical terms. With his shop and with the book he intended to write every summer, he would earn three hundred pounds a year. He was lately offered (or almost) the editorship of the **Caledonian Mercury** but turned it down, though it would be something to fall back on. He had good health, and "two adventurers" such as they were would easily manage. It did not seem to occur to him that there would be many more adventurers joining their household in the next few years, and an interview with her aunt upset him a little; she thought him too young and too insecure. Perhaps she asked him where they were going to live. In the event they started their married life under this aunt's roof in Elder Street, and the following year Robert did accept an editorship, of the **Edinburgh Advertiser**. But three years after their wedding he fulfilled all his promises to Anne by giving her security for the rest of her life.

They were married on December 7th 1829 just a year after they met, a union which lasted till Anne's death in 1863. Until the last few years, when she suffered from some sort of decline, probably alzheimers, they were as happy as two people could be, though weathering the deaths of two children, Robert's breakdown, family feuds and many partings albeit short ones. Anne married a handsome young man, obviously talented, with several books published and a nodding acquaintance with the great Sir Walter. She must have gathered that he was also a workaholic; he had explained in one letter how he had to work at night, needing eight hours of uninterrupted solitude, and this was a pattern that she had to get used to throughout her marriage. Fortunately he needed little sleep, but did eventually drive himself too hard.

Two of her daughters wrote about their parents, and both were loud in their praise of Anne, seeing her as a lovely and intelligent woman, who filled the house with interesting people, Robert's friends as well as her own musical proteges. A memoir describes her as "a charming hostess who possessed the peculiar and finely flattering faculty of drawing out her guests." As well as formal dinners both she and Robert enjoyed cosy suppers of Welsh rarebit or finnan haddock and poached egg, but how they entertained or whoever were their guests music was always an important part of the evening. On one

occasion when a horn player was of the party, there was a scream from a child upstairs; "Oh mama, what are you doing with a cow in the house?"

Anne's daughters did not notice the vagueness and unpunctuality that were something of a trial to Robert, only the enthusiasm and charm. They were fond of their father, teased him gently, enjoyed it when he took them "geologising" on Arthur's seat of a Sunday, and obviously appreciated the many important friends he too brought home. He was certainly not a distant Victorian Papa, but he was very busy and often away. In her memoir his daughter Eliza did not even mention his death. His daughters' memories of him present a preoccupied man, emerging from his study to join the family circle and there to read to them some edifying book. Even sitting out on a summer evening he felt the need to lecture them on the stars.

A letter of the eldest daughter Nina's to Frederick Lehmann before they were married shows that she, at anyrate, found his attitude to the women in his family, rather distant and patronising. It seems that Robert had expressed some doubts about the marriage. "I would not mind this so much if Papa would only speak to me as if I were a rational human being with accompanying intellect like him. He does not admire women with minds I assure you solemnly of this. He would have us all after one pattern, mild, unoffending creatures of property, sitting quite straight in our chairs (he cannot bear to see a woman leaning back in her chair or lounging on a sofa) making a small observation of assent now and then...writing a small delicate female hand and expressing little thoughts in the most strictly proper and polite terms...I am no true woman in his eyes of that I am persuaded. None of us are I fear...I wish I were a toy, a pretty little toy, but then you would not have bought me."

Nina may have been exaggerating out of a passing sense of pique, but her view of her father has to be reconciled with the author of articles claiming that women should have the same rights and education as men; and the attender of seances almost all organised by strident, charismatic ladies of forceful views; and the close friend of the most intelligent and "unwomanly" Harriet Martineau; and the husband of a far from stupid woman who wrote a quite large sloping manly hand and was able to play hostess both to her own and his wide circle of articulate academic friends.

Yet it is possible that he treated his daughters differently; and that his attitude to women generally was ambivalent. In his memoir of Robert's life William printed an article called "The English Girl" in which Robert described a sweet, pretty, silly female as some sort of model of perfection and desirability. It is a cloying piece, read with the sharper eyes of today even distasteful with its sickly sexual undertones. The evidence is flimsy, but produces a slight sense of disquiet, a suspicion that Robert was not free of the Victorian male's often predatory interest in simple childlike women.

Nina herself, though here frustrated by her father, and in the last wistful sentence wishing she could have pleased him, was able to be herself when she married; the friend and confidant of a large circle of both men and women who admired her for all the things that he had apparently dismissed; her wit, her brains, her high spirits. Browning, Wilkie Collins, the Dickens family, Millais were some of the men who reclaimed her as a full human being and not just a pretty doll. That her father had treated her and her sisters in this conventional way is a disappointment, an embarrassment frankly. Without this letter such a shortcoming would never have been revealed.

In his essays for the **Journal** Robert wrote about the Balderstone family, based on his own, and in one first article justified their fecundity, joking that though he was a bit bemused at first at the constant arrival of infants, he became in the end inured. He and Anne were blessed by good health, and she suffered no after effects from her twelve childbirths, no anaemia, no post natal depression, except, rather naturally, at the loss of one of the babies soon after birth. It was important that they were able to afford help; their wet nurse stayed with them throughout all the childrens growing up (though how many of them she fed isn't mentioned, probably only the first) and they had other servants, and a governess. Would they have limited their family if they had not, after the second birth, been catapulted into success and wealth? And how? This was one subject Robert never discussed in the **Journal**, a family paper;

his only suggestion was to postpone marriage, but he avoided mentioning a problem that arose from this; a proliferation of prostitutes.

The fact that they were rich and healthy would not, as a matter of course, have made them good parents. Many gloomy memoirs tell of the tortured childhoods of the rich, because it was common to hand over children to the care of others, and not notice their ill treatment. Lady Anne Barnard, writing of the late eighteenth century, remembered how "in every closet was to be found a culprit - some were sobbing and repeating verbs, others eating their bread and water - some preparing themselves to be whipped." One of the children "was even more frequently whipped for 'pining' as the nursery maid called it. This pinning was taking fits of supposing that no one loved her." The supposition was likely to be well founded in Balcarres Castle.

The famous Dr Chalmers was neglected and abused in the same way in a manse, his parents too busy to notice what nursemaids were up to. It came as a relief to go to school at the age of three, though his schoolmaster was a sadistic monster. Physical punishment of small children was approved of both in the home and school. Many were sent away "into the country" to be wet nursed. George Combe and his brother Andrew went to a woman who made this her profession, and described how infants like themselves suffered, since the wet nurse would not admit when her milk was drying up, and gave adulterated top-ups. The children were not returned until they were weaned, a dangerous proceeding in the nineteenth century and the cause of many deaths. The fifteen children of the Combe family were, in George's words, "sadly maltreated" in a strictly Calvinistic house. Several of them were consumptive which may have started when they lived with the tailor's wife in Corstorphine. Tuberculosis was endemic; Andrew became an eminent doctor but had no idea of either cause or cure.

Robert and Anne had nine daughters and three sons; one daughter died at two years of smallpox, a fourth son three weeks after birth. Their first child Jane was born ten months after their wedding, followed sixteen months later by Robert, he in his turn succeeded by six sisters before the birth of James nine years later, one of these births twins. The eldest daughter was nicknamed Nina, and left some delightful letters, which shows her to have been the inheritor of her father's literary gifts; she also inherited her mother's musical talent, and the good looks of them both. In one of her letters she remembered being removed from home when very young, when the other babies were swamping the house, but returned quite soon to spend the rest of her childhood with her parents.

The second arrival, Robert, was, like all the boys, sent away to school at the age of five; a homely establishment run by a Mrs Gilchrist at Carluke. Robert Chambers doted on his son. He wrote to a friend who had visited the boy: "What a history resides in my mind reflecting the aspects, talk, doings and traits of progressive intelligence of this dear boy in the course of his brief existence." So it seems strange that the child should have been banished at such a tender age. James at five went to live with an Aunt Minnie at Selkirk so as to attend Mrs Macbeth's school. "Hasten dear Jack to learn to read and by and by you will learn to write also and so send a letter to Papa and anybody else who writes to you," his father advised. Was there nobody in Edinburgh who could have taught James to read? William, two years younger than James, was probably put through the same routine. The schools they went to, run by untrained women, were of no particular benefit; Robert noted in his diary that James was unhappy in his. Such uprooting was perhaps, like a Prep School, considered a character forming experience necessary to the male of the species. In the Chambers family the boys were noticeably without talent, in spite of the extra money spent on their education.

News of the children is fragmentary, but there are a few letters from Robert written during Anne's absences. In 1835 she left several of the children; Robert aged three, Mary two, and Anne four months. Robert senior was by this time an eminent and busy publisher, but he was able to write; "We are all happy here, at least as happy as it is possible to be without you. Bobby sleeps with me and often asks for you and hints about the hobbyhorse. Little Mary has given no token of having missed you, indeed she is too young to do so. Little Anne who I went up to see tonight is quite well." A few days later "Mary evidently suffers nothing from a little affliction of her cheek, a most delightful little miss and now runs about saying PaPa with the best of them."

Two years later after the birth of the twins Janet and Eliza, Robert reported: "The dear loves and myself have done the best we could without you, Annie poor sheep had not a good night on Wednesday and has been a little feverish yesterday and today but is not much amiss, suffers nothing and is able to walk about - and promises by dint of a little medicine she has got to be quite well again immediately." A few days later "The children are all quite well and strange to say Eliza is weaned and has not been the slightest affected by it, apparently she was more set to endure it than Janet who is now however quite firm and contented again." The twins were fifteen months old, obviously wet nursed. It is curious that their mother left them at such a difficult time, but she was confident that Robert would cope and would report any difficulties.

She had soothed him by sending him a picture of herself. "I cannot wait to tell you that my heart has filled with a thousand tender and loving emotions at the receipt of your picture" he wrote at 7 o'clock on a Sunday morning, "For me dearest love it is the most precious thing for it promises to commemorate to me you as you were during those most delightful and too fleeting years of our younger married life, when if ever husband was happy I have been so. Possessing this picture I can never forget the object which has so gilded these years - I shall always know what it was that made me so happy - your sweet countenance and the sweeter nature that shines through it." After the birth of the twins she managed a two year gap before the arrival of Amelia but there was only a year between Margaret and James and William. This William died, but was followed by another a year later, and then three years later Phoebe, and after a five year gap a probable surprise Alice. This last child was the only one who appears to have inherited the extra digit, on her hands.

As the family expanded the Chambers moved; first to Ann Street, then to Coates House, then to Atholl Crescent. The girls went to an Edinburgh school, but Robert junior continued to be moved round to various boarding establishments. From nine until twelve he was at a Mr and Mrs Cleggs, then he appears to have gone to Manchester, according to a letter he wrote explaining how he would return on holiday; he would go to Liverpool, to the Chambers agents there, who he would show a note from his uncle William. They would put him on a boat for Glasgow where he would find his way to his uncle David's office and be put on a train for Edinburgh; his father wrote of meeting him then, and added "Poor dog, he is beginning to write a little better." The Manchester school was then abandoned and he spent his last three years (at an age where the average boy would be starting university) at a school called Bruce Castle.

His final term's report gives an idea of where all this boarding schooling had got him, and could not have greatly cheered his parents. In Latin, French and Geometry his success in the examination was "slight", in Ciphering and Chemistry "tolerable." He passed orthography, English, History and Reading in the third class, though managed a second for parsing. The school's curriculum was wide, though it seems strange that reading and parsing were part of a seventeen year old's subjects, and even stranger that Robert's son should be so poor at them. The report summed up "Quality of work moderate. Average success at examination very moderate."

A letter from Robert from Bruce Castle at the age of fourteen gives a curious picture of the system of rewards and punishments in the school. "Tell Mama I have risen to the point veracious and honest and I have risen several points in conservation of property, Kindness, Decorum...I have now about 5000 personal marks which entitles me to a silver medal...I've only had one or two police offences this year and no police deducting at all, I have not once been put upon the compulsory walkers since I came to the school, and for three quarters of the year the prison has been empty." Robert his father was always expostulating against competition in the form of medals and prizes, but in this case he probably accepted the system to be a milder form of discipline than the tawse. Talk of police and prison must have been schoolboy slang.

Fortunately there was the firm to find a place for him, and he lived at home (by then 1, Doune Terrace) and attended the Chambers offices daily. A diary of 1849 survives, and is rather a lonely

record. Robert was surrounded by six sisters, his closest brother James nine years younger. He had spent long periods away from home, and according to this diary had only one friend, R.Spence, with whom he shared some rather sadistic pleasures; "went home with R.Spence and saw his dog kill a cat", "went to Miss Fullertons to see if we could have a shot at a cat, however no cat appeared." They had more success with birds; "Went for a walk along the Queensferry Road and shot 2 yellow hammers, kept wing, tail and claws and threw the rest away" They shot green linnets, skylarks, and robbed a water ousels nest of all its eggs, killing the parent bird. These were normal pursuits for boys, and young Robert grew into a keen ornithologist in spite of, or perhaps because of them

On Sunday "went to Uncle Williams 13 Manor Place where I played with the dog and went a walk to Prince's Street Gardens. Spent most of the day there, no church. Wrote for Papa, Cod Liver Oil in morning." Sundays with Uncle William and mornings of Cod Liver Oil were routine, but there were two recorded expeditions, when he and his father took the early train into the country to geologise. On Saturday March 1st they went to Fife; by train to Granton, steamboat to Burnt Stone, train to Markinch, and there had breakfast at the Railway Inn. "Papa took a sketch of a number of terraced markings on a piece of rising ground facing us." Robert senior's passion for such things was as strong as ever. The following Friday they were up again at 5.30 when Papa bought a first class ticket for himself and a third for his son to Castlecarry. Arrived at the inn Robert senior wrote two short letters and then they walked to Kilsyth "a very poor and very dirty town containing a great many weavers" in which Papa was "very much interested in the Roman ditch and wall."

If Robert was trying to arouse a geological interest in his son, terraced markings and ancient ditches did nothing to achieve this. At the same age he had been sitting beside his second hand books in Leith Walk, self-supporting, poor but ambitious. His son, with the advantages of a settled home and expensive schools, was only moderately interested in anything. He took his Cod Liver Oil, killed his birds, collected ivy leaves for his corns, attended the School of Arts in the morning and the Chambers offices in the afternoons, and once went to a party. On arrival "Went upstairs with Richard (Spence) to stretch my gloves, too small, got the loan of pair from him." and so safely gloved "Danced with a very clever Miss Macdonald from Skye." The only other entertainment mentioned in the diary was on April 12th when he went to tea with R.Spence and his sister and they played Old Maid and then told fortunes. "We then sojourned to the drawing room and had a polka in the midst of darkness", a scene of mild debauchery, dancing in the dark with R.Spence's sister, his corns hopefully soothed by ivy leaves.

The diary peters out after three months, almost the last entry, Sunday 10th June, "This day Papa first told me that uncle William had bought Glenormiston 25,000£". Young Robert may have visited William there, he was the only one of the family who saw this uncle out of office hours by this time. Once he expressed a desire to go to Australia, but it soon left him and he was taken into the firm as a junior partner, receiving shares both before and after his father's death, and eventually inheriting a considerable sum from his uncle William. He became a good golfer, married, and died at the age of fifty six of a "heart condition." He took the firm over on William's death and seems to have managed it well, showing solid ability that had not been apparent to his schoolmasters. He called his son Charles Edward Stuart, himself reared perhaps on Jacobite stories collected for his father's book of the Rebellion.

The two younger sons, James and William were close in age and went to school together in St Andrews, to a Miss Bealeys at twelve and ten years old. A bill for William survives; It lists concerts, trips into the country, music lessons, a theatre at Christmas, tips for servants, baths and soap; the latter suggesting they used a public bath. The total for half a year amounted to £31.15.10 which included fees for board and tuition, not excessive.

James was not university material, and his father confessed himself to be "almost in despair" about him when it came to finding employment. This was in a letter to Alexander Ireland when James was eighteen, "the business of mechanical engineering being so depressed at present that there is no room for fresh hands." With the help of Nina's husband, Frederick Lehmann, he got a position with the Great

Northern Railway at Peterborough "with the promise to give him employment as fireman on an opening occurring" so as to be fitted "for some good foreign appointment. James will have to work as some common working man at some petty wages" a situation his father blamed on the war with America. This had adversely affected trade, and made the employment situation difficult, a state of affairs which would continue "till it pleases God to let these savages in America see the evil and folly of their ways." The avuncular essayist of the **Journal** is often hard to recognise in Robert's private letters and diaries. William, the youngest son, was given his legacy and emigrated. Whether Robert was disappointed in his sons is not revealed. Everyone who visited the house commented on the bevy of pretty daughters; all except one of them married, and that was an accomplishment, though an expensive one in the matter of dowries.

The eldest daughter, Jane or Nina, left among other letters, two describing her mother, and these are worth printing, since they give an intimate and delightful view of the Chambers family at home, and of Anne in her later days, sadly vague and eccentric but still her gentle self. In the first letter Jane, grown up and married, wrote to her husband from a visit home.

"About 12 o'clock I saw Mama hurrying up lunch and asked why it was to be so early. "Oh says Mama, I wanted to get lunch over as Miss Wye said she could come in today, as she waited an hour and a half yesterday for me to come and she had to go away. She left a message to say she would come back today which I think is possible as she has left her teeth behind..." "Her teeth" I said. "Yes, they were found on the ground just where she had been sitting by the cook as she did out the room this morning. It gave Mama quite a turn being the first thing she saw on coming down to breakfast this morning, and she has been on the sofa ever since. Well we hurried our lunch and got it over after which Mama prepared to vanish out of the ken of Miss Wye or any other visitor, first turning to Margaret the table maid and saying gently "Margaret, if Miss Wye calls say we're out and that her teeth are on the dining room mantle piece." The fits you're having on talking over this are nothing compared to what I am going into at this moment as it all comes back to me. There was the double set covered decently by Mama with the Scotsman of yesterday, exposed to view every now and then by everybody in turn taking up the Scotsman intending to read it. Papa can't get over it, he goes into tranquil fits over and over again and says they were left as a ghastly reproach by Miss Wye because she had no lunch yesterday."

How Miss Wye managed to drop both upper and lower sets unnoticed is a mystery, and Robert's suspicions seemed founded. False teeth were not lightly abandoned at a time when they were expensive and fragile; unfortunately there is no sequel to the story in a further letter. The incident gives us an insight into the relaxed Chambers household; in one of his articles Robert described his household of children, the toys everywhere, anything precious put "above the browsing line." A double set of teeth would be one more thing not to trip over. Nina too, in a letter to Frederick on a visit home, conjured up a house of some comfortable chaos; "The Chambers family are the same delightful, vague people they have always been...This is the most dangerous house to let anything out of your sight for a minute." A match box she lost was discovered as a weight to keep a ventilator shut.

Nina and her sisters, unlike their brothers, were kept at home and went to the best schools available, which were not very good. Eliza wrote a book of memoirs and described their school in Edinburgh over a shop in Queen Street, and the "smattering of education" they acquired there. It was co-educational but the boys and girls were divided by a screen "not so tall that we could not lift ourselves up to see the boys getting palmies." It seemed the girls were spared the tawse, indeed Robert and Anne would have forbidden its use on their daughters. Robert was always firmly against physical punishment of children. The visiting dancing master wore tights, played the fiddle and sported a green wig, allowed these eccentricities presumably because dancing was an essential social asset.

When Nina was twelve they moved to St Andrews for eighteen months and she wrote "Education is very cheap here compared to Edinburgh" for instance Drawing, French, Latin and Greek were 7/6 a quarter, the plain branches only a shilling a quarter and 2/- for private classes which supplemented what the two old ladies who ran the school could offer. For art they went to Madras College, an institution

started by a Dr Bell who had made a lot of quick money in India, and returned to found a school on the principles he had first used out East; employing monitors to do a lot of the teaching. This was a system also being practised by the Quaker Lankaster, and somewhat in vogue at a time when new teaching methods were much under discussion. It enabled Bell to cram a great many pupils into his college, grouping them round their pupil teachers in a large hall. He also believed in competition and a lot of medals and prizes, anathema to Robert, and one can imagine the reluctance with which he allowed the girls to attend the place even occasionally.

When her grandmother died in 1843 Nina wrote to her uncle William asking if she could have her legacy to continue music lessons as her father was "disinclined to spend any more money in this way, having so many other demands upon him at present." It is a curious little note; did her father know about it, and was he irritated at her thus going behind his back? Was he really unable to pay for music lessons for this very gifted daughter, or did he think she had reached a standard high enough for her limited needs? And, peripherally, how did Robert's mother have money to bequeathe, since she had spent her days as a struggling widow until the last few years when a house had been bought for her in Atholl Crescent.

Another musical daughter, Amelia, was sent to Dresden for two years to a Rev. Krause at a cost of £60 a year, but that was a bit later when there may have been more money available. The family returned to Edinburgh when Nina was fourteen, and presumably entered another teaching establishment until they were ready to "come out" into society. Then they waited about until suitors appeared, which for Nina was at the age of twenty two. She married Frederick Lehmann, also musical but an able business man who made a fortune out of the American wars. It was a very happy marriage, and Nina's letters show her to have been a devoted mother, who romped with her children inside and out, giving them as much time and attention as any modern mother.

Frederick Lehmann came from a distinguished and artistic family, his father Henri a friend of Litz and of Ingres. He had a colourful affair with a beautiful mysterious courtesan called Lizzie before he came to Scotland and met the Chambers through his musical connections. He joined the firm of Naylor Vickers and made a great deal of money in the American Civil War apparently organising arms supplies to the government side. His letters from the States express his horror at the slave trade; "I can never overcome a silent terror creeping over me when I see one of those wretched listless vacant, shining black slaves behind my chair." The sight of a slave market "utterly unhinged my mind" he told Nina, who was more ambivalent in her feelings.

When he returned they settled in London where their Westbourne Terrace house became the centre of literary and musical life. Wilkie Collins said that after Nina Lehmann Halle was the best pianist in England, and Browning wrote to her "my last self is always the most affectionately disposed to you of all the selves." They were close friends of the Dickens family, but Frederick disapproved of the daughters; "My dear, those two girls are going to the devil as fast as can be...society is beginning to fight very shy of them, especially of Kitty C..." "Kitty Collins the little hussy" is how he described the daughter who had married Wilkie Collins' son, not a happy marriage from which she was finding diversions. The example of her father was not helpful; sadly any letters on this subject, if they existed, have been destroyed.

Nina enjoyed the money, the company, the stimulations of the London scene, but she also loved getting away with her four children to the Isle of Wight, there to write ecstatically happy letters to Frederick of walks on the sands and shrimp teas. Then at the age of thirty four she was forced to seek a cure in the South of France for an inflammation of the lungs, a dangerous complaint which could easily have turned into T.B. She had met George Eliot before leaving, who wrote to her: "I like to be able to imagine where you are and what sort of prospect is before you ...We have seen little of each other, but then that little was under circumstances which interested me more than any lengthy intercourse with other people has often done." George Eliot and her "husband" G.L.Lewes visited Nina in France, who described the great lady as gentle and feminine, and the commonly bright and sparkling Lewes as low and rather ill. Frederick wrote of a dinner party with them; "She speaks always in a very low voice and

somehow everybody is on his best behaviour."

Nina's letters from Pau show a literary gift which, developed, would certainly have allowed her to join the ranks of the many lady authors of the day. With her influential father and her illustrious friends she had a good start, but although she did mention the desire to write, it was her piano that absorbed her, along with her four children. She described one afternoon in the garden; "I had to submit to be wrestled with (always getting the worst of it) and to be thrown down on the grass and violently pulled up behind rose bushes, and have all sorts of moths and other insects hurled at me..." not the way a Victorian mother would normally be expected to behave.

In one letter Nina described taking the children to Ramsgate, "to the haunt of my childhood Wellington Crescent," the only reference anywhere that the Chambers went so far south for holidays. Most of her letters were from Pau, where she told Frederick how much she missed him, but sent news of the children every few days, and diverted him too with descriptions of the boring Miss Plumley, one of the many English governesses who led sad and lonely lives on the continent. "It is a species" a friend told her. "At Nice there are three, elderly and single too, who fasten like leeches." Miss Plumley attached herself with her suckers to Nina, visiting her nearly every day.

"Miss Plumley gravely looked me in the face over a cup of tea this afternoon, and said it made her shudder to think that only 144,000 Jews were to be saved. They all had seals on them (to us invisible) by which they would be recognised. I should have thought they might be recognised without a seal, but it seems not, and they are all in tribes, 12,000 to a tribe, but whether the lost one counts or has been given up as a bad job I don't know. Miss Plum thinks it wouldn't be nice to see too many Jews in heaven and they and the Christians would never be comfortable together...she's very sorry for them it's better as it is. Poor Jews. It's very creditable to them bearing up as they do under their awful fate and looking so jolly. And this is my friend and companion at Pau, and I sit silent and hear such awful such sad and mournful nonsense as this..."

In one letter Nina mentioned her sister Janet, who had died the year before, 1863, at the age of twenty seven. One night, kept awake by a mosquito "I lit my candle at half past four, made one wild, and I need hardly say unsuccessful dab at the unfeathered minstrel, and then took a pencil and a bit of paper, and what did I do? First I had naturally looked at the sleeper beside me - our little soft dove - and I was struck by her strange almost mournful likeness to Janet...I naturally was sad, and thought of sad things. I went over every memory I had of Janet, and of her illness - of the mental struggle she had had, poor darling, before that illness, and the grief and disappointment she suffered from terribly. I am sure her face came back to me so vividly as I saw it one day a week before her death, so purely white, the eyes so grave and wistful..."

Janet, the twin of Eliza, appeared in Robert's diaries at intervals as unwell, was sent abroad for a "cure", and appears to have had a romance that went wrong; Robert noted an interview with a Mr Maclean about Miss J. and she was sent down to London, presumably to get her out of harm's way. It is all rather tenuous, but the suggestion is that he stamped on the love affair, and that Janet suffered greatly. She died of a ruptured ulcer a couple of months after her mother's death. There is no evidence - perhaps it was destroyed - that Robert felt guilty about her. Her story casts a slight shadow over the otherwise sweet and sunny picture of his family life, adding to the small doubts of Nina's letter on his attitude to women.

Nina recovered and returned to her beloved Frederick, outliving him for some years. Her gifts missed a generation and appeared in her grandchildren, John, Beatrice and Rosamund. Her sister Amelia married Frederick Lehmann's elder brother Rudolf, a fashionable portrait painter. Amelia, or Tuckie (they all had nicknames) was the only daughter sent away; she too was musical and spent two years, from fifteen to seventeen, at the school in Dresden to develop this talent. This was quite an expensive venture, but whether an honour or a trial one doesn't know.

In a curious admission in a letter to Anne, Robert said he found he could not fondle the children that were like himself. A Freudian analyst would find this clear evidence of a deep dislike or distrust of himself, which may have contributed to his breakdown. In fact the daughter considered most like him, Anne, was the one who visited him most often in his last days, was with him when he died, and preserved the only family letters apart from Nina's. Anne married a James Dowie at the age of twenty four; all the girls married in their early twenties, from home, the recorded dowries £1000; an extremely large outlay which caused Robert no strain financially even though there were seven of them.

Anne's elder sister Mary was nicknamed the Andalusian maid, one of the rare dark daughters. She married at twenty three, but died five years later after the birth of her third child. Nowhere is it stated what caused her death, but it was likely to have been connected with the birth. Robert took over the care of her three children and they were legatees in his will, so it seems their father either would not or could not provide for them. Robert contacted her through a medium while in the States, along with little Margaret who had died at two years of scarlet fever. He was deeply involved with spiritualism by that time, and extraordinarily gullible for a man normally taking a scholarly view of life, looking for rational explanations and suspicious of unfounded assumptions.

Janet's twin, Eliza, was the youngest to marry, at eighteen, before either of her elder sisters Mary and Anne. She married Dr Priestly, the assistant of the famous Dr Simpson of chloroform fame. Her husband became eminent and rich, and was knighted, and as Lady Priestly she wrote a book of reminiscences which is only occasionally of interest; she lacked her sister's gift of expression which is a pity as she met many interesting people but was unable to describe them. The best pages are those that tell of Dr Simpson's visits to their house when he was doing his experiments; according to her he had the girls all laid out cold with handkerchiefs dipped in ether over their faces, a sight that did not at all alarm their mother. She and Robert had also allowed to let the family become guineau pigs in Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton's experiments on mesmerism. These were all fashionable fringe medicine at the time, though Simpson's work was more than a passing fad, and in the **Journal** Robert celebrated the use of ether in surgery as the best news of the century.

The Chambers daughters were brought up in a house - more exactly several houses - where scholars, musicians, artists, scientists were regular guests, and from whose company they were never excluded. From this environment they got a better education than at any of their schools, and met men of talent like the Lehmann brothers and Dr Priestly to marry. In a typically Victorian way, parties always included music, with Anne on the harp, Robert on his German flute, Nina at the piano, Amelia singing, and musical guests joining in. It was a scene that charmed many, including Harriet Martineau who always stayed with them on her visits to Edinburgh. She was a model of successful spinsterhood, a woman greatly admired, thoroughly fulfilled, richly rewarded in spite of being unmarried and almost stone deaf. Robert was one of her admirers, though less defiant about social issues, nor did he and Anne encourage their own daughters to tread her independent path.

The family were remarkably healthy, apart from the scarlet fever epidemic which carried off little Margaret. Small accidents caused alarm; when Alice fell off a wall Robert rushed back from a holiday in the Highlands; a burn on Mary's foot upset them so much that she was sent to the aunts to recuperate. This was a symptom of the general ignorance, not knowing what the smallest mishap would "turn into", and in Robert's case a deep distrust of doctors. They were well fed, much loved; they were extremely lucky to be surrounded by a wall of solid support from their parents, aunts, family retainers. Robert referred to them in letters as either doggies or sheep, signing himself in one letter Diggy Dangy, and sending love to family pets. Given his views, it is safe to say none of them was ever beaten. Only Janet's sad white face surfaces to float above the happy household.

They were so protected, by their mother and by servants and nursemaids, that it is doubtful if any of the children suffered over their father's breakdown, which was the one near-catastrophe of their childhood, and by the time Anne went into her "decline" they were most of them away and married, only the two youngest, Phoebe and Alice, would have been affected. Robert mentioned that "for several

years" before she died Anne had been drifting away from them, changing into a different woman. They had moved to London by then, and there is a picture of her sitting on the lawn with a white kitten on her knee, serene but apart.

There is also a funny/sad letter from Nina written a year before her death, when she visited the Lehmann family on holiday in the Isle of Wight, vaguely out of touch but still gentle, musical, dignified, unpunctual. Alice came with her, eleven years old, and they moved into rooms next door to the Lehmanns. "Mama enjoys the place in her own way immensely, and has already sniffed out all the drains and condemned them particularly the Chine one by Samsons. Samsons the owners of the bathing machines are greatly impressed by her presence and dignity, she goes about in her white dressing gown, regardless of crinolines and existing fashions, spends more competencies on shrimps never takes a meal at the time we take it, and retires to her couch at about 6.45 leaving Alice to spend her evenings and sup with us. Yesterday she announced with the air of deepest mystery and importance that she was going to give a concert...Alice prima donna... admission by ticket one halfpenny, she intended giving it in her room but came round and asked if she might give it in mine. The fact was the upper notes of her piano were slightly defective and the lower ones wouldn't sound at all, so I gave my consent. Alice wrote the tickets and we were all obliged to purchase, the boys came clamouring for halfpence, the free list was suspended. Lisa the parlourmaid Julie the German nurse and Matilda our governess were commanded to disperse. Julie plunged a great brown paw in her pocket and finally cleared the required coin from a miscellaneous collection of crumbs, opal diamonds, nutmeg grater, grimy pocket handkerchief, small hard apples and safety pins. Lisa drew forth with more delicacy from an old purse of yours where she keeps a small fortune of halfpence and fourpenny pieces. Then Mama said in a grand voice "Let Mrs Colnut (the landlady) know of this, I desire she may come too. Free list I whispered? By no means, she must pay for her ticket. So poor Mrs. C. had to buy her ticket and finally when we were all seated she knocked at the door, held her ticket out timidly, and stood without a smile at the back of the door the whole time. Mama had got Matilda to make a wreath for Alice who looked like a midge in the sunshine with it on, and all the boys had sprigs in their hats and sat with the greatest solemnity the whole time. The concert consisted of Mama and Alice playing three duets and before each Mama always turned to Mrs Colnut, who was ready to sink with awe, being the principal feature in the audience, and said impressively, 'Scotch lowland' 'English very old' 'favourite air of Sir Walter Scott, supposed to be highland.' When it was over Mrs Colnut curtsied and said it was beautiful and well worth the money. Hopie and I retired after the whole thing and actually danced with laughter. Mama on the contrary was as serious as a judge. Alice subsequently confided to Hopie on the sands that she had made 4d halfpenny by the affair, having sold nine tickets. Mama said afterwards to Hopie and me 'Now that is a thing Mrs Walnut will never forget, she was deeply impressed.'"

There is something a little cruel in this presentation of her mother reliving seriously, ridiculously, the musical soirees of her past; something to modern ears a touch distasteful in Anne's languid condescension towards the landlady, though at the time it would have been commendable. Hopie, the wet nurse who was still a friend and constant visitor in Nina's house, and helped out with the children, was now joining in the giggles at her former employer tinkling away while Alice accompanied her with sprigs in her hair. Nina's attempts to amuse her husband sharpened the description, but she obviously thought her mother delightfully dotty, wandering about sniffing the drains in her dressing gown, though still with a dignity that impressed the owner of the bathing machines. How Alice felt about her mother is not revealed; when Anne died the following year she stayed with her father until he too died when she was twenty. She then married immediately, relieved of her position as the daughter who remained at home with the elderly parent.

Before she drifted away into her own world at about the age of fifty, Anne Chambers had been a brave and understanding wife to a husband who had given her much happiness and comfort, but also a good deal of worry. The worst year of their married life had been 1842, thirteen years into the marriage. In March of that year the scarlet fever epidemic had hit the family, the youngest member of whom was one year old James. Like all the infectious diseases of the time, there was no cure for what was a major killer of children, but only one of the eight children died; bad enough, but it could have

been worse and Anne, who was four months pregnant, must have been distracted.

It wasn't only the children she was worried about either; Robert was in such a state of nerves and depression that they had decided he must get away from Edinburgh for a rest from the office and the pressures of work which had led to his condition. So she had to pick herself and the children up, and with her agitated husband transfer the lot to St Andrews. From there she wrote one of the few of her letters that have been preserved showing how much she loved her irritable Robert, how tactfully she was dealing with his moods, how she wanted to do whatever was right for him. She allowed him to leave her and go off to Fingask Castle soon before the birth of the son, William, who died three weeks later. Two children dying, Robert in an agitated frame of mind and threatening to give up all his interests in the firm, and Anne weathered it with only a temporary sinking of spirits after the birth. Soon she was transcribing the book that was too dangerous to allow anyone else the sight of, apparently not complaining at the possible dangers to the family implicit in this work.

She didn't complain about Robert's growing absorption in spiritualism either, though she didn't share it. Only once did she accompany him to the seances which were usually organised by emotional women in an atmosphere of high, not to say erotic, drama. When they returned to Edinburgh from St Andrews, Robert was greatly improved, but leant more and more heavily on this relief from the normal. In the 1850's he was attending seances steadily, and constantly in the company of Catherine Crowe who instigated many of them. She was a highly intelligent woman, an author and playwright, but also unbalanced. Anne harboured no jealous thoughts, indeed she had no occasion to do so, but might well have resented the many evenings Robert spent sitting round tables in the dark with Mrs Crowe and her clientele.

In 1843, Robert wrote to her from Edinburgh, where his mother was fading fast. Anne in St Andrews was of course pregnant with the second William who was born three months later, in November. The letter shows him to be fairly buoyant, though his fits of depression returned at intervals.

It is a loving but teasingly critical letter. Robert was staying at Mackays hotel, and after some mention of the new editorial assistant Wills he continued: "The pain of absence from thee I endeavour to soothe by the consideration that I am at least exempt from the constant trouble arising from our unfortunate inconsistency as to time, and your insouciance as to the minutes which are such trifles when attended to but when not become such Hydras, Gorgons...to the utter destitution of all sweetness from existence." He wrote a piece in the **Journal** about Anne's unpunctuality (without naming her) and obviously found it a great burden, though this hardly seems the moment to criticize. However he continued "I look forward with eager expectation to seeing you all again soon" and then proposed a complete change of life and career, which would mean a drastic drop in earnings but give him space to work on the subject that most engrossed him. The idea came to nothing, for whatever reason, but it is safe to say that Anne would have accepted whatever life he planned for them.

Robert's mother died a week before the birth of his son, but there is no word of his feelings. His own mental balance was not fully restored, and this may have taken the edge off his responses, since his condition led to an intense and preoccupied introspection. Her death did not affect his recovery, which continued steadily, and an entry in his diary about "my mother and Maclean" suggests something unhelpful had been taking place which alienated him. On black lined paper he wrote to Anne "Be assured I must ever love you very dearly for you have all the qualities that command affection - and amongst others the kindness which enables you to deal gently with others faults, particularly mine." In her comforting warmth and support during his breakdown, she had taken over the role of his mother.

When Anne herself died Robert wrote to his closest friend Alexander Ireland "How sad to think of her last years and the change that has come over her| Life hereafter must be a different thing to me, wanting her sweet presence. Janet has been ill for three months." It seems a rather muted response, but for several years she had been living apart from him, occupying a space that separated them almost as much as death would do. He was also ill himself with the anaemia that killed him eight years later, and his daughter Janet dying in another bed. He rallied, moved to a retirement home in St Andrews,

remarried at the suggestion of his daughters, lost that wife quite quickly, and was never again the busy and energetic Robert Chambers of the first half century of life.

His relations with his siblings, William, Margaret, Janet and David were not as untroubled as those with his own children, but will be examined in the context of his breakdown and his business, in which three of them were involved. Margaret moved away with her husband, Janet to London when she married Wills, William and David he continued to see with varying degrees of pleasure, anxiety and irritation. It was to William he owed the launching of their **Edinburgh Journal**, which made them both successful overnight, but their relationship was increasingly prickly.

David, who was the afterthought, nearly twenty years younger, became a trial to them both, though they took him into the firm and gave him responsibilities which he only erratically deserved. He married young and was then chronically short of money, and helped himself out of the firms till, as well as running up large debts. He was given chances and failed again, but Robert was more understanding than William and produced money as well as good advice and warnings. In a letter of 1866 it appeared that David had run up debts of £7525 an enormous sum but Robert remarked mildly "I would fain see you get a little credit for the sake of wife and bairns." David died suddenly soon after Robert at the age of fifty one, a heart attack brought on by shock it was said. William complained bitterly at the mess he left behind for this last remaining brother to clear up.

William Chambers deserves a chapter to himself; a man of much talent, energy, acumen and concern for others, but in the context of Robert's life he gets rather a poor showing. In their early days they were close, sharing the horrors of the Peebles widow's house, and the worry about their father, and the concern for their mother, and the chilly bookstalls and the struggles with the ancient printing machine. Together they produced "The Kaleidoscope" and then triumphantly **Chambers Edinburgh Journal**. Together they launched all the other publications, though with the help of assistants, and on the surface all seemed harmonious.

Problems may have started with William's marriage to Harriet Steddard three years after Robert's wedding. In his autobiography William gives one line to his wife, and another to the fact that two pairs of twins and a single infant were all stillborn. and then no further children appeared. It must have been hard to see Robert and Anne with their large family, their parties and musical evenings, while he and Harriet made do with dogs. When he bought his mansion on the Tweed the pair of them moved into it alone, though they too had friends of course. But Robert and his family kept away, and ten years later an extremely acrimonious set of letters reveals how sour their relationship had become.

The trouble is, William's side of the story is never told. In his memoir of his brother, and of his own life, he avoided any reference to their problems; he never mentioned Robert's breakdown, or his famous book "**Vestiges of Creation**"; determined to give a bland and misleading gloss to their work and relationship. He presented his brother as a retired scholar, himself as the practical brains behind the business, which was not very accurate. On the other hand Robert's references to William, and his irritable entries in his diary about the "unpleasant" meetings they were always having in the office, are not an accurate background for an assessment of a brother who became Lord Provost, was offered (and refused) a knighthood, travelled widely in the interest of education which was a consuming concern, and singlehandedly organised the restoration of St Giles cathedral, which was in a shocking state of neglect. For all this he was finally offered a baronetcy, which he accepted, but died before receiving it.

How the Cathedral of a prestigious capital city had been allowed to sink into such a state of ruinous neglect is hard to explain. William employed a well known architect, Hay, and reputedly spent £40,000 of his own money on the work. For this, and for his "improvements" to the old town; knocking down whole streets of crowded tenements and replacing them with large expensive houses for renting; brought him the offer of a baronetcy. Twenty years before he had applied for a crest, notching his family up a little in the process. His father the failed weaving superintendant was described as Burgess and attention was drawn to William de Chambre, King's Bailiff of many generations back. The family motto "Facta

non Verba" did not seem entirely appropriate for someone whose business was words.

From the present standpoint it is quaint, not to say dangerous, to allow one man such freedom. One of the critics of his "improvements was Isabella Bird, who described a great many poor families thrown out of their homes and with nowhere to go. All they had was bundles of wood from their destroyed houses. There was no chance whatever that they could rent the buildings that replaced them. William's intentions, to "open up" the dark and squalid alleys, were commendable to some. The City Council of which he was head, was in any case a law unto itself with no legal restrictions on its decisions.

St Giles he managed better, since it was his own money he was spending, but it is still surprising that he, his solicitor and his architect, could pull down and redesign Edinburgh's ancient pile. Mr Gladstone via Balfour, offered the baronetcy at the beginning of May 1883, but William was too ill to reply personally. He could not fill in the list of queries from the Garter College either, sent on May 11th, though he probably overlooked the programme for the official opening of the restored cathedral; a regal affair, with the military turning out, trumpets sounding, a gun fired from the castle and a handing over of keys which he should have performed, but he died on May 20th. He was eighty three and suffering from congestion of the lungs.

In spite of the sums spent on the cathedral, he left much money and property.. His wife got his house in Chester Street and the contents of Glenormiston except books, papers and pictures. She also received an annuity of £1,000. His secretary of a year, Jane Reid, and her sisters Susan and Mary, got annuities from a £10,000 investment, his Kirkwood nephews got £2,000 each and so did the four daughters of his brother David; a generous gesture considering the past. Glenormiston was to be sold, and at the death of the Reids his nephew Robert junior and his family were to inherit everything. The firm was to continue for seven years, and then shares were to be offered at £2,900 each, and the offices in the High Atrreet sold to the surviving partner for £13,600. There were other bequests, to family and charities, valued at £8,500. It was a sensible, straightforward document, with noticeably nothing left to any of Robert's children except the son who had visited his uncle every Sunday as a boy. He seems to have become both devoted and grateful to his young secretary Jane Reid who was with him for the last year of his life; perhaps she and her sisters became the daughters he never had.

Robert had been dead for twelve years by then, but William's will would not have surprised him. He would not have expected anything for his family, who he had provided for in his own will, and who were comfortably settled in marriages and jobs. All the Chambers children were lucky in their upbringing, the girls luckier than the boys in not being banished at the age of five. As well as believing in freedom and very much disapproving of punishment for the young, Robert as a folklorist was able to supply them with story and song; as a historian with tales of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Robert Burns, both of whose lives he had researched. He knew every inch of Edinburgh, and the legends and scandals connected with its old streets and closes, and when he travelled in the pursuit of his geology he sent them poems describing his findings. The house was full of books on all the things that interested him, a wide range. The family went to Portobello in the summer, and stayed in the country with two maiden aunts. Nina described these ladies in their old age, sprightly and comical, refusing to admit to rheumatism, ("its just a flatulency") and hiding papers giving their birth dates in a chest in the attic, only to be discovered when the cat was shut in the chest for a couple of days.

They were not subjected to the gloomy Calvinistic moralisings and abstentions which were a feature of Scottish childhood. They went to church on Sunday, but the minister described theirs "as such a merry pew." Robert removed himself and his brood from the Free Church of St Cuthberts after being criticized from the pulpit, and in his private memos treated ministers almost with contempt, with many comic stories which made fun of their practices. He became even less enthusiastic about them after the reception of "**Vestiges**", and it was in the vacuum left by this loss of faith in the church of his childhood that he turned to spiritualism.

It was an age of questioning and doubt, best described in Tennyson's verse.

"I can but trust that good will fall
At last far off - at last to all."

and the rather desperate

"I falter where I firmly trod
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar stairs
That slope through darkness up to God.

and the truly desolate

"I trust I have not wasted breath
I think we are not wholly brain..."

After Anne's death. Robert stayed with his daughter Lady Priestly for a bit, described by her as patient and uncomplaining, but very weak, spending his days in a chair at the Athaeneum. He was persuaded by his daughters to remarry when he retired to St Andrews, but this plan misfired when this amiable widow died a year later. Alice was with him in his last year or two, and Anne when he died on March 17th 1871. Whether his other children visited him, or William, or the lively Janet Wills, one does not know. His gravestone is bleakly simple; no loving message or regret inscribed on it. Guesses are not good enough, but a suspicion lurks that his family rather abandoned him in the end. New evidence may come to light to refute this. One hopes so, because he had worked himself almost to death in their cause.