

1854 LETTER¹ FROM REV. THOMAS KETCHIN² TO WILLIAM JOHN STAVELY CATHCART³

Cleveland County, North Carolina⁴; July 13, 1854

Dear Son William,

Yours dated 29 May came safely to hand. I am greatly obliged to you for writing to me, and I hope that you will not fail to do so as you have opportunity, though my daughter is taken from you⁵ that circumstance does not abolish our connection, nor I hope lessen our affection. You did well, hoping you made a good choice to make up the want of Mary Ann as far as it was practicable. I have little doubt but that the change to her was for her advantage not merely from her statements at her letter's end, but from her general actings through her life. I am glad to hear that you are all well. You did well William to take

¹ General notes and observations.

- a. This letter was found in a family Bible owned by William John Stavely Cathcart (1823-1901). The Bible—along with other documents—was in the possession of someone unrelated to the Cathcart or Ketchin families. Due to the very much appreciated kindness of a fellow genealogical researcher, all these wonderful documents came into my possession in September 2012. Once again, valuable genealogical information was saved from being lost forever due to the kindness of this gentleman—whose name I will not mention for his privacy, but to whom I owe a great debt of appreciation.
- b. The original letter is written on one piece of paper, folded in half to make four separate pages. It is fairly difficult to read as the ink from the opposite side of each page bleeds through. Digital copies of the original letter can be found here: (http://johnsanpublications.com/genealogy/Cathcarts_Illinois.html#sources).
- c. The transcription of the letter—especially with respect to punctuation—was a bit of a challenge based on the fact that Thomas did not use many paragraphs. Instead, he would use dashes to indicate a change in thought or topic. In some cases, I have added punctuation to make the meaning more clear.
- d. I have added footnotes to clarify the individuals mentioned in the letter as well as point out some of the words/meanings that might be difficult for a modern reader to understand.

² Thomas Ketchin was born in 1786 in Scotland. He served as a Presbyterian minister throughout his life—and was installed pastor of the Bethel ARP Church in Winnsboro, South Carolina in 1844. Two of Thomas' daughters married two Cathcart brothers—Ella Janet Ketchin (1824-1903) married James G Cathcart, and Mary Ann Ketchin (1826-1852) married William John Stavely Cathcart (*see footnote below*). This letter is written to Thomas's son-in-law, the above-mentioned William Cathcart. For more details about Thomas Ketchin, see his page on my online genealogical database (<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=jcath&id=I820>).

³ William John Stavely Cathcart was the third son born to John and Mary Harper Cathcart. William was born on 20 January 1823 in Winnsboro, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

⁴ Cleveland County—located just west of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County—is where Thomas Ketchin spent the last years of his life.

⁵ Rev. Ketchin is referring to the death of his daughter (and William Cathcart's first wife) Mary Ann Ketchin Cathcart. Mary was born 14 October 1826, in South Carolina; and died 15 December 1852, in Randolph County, Illinois. Rev. Ketchin also refers to the fact that William remarried. Although not specifically mentioned by name in the letter, William's second wife was Elizabeth Elder Arnott, whom he married on 22 December 1853.

to you another partner, the Scripture saith "it is not good for man to be alone." A young man may live alone, if so disposed; but a man that has lost his wife, and is left with children cannot do well to be alone.

I thank you for the ample information that you have given to me concerning the prices of grain, stock, etc. I am happy to state to you that we are all enjoying considerable good health. I feel this afternoon very tired. William and James⁶ were here both at Mill, and wishing to keep the women at the plough, I assayed⁷ to rake part of my meadow that was cut yesterday, the grass being rank⁸ I became very tired. But after eating my dinner and being rested I thought I should write a few lines to you.

Our wheat rake is lighter than I expected; it was somewhat hurt with the rust.⁹ I had only 34 bushels. Our oats are a good crop: but I suppose nothing like what yours is. Our corn looks well we will get through plowing I think next week. We are eating fresh potatoes in plenty. Our sweet potatoes are late. We planted no cotton. This has been a pretty hard year for us... this, as I had to purchase the greater part of my corn and wheat. I hope that this will not be to do again.

You did well William that you did not betake yourself to acquire more learning. The lawyer and the doctor professions are both ever stocked. They are both indeed useful if those that professed them knew their business. They are chiefly infidels that follow both professions, and they did not evince themselves to be of much benefit to the public. Preaching the Gospel and teaching the principles of moral and useful science are callings of inconceivable benefit to the community; but these are callings averse remunerated [*sic*]¹⁰ than any others in this country; and it is difficult for man to attend to either of them and make a living.

The last account I had from Robert¹¹ he was well; he is now a partner in the store and I understand that he is well acquainted with his business. And is very strong and writes late. I wish he may keep his health. The store is now called Morrison and Ketchin and C^{py}. They now occupy all the under part of the building called the Odfellows [*sic*] Hall.¹² It is now the property of Messrs. H L Elliott¹³ and L Stewart,

⁶ I assume these are Thomas' two sons, William Witherspoon Ketchin (1836-1919) and James Cathcart Ketchin (~1839-1863). Both sons are enumerated in the 1850 census as 13/10 years old living with their parents in Winnsboro, South Carolina. The two sons would have been aged 17 and 14 years by the time of this letter, and therefore we can assume they'd both be living with their parents and helping work the family farm.

⁷ From "assay" archaic form, meaning "to attempt or try."

⁸ By this, I assume that Thomas Ketchin was referring to wheat that had been laying for some time in the field and that was therefore foul-smelling. I wonder how many other 68-year-old gentleman could attempt such labor today without becoming tired!

⁹ A fungal disease affecting wheat and other grains.

¹⁰ I assume he means "poorly paid." The last census enumeration in which Thomas Ketchin appears is the [1850 census for Fairfield County, South Carolina](#). Thomas is listed as being 56 years old, born in Scotland, and his occupation is listed as "Preacher Seceder." The value of real estate owned is given as \$1600. This would have placed Rev. Ketchin well within "middle-class" status; but certainly not wealthy.

¹¹ I presume this to be Robert Simpson Ketchin, Sr. (1831-1871), Thomas Ketchin's son. In the 1860 census for Winnsboro, Fairfield, South Carolina, Robert's occupation is listed as "dry goods merchant."

¹² This is almost certainly meant to be the "Odd Fellows Hall" in Winnsboro, from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows—from what I can tell, an organization similar to the Masons.

¹³ Henry Laurens Elliott, Sr. (1817-1897). On 8 November 1854—about 15 months after the death of his first wife, Mary Milliken McMaster Ketchin—Henry Elliott would marry Thomas Ketchin's daughter, Tirzah Christine Ketchin (1833-1917). The marriage was performed in Cleveland County, North Carolina by Tirzah's father.

you are aware that they are both officers in Fairfield Bank, Mr. Elliott being cashier and Mr. Stewart, Teller; and Mr. James Aiken, President. Of course Mr. Elliott does now no business in the store.

I am happy to learn by your letter that your brother, James¹⁴ is prospering better than he did. If it was in my power, I would aid him; I hope I will be spared yet to do so. It is a hard case beginning in a new place and having almost everything to purchase. We are getting along however, equal to all reasonable expectation. I expect it would have been good for me if I had come to this neighborhood 20 years ago. It was a miserable place that in which I lived/left when you married Mary Ann. If I had even got that place for nothing, my family and I would have starved on it. As to either you or James living here, I do not expect it, however desirable it might be to me and my family. I would be glad, however that you would pay us a visit. Hoping soon to hear from you I must quit with best wishes for you and your young partner and children. My wife and children with me join in the same good wishes. Please state to James that I wrote to Elly¹⁵ on the 28th of last month; and promised to write to him in a short time which I mean to do. Please give my best wishes to your father and family. I conclude by expecting to hear from you as soon as it may be practicable.

I am your affectionate father,

Thomas Ketchin

Mr. William JS Cathcart

PS I sent or I ordered to be sent to you a paper published at Erskine College, both last year and this current year. I paid for the same; but never learned whether or not it reached you; or whether or not you thought it worth the reading; the paper is called the Telescope.¹⁶ This current year I mean to say though I have not yet done it, it is upon the whole a good paper: though there are some things in it of little importance. I hope that you continue a conscientious member of the church. I should be glad to see an Illinois paper. TK

¹⁴ James G Cathcart (1815-1889) was William's eldest brother. James (along with his older sister, Nancy) was born in County Antrim, Ireland. Young James and Nancy and their parents (John and Mary Harper Cathcart) left County Antrim for South Carolina in 1816. James married Thomas Ketchin's daughter, Ella Janet Ketchin (1824-1903) in about 1843 in Winnsboro, Fairfield County, South Carolina. James and Ellis first three children would be born in South Carolina, while the rest of the family would be born in Randolph County, Illinois after the family's move sometime around 1849.

¹⁵ *ibid.* Ella "Elly" Janet Ketchin Cathcart, Thomas Ketchin's daughter.

¹⁶ It would appear that Thomas is referring to the "Due West Telescope," which was published by the Erskine College (located in Due West, South Carolina).