

“Now comes the day of terror — the third of June.”

A Planter's Daughter in South Carolina during the American Revolution

Letters of Eliza Yonge Wilkinson on her experiences of spring 1780, written 1782

Born in 1757 to a wealthy plantation family near Charleston, South Carolina, Eliza Yonge Wilkinson was a widow in her early twenties when the British army launched its southern campaign, culminating in a forty-day siege of Charleston and eighteen-month occupation of the city. Wilkinson was staunchly pro-Patriot, which she had no qualms announcing to the British and Loyalist soldiers who plundered her family's plantations. Soon after the war, she recounted her experiences in a series of letters to a friend.

Here Wilkinson relates how war arrived at her front door in spring 1780. As British and American forces converged on besieged Charleston, she fled her parents' plantation at Yonge's Island for safety at her sister's nearby plantation, but both were squarely in the path of marching armies. On “the day of terror,” June 3, 1780, three groups of military men arrived at the plantation—friendly Patriots, plundering Britons, and sympathetic members of the notorious “McGrith's Army,” a renegade band of Loyalist militia. Yet on the same day members of McGrith's gang plundered her parents' plantation. The “Iron hand of Justice” will overtake them sooner or later,” she asserts; “though slow, 't's sure.”

I was in Charles Town when we heard that a large party of them [British] had landed somewhere near Beaufort.¹ I saw several detachments of our Southern Troops leave town to march and oppose the Invaders of their Country. It was a very rainy day, and yet they march'd with the greatest alacrity [speed] imaginable, not regarding the Weather, 'tho the rain pour'd down incessantly upon them. I can't describe my feelings upon this Sight — gratitude, affection, pity, and Compassion for my Countrymen fill'd my heart and my Eyes, which pursu'd them 'till out of sight, and then every good wish attended them. However, 'twas not long before our little band of Patriots return'd to their homes in triumph, excepting a few who had seal'd the Cause with their blood. Peace to their ashes — and everlasting happiness to their Immortal part. . . .

Now, the time drew near when this State was to have her Day of suffering in sympathy with her Sister States.

O! how I dreaded the approaching Enemy. I had thoughts (as many of my friends had done) to go higher up the country to avoid them, but as my Papa, with others of my relations, had not conveniences ready to carry off their Effects with them,² and the Enemy approach'd in a rapid manner, they agreed to stay. It was a melancholy Sight to see such crowds of helpless, distress'd women, some weeping for Husbands, Brothers, other near relations and friends who were they knew not where, whether dead or alive, or what. When the Enemy was at Ashepoo³ or somewhere thereabouts, my Sister and Sister-in-law were both at my Papa's, when one Sunday morning a negro wench who had been out a visiting came running home in a violent hurry, informing us a party of British horse [cavalry] were then at Mr. M_____ W_____n's,⁴ not above five or six miles from us.

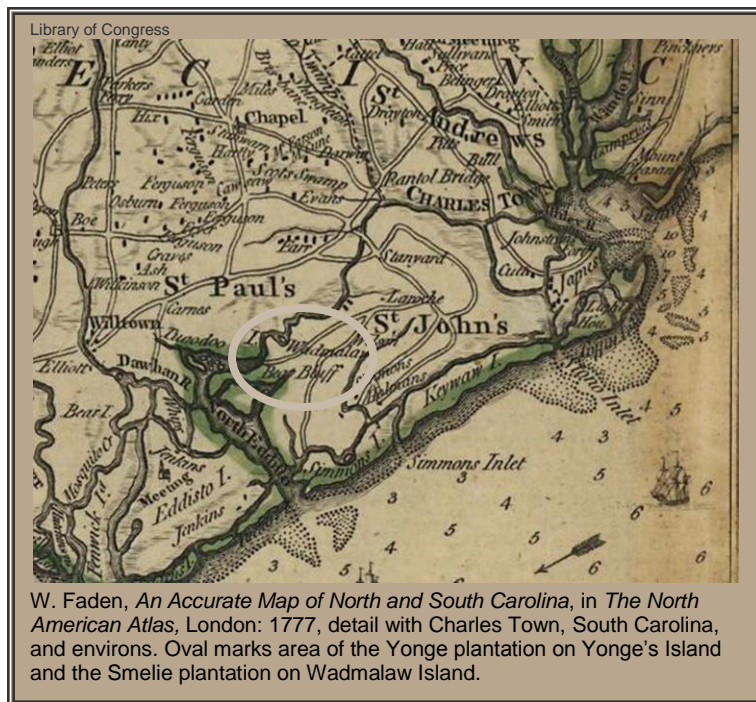
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¹ South Carolina, about 70 southwest of Charleston. The British had captured Savannah, Georgia, in December 1778 and were then marching northeast to join British forces surrounding Charleston.

² I.e., had no vehicles with which they could take personal possessions with them.

³ About halfway between Beaufort and Charleston.

⁴ Morton Wilkinson.



She met a boy on the way who inform'd her of it. This created such confusion and distress among us all as I can't describe. A boat was immediately push'd off. My Sister Yonge, my Sister Smelie,⁵ and [my]self were desirous of putting the evil day afar off! So we went over the river to Mr. Smelie's.

Papa and Mama ventur'd to stay at home. Melancholy were the adieus [goodbyes] on both sides. We had got but a small distance from the house when we met another Lady who, upon receiving the like information, had walk'd about two miles (if not more) to Papa's. She join'd us and away we went, often looking back with watery eyes to our Father's dwelling, thinking at the same time that in all probability, even while we were looking, he might be suffering all the Insults and

Cruelties that a remorseless gang of Barbarians could inflict. These thoughts drew sighs and tears from us, However, we made the best of it and endeavored to console one another the best we could — but poor was that consolation, you may think.

We had but just got over when a Scene presented to us, enough to move the hardest heart in the British army could they have seen it. This was a large boatload of Women and Children on their way to Charles Town, as that place promis'd more safety than anywhere else. They call'd at Mr. Smelie's and stayed a day or two. I pity'd them all greatly ('tho we were much in the same situation), one Lady especially who had no less than seven Children, and one of them but a fortnight [two weeks] old. Thus, in her weakly situation, to venture her life and that of her Babe rather than fall into the hands of an Enemy, whose steps have been mark'd with Cruelty and Oppression. . . .

We stayed over at Wadmalaw⁶ for some time. The Enemy were all around my Father's but had not as yet been so Complaisant as to visit him. The whole country was open to them. Nothing but Women, a few aged Gentlemen, and (shame to tell) some skulking varlets [rogues] inhabited it; the latter, indeed, inhabited the dark recesses of the woods more than anywhere else, probably thinking so many huge Trees might deaden a Shot, should it happen to pass that way.

The poor women were in the greatest distress imaginable. There was no hearing [news] from Charles Town, where all our relations were, ready to defend the town in case of an attack, and waiting for General Lincoln.⁷ Him, too, we could hear nothing about, unless it was what we heard from disaffected people and negroes, and it was the most disheartening (to say no more) accounts that we could hear. Once we heard that the Enemy had surrounded the town, that they got to Wando, James Island, and I don't know how many more Islands; however, it was in such a manner that they cut off all ways of provision getting to Town and that our Troops there were in a starving condition.

Such like reports, these were constantly circulating about and half distracted the People. Some believed, others disbelieved — I was one of the unbelievers. However, it was the constant Topic of Conversation. Some said one thing, some another; and depend upon it, never were greater Politicians than the several knots of Ladies who met together. All trifling discourse of fashions and all such low or little

⁵ Also Smilie (spelling used by Gilman in 1830s publications).

⁶ See map, this page, and photo, p. 7.

⁷ General Benjamin Lincoln, commander of the Southern Dept. of the Continental Army. Lincoln surrendered Charleston to the British on May 8, 1780.

chat was thrown by, and we commenc'd perfect Statesmen. And I don't know but if we'd taken a little pains, we should have been qualify'd for prime ministers, so well would we discuss several important matters in hand.

Many days were we in this cruel suspense, lamenting the situation we were in and the report concerning our brethren in Charles Town. The few people at Wadmalaw began to waver. Some insisted it would be rash and even action foolish for them to make any resistance when they knew not what was become of their General — that they were but a handful of men compar'd to the large Body of the Enemy, and to Oppose themselves against them would be to be sacrificed at once. However, they turn'd out and watch'd the Enemy's movements, and I believe had a shot or two at some of them; but finding [that], they began to move over in large parties to James and John's Island[s], they all repair'd to their homes to wait the Event. I can't say all, either. Some few, whose bodies were inhabit'd by true American Souls, stood in opposition to the last, 'till they were unfortunately surpris'd one rainy night when they were keeping guard on some part of the Island and by that means fell in the Enemy's hands.

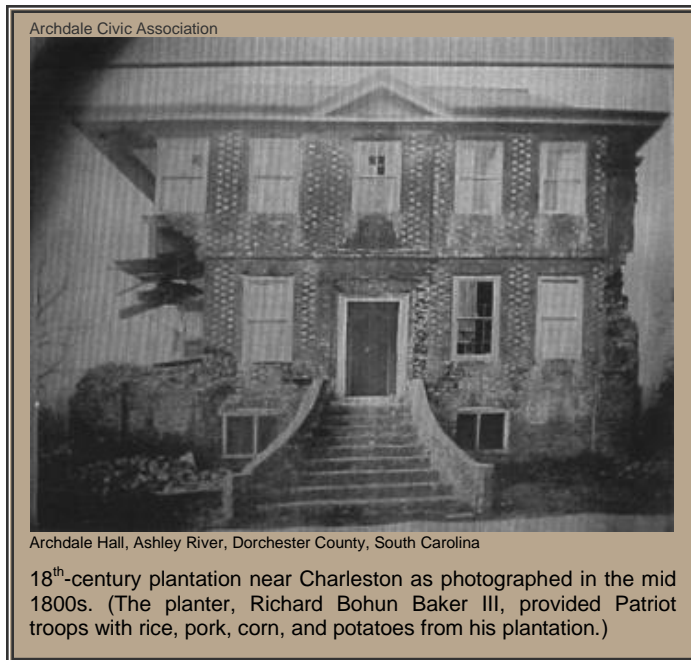
When I found how the situation of affairs was on Wadmalaw, I took a melancholy leave of my Sister (Mrs. Smelie), and return'd to my Father's, but still could hear nothing of our long look'd for General. It was moving — in the highest degree distressing — to hear the general cry echo'd from every trembling mouth of “Where's Lincoln?” but rather, said I, “Where's the lord God of Israel”? Will he indeed deliver us into the hands of these Philistines? No; the upholding hand of God was visible. The whole Country was open to the Enemy, nothing (as yet) to hinder them from prosecuting every villainy their hearts could form, nothing but Women and Children were left unprotected at home to their mercy. Husbands, Fathers, Brothers, Friends, and Countrymen far away, and we could not have the least information from them — where they were, or what about — yet we did not wholly despond. We trusted in more than feeble flesh and Blood, and our Dependence was not vain. Though our troubles were great, but in the midst of them my Brothers, with the Willtown hunters, arriv'd from Charles Town. Judge our joy upon that account, which was augmented by their assuring us that they had heard from Gen. Lincoln, that he was hurrying to our assistance and would soon be with us. How we congratulated one another on these Tidings! We could now converse with cheerfulness and take pleasure in each other's Company. The gloom which had so lately reigned among us and darkened every prospect of happiness and hope, smiling hope, took place.

“Hope, of all passions, most befriend us here;
Passions of higher note befriend us less.
Joy has her tears — and transport has her death:
Hope, like a cordial — innocent, though strong,
Our hearts at once enlivens, and serenens.”⁸

Hope seems implanted in us. It's the foundation of happiness. The great Creator, knowing our weak, desponding natures, seems to've endowed us with it to soothe, soften, and heal the wounds of keen distress and anguish, and make us bear with Fortitude the many misfortunes which attend mortality. Without this gentle, healing Passion, dreadful despair would take possession of us, and then — O! what then, but misery unutterable! What makes the infernal Regions [hell] so hideous but the loss of hope? I've never consider'd this same Hope nor seen it in the light I've lately done. It makes a kind of Paradise on Earth, that is, it makes us in some degree happy by anticipating our Wishes. Great, then, must be its qualities, which can find a source of happiness in a Soil whose chief produce is sorrow.

On May 8, 1780, Gen. Benjamin Lincoln surrendered Charleston to the British after a forty-day siege. As the British moved to subdue and fortify the surrounding areas, Wilkinson returned to her sister's plantation while her parents chose to remain at their Yonge's Island home. On June 3, a “day of terror” for Wilkinson, her sister's plantation was plundered by British soldiers, followed by the arrival of the McGirth “gang.”

⁸ Edward Young (English poet), *The Complaint, Or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*, 1742-1745.



As the Enemy were moving over to the Islands about us, Mr. Smelie quitted Wadmalaw with his Family and remov'd to a Plantation of my Father's on Stono road, but he had not been there long before we heard they [British] were encamp'd at Stono Ferry, not more than seven miles from either of my Papa's places. This put us in a deplorable situation again. I want'd to move more out of the way of them, but surely, thought I, my Papa's venerable aspect and grey hairs will move compassion at least, and I've no husband to fight against them ('tho, by the bye, if I had one who refus'd to enter the field in his Country's cause, I believe I should despise him from my Soul.) Besides, says I, "our weak Sex, incapable of wrong, from either side claims privilege of safety."⁹ That I quoted from some book or other by way of consolation. Such vain thoughts

pacify'd me for the present (for vain they prov'd to be). But after a while, I could not think of staying at Papa's, as he liv'd on the River, and we very often saw boatloads of red-coats [British] pass and repass; so I went and stayed with my Sister at the Plantation. She had another Lady with her too, one Miss Samuells. While we stayed there, we us'd to see parties of our friends — mostly the Willtown hunters — pass the avenue towards Stono Ferry, where they rode daily in search of adventures, and would frequently call on us. O! how sweet, how comforting, the presence of a friend in such distressing times, especially those we look on as the protectors, the prop of their Country. And yet with a tender anxiety for their welfare, we beheld them. The poorest Soldier who would call at any time for a drink of water I would take a pleasure in giving it to him myself, and many a dirty ragged fellow have I attended with a bowl of water or milk & water, and with the utmost compassion beheld their tatter'd raiment [clothing/coat] and miserable situation. They really merit everything — [those] who will fight from principle alone, for, from what I could learn, these poor Creatures had nothing to protect and seldom get their pay, and yet with what alacrity will they encounter danger and hardships of every kind!

All this time we had not seen the face of an Enemy, not an open one — for I believe private ones were daily about. One night, however, upwards of sixty dreaded redcoats commanded by Major [James] Graham pass'd our gate in order to surprise Lieut. Morton Wilkinson at his own house, where they understood he had a party of Men. A Negro wench was their Informer and also their conductor, but (thank heaven) somehow or other they fail'd in their attempt and repass'd our Avenue early in the morning, but made a halt at the head of it and wanted to come up, but a Negro fellow, whom they got at a neighbor's not far from us to go as far as the ferry with them, dissuaded them from it by saying it 'twasn't worthwhile, for it was only a plantation belonging to an old decrepit Gentleman who did not live there. So they took his word for it and proceeded on. You may think how much we were alarm'd when we heard this, which we did the next morning; and how many blessings the negro had from us for his consideration and pity.

...

After this, we saw not any of our friends for a great while. They'd taken a different route to Willtown, Pon Pon, and other places, where they heard the Negroes were very unruly and doing great mischief; so they rode about from plantation to plantation in order to quell them in time. We grew melancholy and unhappy on our friends disappearing, and hourly expect'd unwelcome visitors; but seeing nor hearing

⁹ Nicholas Rowe (British dramatist), *Tamerlane*, 1701, Act I, Scene I.

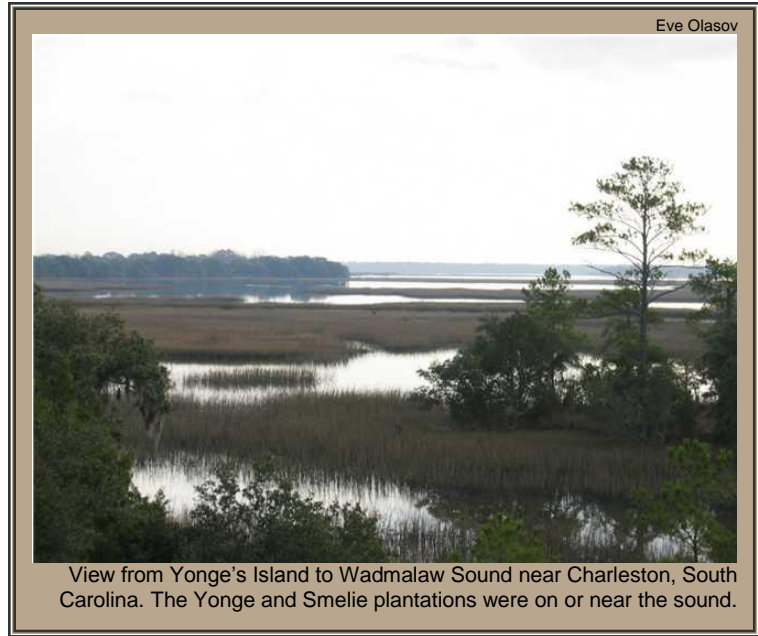
nothing of them, only that they were erecting Forts at the ferry, I began to be in hopes they would not be so free in obtruding [imposing] their Company on us as they had done elsewhere — but at length the time arriv'd.

The second of June, two men rode up to the house. One had a green leaf, the other a red string in his hat. This made us suspect them as spies (for we heard McGirth's men¹⁰ wore such things in their hats). They were very particular in their inquiries — “if there were any men in the house?” (Foolish fellows! if there were, they would not have had time to've ask'd us that question.) — “If any had been there?” “No.” “Did any go from here this morning?” Impertinents, thought I; do you think we are bound to answer all your interrogations! but I must not say so. “Well,” says one, “do you know Col. McGirth will be along here presently with two hundred men? You may expect him in an hour or two.”

Ah! thought I — I'd far rather (if I must see one) see Old Beelzebub, but here's some of his Imps — the forerunners of his approach. “Why,” said Miss Samuells, “if Col. McGirth should come, I hope he won't act any how ungentlely, as he'll find none but helpless women here who never injur'd him!” “O!” says one, “he'll only take your Clothes and Negroes from you.” After a little farther chat, they rode off, leaving us in a most cruel situation, starting at every noise we heard and dreading the enemy's approach. . . .

Well, now comes the day of terror — the third of June. (I shall never love the anniversary of that day). In the morning, 15 or 16 Horsemen rode up to the house. We were greatly terrify'd, thinking them the Enemy, but from their behavior were agreeably deceiv'd and found them friends. They sat a while on their horses, talking to us, and then rode off, excepting two, who tarried a minute or two longer and then followed the rest who had nearly reach'd the gate. One of them said two must needs jump a ditch — to show his activity,¹¹ I suppose, for he might as well and better have gone in the road. However, he got a sad fall. We saw him and sent a Boy to tell him if he was hurt to come up to the house, and we would endeavor to do something for him. He and his Companion accordingly came up. He look'd very Pale and bled much. His gun somehow in the fall had given him a bad wound behind his Ear, from whence the blood flow'd down his neck and bosom plentifully. We were greatly alarm'd on seeing him in this situation and had gather'd around him, some with one thing, some with another, in order to give him assistance.

We were very busy examining the wound when a Negro Girl ran in exclaiming — “O! the king's People are coming. It must be them, for they're all in red.” Upon this cry, the two men who were with us snatch'd up their guns, mounted their horses, and made off, but had not got many yards from the house before the Enemy discharg'd a Pistol at them. Terrify'd almost to death as I was, I was still anxious for my friends' safety. I tremblingly flew to the window to see if the shot had prov'd fatal when, seeing them both safe, “Thank heaven,” said I. “They've got off without hurt!” I'd hardly utter'd this when I heard the horses of the inhuman Britons coming in such a furious manner that they seem'd to tear up the Earth, and the riders at the same time bellowing out the most horrid curses imaginable — oaths and imprecations



View from Yonge's Island to Wadmalaw Sound near Charleston, South Carolina. The Yonge and Smelie plantations were on or near the sound.

¹⁰ “McGirth's Army,” a renegade Loyalist militia unit led by Col. Daniel McGirth that became notorious for raiding, raping, murdering and pillaging from north Florida through South Carolina.

¹¹ I.e., to show his horsemanship.

[curses] which chill'd my whole frame. Surely, thought I, such horrid language denotes nothing less than death, but I'd no time for thought. They were up to the house — enter'd it with drawn swords and Pistols in their hands. Indeed they rush'd in in the most furious manner, crying out, “Where's these Rebel B____s?” (pretty language to Ladies from the Once fam'd Britons).¹² That was the first salutation [greeting]! The moment they espy'd us, off went our Caps (I always heard say none but women pull'd Caps!)¹³ And for what, think you? Why, only to get a paltry Stone-and-wax pin which kept them on our heads, at the same time uttering the most abusive language imaginable, and making as if they'd hew us to pieces with their swords. But it's not in my power to describe the scene: it was terrible to the last degree, and what augmented it, they had several arm'd Negroes with them who threaten'd and [verbally] abus'd us greatly.

They then began to plunder the house of everything they thought valuable or worth taking. Our trunks were split to pieces, and each mean, pitiful wretch cram'd his bosom with the Contents, which were our apparel, &c. &c. &c. [etc.]

I ventured to speak to the inhuman monster who had my Clothes. I represented to him that the times were such we could not replace what they'd taken from us and beg'd him to spare me only a suit or two, but I got nothing but a hearty curse for my pains. Nay, so far was his callous heart from relenting that, casting his eyes towards my shoes, “I want them buckles,” said he, and immediately knelt at my feet to take them out, which, while he was busy about, a Brother Villain, whose enormous mouth extend'd from Ear to ear, bawl'd out “Shares there, I say, shares.” So they divided my buckles between them. The other wretches were employ'd in the same manner. They took my Sister's earrings from her ears, hers and Miss Samuells's buckle. They demanded her ring from her finger; she pleaded for it, told them it was her wedding ring and beg'd they'd let her keep it; but they still demanded it and, presenting a Pistol at her, swore if she did not deliver it immediately, they'd fire.

She gave it to them, and, after bundling up all their Booty, they mounted their horses. But such despicable figures! Each Wretch's Bosom stuff'd so full, they appear'd to be all afflicted with some dropsical disorder.¹⁴ Had a party of Rebels (as they called us) appeared, we should soon have seen their circumference lessen.¹⁵ They and their Allies (their Negroes) seem'd to be on a very friendly footing — quite familiar! Indeed, they're very fit Company for each other, for their actions being of as dark a dye as the Ethiopians' skin makes them of a color in some sense.¹⁶

They took care to tell us when they were going away that they had favor'd us a great deal — that we might thank our Stars it was no worse. But I'd forgot to tell you that upon their first entering the house, one of them gave my arm such a violent grasp that he left the print of his thumb and three fingers in black and blue which was to be seen very plainly for some days after. I show'd it to one of our Officers (who din'd with us) as a specimen of British Cruelty. If they call this favor, what must their cruelties be? It must want a name! To be brief, after a few words more they rode off, and glad was I. “Good riddance of



British "Redcoat," 1742
37th Regiment of Foot (Infantry)

¹² Charlotte Gilman replaced “Where’s these Rebel B[astard]s?” with “Where’re these women rebels?” presumably because she initially published the letters in her children’s magazine *Southern Rose Bud*. She omitted other curse words spoken by soldiers.

¹³ *Pull caps*: to quarrel like women, it was said, who would pull each other’s caps off in an argument [18th c. expression].

¹⁴ *Dropsical disorder*: edema; swelling from excess watery fluid in bodily tissues.

¹⁵ I.e., they would drop all the objects in their coat pockets and suddenly appear slimmer.

¹⁶ Gilman omitted the last two sentences of this paragraph.

bad rubbish,” and indeed such rubbish was I never in company with before. One of them was an Officer too! a sergeant or some such for he had the badge of honor on his shoulders!

After they were gone, I began to be sensible of the danger I’d been in, and the thoughts of the vile men seem’d worse (if possible) than their presence; for they came so suddenly up to the house that I’d no time for thought; & while they stayed, I seem’d in amaze! Quite stupid! I can’t describe it. But when they were gone and I had time to consider, I trembled so with terror that I could not support myself. I went into the room, threw myself on the Bed, and gave way to a violent burst of grief, which seem’d to be some relief to my full swollen heart.

Lay there an hour or two, indulging the most melancholy reflections. The whole world appear’d to me as a Theater where nothing was acted but Cruelty, bloodshed, and Oppression, where neither age nor sex escap’d the horrors of Injustice and violence, where the lives and property of the Innocent and Inoffensive were in continual danger, and lawless Power rang’d at large.

I was interrupted in these thoughts by hearing somebody cry out. There were a number of horsemen coming up the Avenue. “Well,” said I, “here’s another Banditti coming, but death will I suffer before I’ll be coop’d up in this house with them again.” So out I went, my Sister with me. Miss Samuells, having more resolution, was determin’d to stay and see who and what they were. First came up an Old Man and two others. She went to the door. “If,” said she, “you’re friends, I beg you’ll go away unless you are able to protect us, for we have been us’d very ill today by a party who call themselves British Dragoons¹⁷ (dragons rather), on account of two men who say they saw ride from here this morning, but if you’re Enemies I can assure you there’s nothing left worth your taking, as the house was plunder’d this morning by the party I told you of.” The above-mention’d Old Man dismounted and said he must see what was in the house for all that. “Well, go in and see.” She walked out and burst in tears — called on my Sister and [my]self to come and endeavor to save what few things the British savages had left. (These were a large party of McGirth’s men.) When I saw they did not behave in that outrageous manner the others had done, I ventured to approach the house, and went in.

One of the men, seeing Miss Samuells quit the house, jump’d from his horse. “By G__d,” said he, “you shall have nothing more taken from you!” He ran in and brought the Old Man out by his Shoulders, who declar’d vehemently he had no Intention of taking anything from us, and to prove that he would rather give than take from us, he went to his horse and loosing a great quantity of yarn (which I dare say he’d plunder’d), brought it and gave it to my Sister. One of them, who by his appearance seem’d more than the rest [superior in rank or class], ask’d if “one Mrs. Wilkinson wa’n’t there?” They told him yes, and looking round towards where I sat, he bent himself forward on his horse as if to see me. “Gracious heaven!” said I, “what can the Man mean by asking for me?” I was ready to sink on the floor, however I put on as resolute an air as I could assume and step’d forward with “Have you anything to say to me, Sir?”

The man saw I was frightened. He smil’d. “How far is it, Madam, from here to Mr. Morton Wilkinson’s?”

“I really can’t tell. It’s a great while since I’ve been there, and I hear he’s got a new road to his house.”

He and another one spoke low. He then said, “But you can guess. Madam, how far it is?”

“Indeed, Sir, I can’t.”

“We’ve orders,” said he, “to burn that house.” We all pleaded for it.

“If you go there,” said one of us, “you can’t find it in your heart to execute your orders. There you’ll find no less than seven small Children. You could not be so cruel as to turn them out of the house, sure!”

“Well,” said he, “we won’t go. Women and Children can’t help what the Men do.”

“Very true,” said I, “but yet you see the Innocent suffer with those who are term’d guilty. Come in the house and see what destruction they’ve made!”

¹⁷ *Dragoons*: horsemen, cavalry.

They came in — express'd a great concern for us, and abus'd [criticized] the Britons much. "Yes," said they, "we always bear the blame of these outrages, but I'll assure you we take nothing from Ladies. Men's apparel, Horses, &c. we do take, but we wish not to distress Women for they can't help what's done. Those fellows who rob'd you this morning can't have any feeling for the Fair Sex, I'm sure." (O rare! thought I, here's "high life below stairs" in good earnest!)¹⁸

There was a Man among them who would not come in but stayed just without the door. They kept their Eyes on him as they spoke, with a smile of Contempt. At last said one of them, "Ladies, do you know that man's face?" (pointing towards him). We look'd at him — he seem'd to avoid our eyes. We soon recollected the wretch and cry'd out, "He was among the Dragoons in the morning." "Very true," said they, "he was so," and then sham'd him. He was very sullen, and after that could not give us a good word. Whatever we'd say, he'd have some surly answer ready. The others frown'd at him, but that having no effect, they spoke to him and ask'd "How could he behave in that manner to us?" He was silent for some time after.

One of them assured us, if we'd let him know what we'd lost, he'd endeavor to get them for us again; but as we'd not want any more of their company, we declin'd accepting their offer. He swore that as soon as he return'd to camp, he'd make a report of the usage we'd receiv'd, and he was sure the men would suffer for it. (He was as good as his word, for we afterwards heard by some of our Men, who were prisoners at the Ferry, that the ill treatment we'd met with was talk'd of throughout the Camp there, and afterwards my Sister saw the Man who reported it. "Well, Madam," said he, "if it will be of any satisfaction to you, I can assure you I saw one of the men who us'd you and the other ladies so ill, receive five 500 lashes for the same." So here was "the Devil correcting Sin."¹⁹

While they were talking to us, some of the Silent ones withdrew and presently laid Siege to a Beehive, which they soon brought to terms, which the others perceiving, cry'd out, "Hand the ladies a plate of honey" — which was immediately done with officious haste, no doubt thinking they were very generous in treating us with our own. There were a few horses feeding in the Pasture. They had them driven up.

"Ladies, do either of you own these horses?"

"No! They partly belong to Papa and Mr. Smelie."

"Well, Ladies, as they're not your property, we'll take them. It can't be injuring you, you know." The Old Man got on one.

"Why," said Miss Samuells, "that horse can do you no good. It's very ordinary."

"No matter. Madam. I'll take a Rebel's horse at any time."

"Why," said she, "that poor old Creature had better be at home. He can't be of any service to you."

"I think so, too," reply'd he, "but it's no matter what becomes of him."

"Old Man," continued he, "if that was a Tory's horse, would you take it?"

"Why, no!"

"Faith, Old Fellow," said he. "I believe you don't mind Whig nor Tory [Patriot nor Loyalist], so you get by it!"

Ah, thought I, I believe you speak the sentiments of your whole army, from the highest Officer to the lowest Soldier. Nothing but the hopes of raising themselves on the ruin of others has induc'd them to engage in the war against us. I fear principle governs very few. Interest reigns predominant.²⁰

Another poor, meager-looking Mortal with a wound in his shoulder went into the kitchen and fell to upon some rice. He told the Negroes he wish'd he had some meat, and if he wa'n't afraid of distressing the Ladies he'd ask them for some. I mention all these trifling circumstances that you may see with how much more humanity McGirth's men treated us to what the Britons did, yet we had a most dreadful

¹⁸ *High Life Below Stairs*: 1759 British farce attributed to David Garrick, and a 1763 painting by the English artist John Collet. The works satirically depict house servants imitating the affluent style and consumer abundance of their masters.

¹⁹ From an old proverb.

²⁰ I.e., self-interest.

account of his gang — that they were worse than Savages and committed every kind of outrage. But let everyone have their due, and the merit of a good act.

To tell the truth, they behav'd to us more like friends than Enemies when they saw our distress. I don't know whether that mov'd them to pity us or what. They ask'd if there were any settlements near us. We told them there were and beg'd if they went to Papa's, they'd treat him and family well and do nothing to distress them, for we heard that the Dragoons had plundered his house that morning, and insulted him very much.

"We won't, Ladies, we won't; and had you thousands, we would not rob you of a Shilling. But what's your Father's name?"

"Mr. Yonge."

"Yonge, Yonge," said the before-mention'd busy Old Wretch. "Ay, right, he's a D___n'd old Rebel. Why, he's one of the Council!"²¹

"You're quite wrong, good Man." (I told a fib in the word good!) "My Papa, besides his being a Man in years, is very hard of hearing and consequently unfit for that Office."

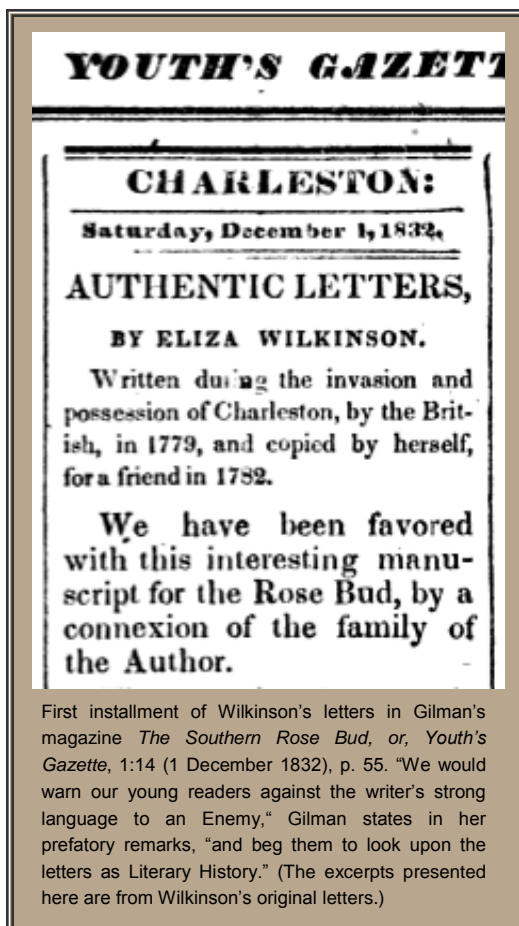
"But go," said Miss Samuells. "If his grey hairs and beard can't move compassion, I don't know what will."

Away they went to their horses when one of them, turning round to me, "How far," says he, "does — does (he could not recollect my Papa's name) does Father Grey

Beard live from here?" Pray, heaven, thought I, you nor no Enemies to America may live to deserve that Appellation. The prayer savor'd of Cruelty and was rather unchristian, especially as we are commanded to "pray for our Enemies and do good to those who despitefully use us and persecute us."²² It is a hard lesson, and I forgot it at that Instant, when Indignation had taken possession of my heart.

...

... It was likewise on the third of June that my Papa, with an Old Man who liv'd a few Miles from him and whose head was silver'd o'er with age (one Mr. Bryant) was sitting in the Piazza when they saw a Party of Men — some in red, others in green, coming up to the house furiously. The moment they arriv'd they jumped from their horses and ran into the house with drawn Swords and Pistols and began to curse and abuse Papa and the other Man very much. Indeed, took his buckles from his shoes, search'd his pockets, and took all they found there. They then went to search Mr. Bryant's pockets. He threw his top Jacket aside and producing his under-one, "Here," said he, "I'm a poor Old Man" (he was so, sure enough.) They searched but I believe found nothing, for by a lucky thought the "poor Old Man" sav'd several hundred Pounds [English currency] by carelessly casting aside his top Jacket as if it had no Pockets in it. They then went in the Rooms up and down stairs, demolish'd two sets of drawers, took all they could conveniently carry off. One came to search Mama's Pockets too (audacious fellow!) & she resolutely threw his hand aside. "If you must see what's in my pocket, I'll show you myself," and took out a thread case which had thread, needles, pins, tape, &c. &c. The mean wretch took it from her. They even took her two little Children's Caps, hats, &c. &c. and when they took Mama's, she ask'd them what



²¹ Yonge had been a member of the state legislative body, the Grand Council, as well as the state surveyor general, judge on the South Carolina Supreme Court, and the colonial trade agent for South Carolina in London

²² Matthew 5:44 [New Testament].

they did with such things which must be useless to them. “Why, Nancy would want them.” They then began to insult Papa again in the most abusive manner. “Ay,” says one, “I told you yesterday how you’d be us’d if you did not take protection!²³ But you would not hear me, you would not do as I told you. Now you see what you’ve got by it.”

“Why,” said Mama, in a jeering way, “is going about plundering Women and Children, taking the state?²⁴ I suppose you think you’re doing your king a great piece of service by these actions, which are very noble, to be sure; but you’re mistaken — ’twill only enrage the people. I think you’d much better go and fight the Men than go about the Country robbing helpless Women and Children — that would be doing something.”

“O! You’re all, every one of you, D___’d Rebels! and, Old Fellow” (to Papa), “I’ve a great mind to blow my Pistol through your head.”

Another made a pass at him (Inhuman Monsters — I’ve no patience to relate it) with his sword, swearing he’d “a great Mind,” too, to run him through the Body. What callous-hearted wretches must these be, thus to treat those who rather demanded their protection and support. Grey hairs have always commanded respect & reverence ’till now, but these vile Creatures choose the aged and helpless for the Objects of their insults and barbarity. But what, think you, must have been my Papa’s feelings at the time! — us’d in such a Manner and not having it in his power to [verbally] resent it. What a painful Conflict must at that Instant have fill’d his Breast. He once or twice (I heard him say afterwards) was on the verge of attempting to defend himself and property — his breast was torn with the most violent agitations — but when he consider’d his helpless situation and that certain death must ensue, he forbore and silently submitted to their revilings and Insults. It reminds me of poor Old Priam, King of Troy, when he says,

“As for my sons! I thank ye, Gods — ’twas well —
Well they have perish’d, for in fight they fell.
Who dies in Youth and Vigor, dies the best,
Cover’d with wounds, all honest, on the breast,
But when the Fates, in fury of their rage,
Spurn the hoar head of unresisting age,
This, this is misery, the last, the worst,
That Man can feel — Man fat’d to be curs’d.”²⁵
I think those are the lines. It’s a great while since I read them.

But to proceed. After drinking all the wine, rum, &c. they could find, and inviting the Negroes they had with them (who were very insolent) to do the same, they went to their horses and would shake hands with Papa and Mama before their departure. Did you ever hear the like? Fine amends, to be sure! A bitter Pill covered with gold, and so a shake of the hand was to make them ample satisfaction for all their Sufferings. But the “Iron hand of Justice” will overtake them sooner or later. Though slow, ’t’s sure.

After the war, in 1786, Eliza Wilkinson married Peter Porcher with whom she had four children.
The date of her death is unknown.

²³ I.e., pay McGirth’s army to leave them alone.

²⁴ *Taking the state*: occupying enemy territory.

²⁵ Homer, *Iliad*.