

The following is a copy of a letter written by Mrs. William Moultrie Dwight to her brother, Captain Henry A. Gaillard, Adjutant of Bratton's Brigade, formerly Jenkin's Brigade.

The letter was not mailed because it could not be gotten through the lines.

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February 22, 1865

I take advantage of a small respite to commence a detailed account of the miseries of the past twenty four hours, which I fear are destined still further to be lengthened out before we are freed from this state of wretchedness and left in mercy to ourselves.

After you left on Monday, three of Wheeler's Cavalry dined with us--polite gentlemanly fellows that we were sad at parting with, knowing that they were the last grey coats that would bless our eyes for some time. All night long, we were in a state of apprehension and dread, having heard just before dark that Sherman was within a mile and a half of the town. It was not until ten o' clock on Tuesday, however, that our long dreaded visitors made their first appearance, several scouts riding up and inquiring for our horses. Dooty (Mrs. Mary Martin) and myself walked out to meet them, and informed them that the horses had been sent away. With a very incredulous air, they rode around the house, cursing and threatening negroes, to the consternation and horror of the whole yard, several of the negroes rushing in to inform us that they had taken Dick's hat and sworn to burn every house on the place, if the desired information was not given them. They passed on, however, without inflicting further damage. We, in the meantime, were suffering agonies of dread, but it was not many minutes before another party came dashing into the yard, headed by the most impertinent looking wratch I ever sawy, who hitched his mule to the steps, and calling to his comrades to come along, rushed past two of us who had gone into the piazza to meet them, and walked into the room. They were too lawless and rude, and we did not pretend to follow or restrain them, but commissioned Mauma to do so, while we remained in a body in the hall, quietly knitting, nerving and strengthening ourselves for the worst. It would be impossible to describe their deprivation. They ran from one end of the house to the other, opening and breaking locks, emptying every trunk and box, and helping themselves to whatever they liked, singing, whistling and talking at the very top of their voices. Every now and then they would come into the hall with some impertinent question and remarks, which we tried to answer always calmly and plainly. They cross questioned us about fire arms, and unfortunately after denying that there were any in the house, they found an old one stores away in a trunk, which we had forgotten, and five swords. The capture of these last delighted them highly, and they afterwards brought it up as proof to Mrs. Robertson that Southern ladies "could tell lies,"....

A little circumstance which annoyed me considerably, because I would not for worlds have the meanest of the wretches suppose that we would so lower ourselves intentionally. Words could not express to you all the agony that we suffered during the two or three hours that these wretches were running riot over the house, especially when the aforementioned leader of the party, an Irishman, came into the hall and leaning on the piano looked at each one of us, and inquired in the most familiar manner, "Do any of you girls play the piano?" No reply was made to the question, and thank Heaven it was not repeated.

After a while, two who seemed to feel some pity for us, took their seats by the door, and acted as some protection to us. We maintained a calm dignity, and soon our tongues gave utterance to our indignation, and we treated them to some of the plainest talking you ever heard. Some declared that they respected us for avowing our sentiments openly, but others were offended, and one fellow after receiving a very spirited reply from Dootie to his injunction to write to her lover and brothers to lay down their arms and stop the war, declared that he had come with the intention of affording us protection, but we talked to "Damn strong" and did not deserve it, and walked out calling some of the men after him.

Toward noon, an officer rode up, and seemed much incensed and mortified at the behavior of the men, and ordered them out and gave us a guard. Several officers were taken over the house to behold the work of destruction, and all expressed regret, though they were so exultant over their triumphs that they incensed us very much in their way.

Quiet being somewhat restored, we took a tour of the house, and from the garret closet down the appearance of confusion could not be described. Every article of the boys' clothing was gone, but out garments, though all tossed on the floor, was left untouched with some exceptions. Even my little darling was a loser by one dress, the nicest she had not yet made up. Just at dark, our guard took leave, and left us in a state of unparalleled misery and wretchedness, having heard that threats had been made to return at night and burn the house, and not having any one whom we could send to demand a guard. We were mercifully permitted to remain in quietness and perfectly undisturbed until after day light, when they came swarming into the yard like locusts, searching and digging into every corner, and in the dry well without success. Just where you concealed some articles in the vegetable garden they have dug with hoes and spades, and have sounded almost every spot on the premises with their bayonets. We have watched them in perfect misery, and have been grateful to you many times that your work was so well performed. How long it is to remain so, Heaven only knows!

Those that came into the house to-day were more orderly, and did not seem to be disposed to show disrespect. One impertinent fellow walked into the house about two hours ago, seated himself before the fire and commenced a conversation in the most familiar manner. He insisted twice upon our performing on the piano. We

gave him the most freezing reception you ever witnessed and seeing that we would not talk to him, left us after a long visit. The most genteel of them have no manners. They have tried to gather from us all the information possible concerning the movements of our army,--are all perfectly exultant and declare their firm belief that Richmond and the Confederacy will soon fall, before Sherman's host of 80,000.

By yesterday evening, our stock of provisions was so nearly exhausted that when Louise demanded her "tup and poon", as usual, there was not a mouthful of anything to give her, and we substituted a dose of paregoric instead and put her to bed. This morning, Mrs. Robertson sent us a little grist and coffee saved from the wreck over there, and we ate for breakfast hominy with some turkey sauce left from Sunday's dinner, using for spoons a piece of horn, an iron spoon, one teaspoon and two salt spoons. We gathered around the one dish very merrily, and felt thankful for that little. Every thing has been taken from the house and store rooms, excepting a little peas, a small chine and two bags of flour, which Mauma's ingenuity saved for us. The carriage and even Louise's cart have been carried off loaded with provisions. Mrs. Robertson and the B's (Boyces) have suffered equally ~~xxx~~ with ourselves.

We can hear nothing from Winnsboro, excepting the burning of the steam mill, Mrs. River's and Mrs. Lauderdale's houses, and the greater part of Main Street. The depot and cotton were destroyed before our soldiers left. We have been told repeatedly that we ought to be grateful that ~~our~~ house has stood so long, and do not expect to be allowed to remain under its shelter. We look forward with dread to the coming night. God have mercy upon us!

We have just been grieved to hear that our dear little Church was burned to the ground last night, but can hear nothing of our friends in town. The whole of the railroad was burned this morning. Just now every thing is perfectly quiet, and we see only an occasional straggler, but don't know whether we are to expect any more. Our negroes have suffered too dreadfully, losing most of their provisions and clothes, but they are firm friends, and have gained our gratitude and respect. Every threat has been made to extort the secret of the silver, etc., but without effect. I don't think we could ever have imagined how terrible this trial was to be, but we have tried to bear it bravely, and are certain that our principles are much strengthened by it. Some of the soldiers tell us that all of the South Carolinians are strong Rebels, while others again insist upon the existence of some good Unionists. All express their surprise at the small resistance they have met with.

The Yankees guarded Mrs. Robertson's home voluntarily last night, having heard threats of burning, etc., and were really kind to her. Upon leaving this morning, one of them offered to carry a note requesting a guard. Sometime afterwards, he came back to say that General Geary had refused the request, saying in an angry tone that he afforded "no protection to Rebel property." So this is really why we have been left so much to ourselves.

Since writing the rest of my letter, some of Mrs. Robertson's negro men have returned and report the whole expedition a failure, and the party without doubt prisoners, if their lives have been spared. This morning, upon the near approach of the enemy, the gentlemen abandoned their wagons, horses, etc., and took to a swamp nearby. I feel almost certain that they have failed in their object, and am much worried about Mr. D. (Dwight), who I never expect to see again. Poor Mrs. R. (Robertson) bears up bravely under this accumulation of trouble.

Peter has come from Town since dark, and has given us some accounts of the burning. The Main Street from the Printing Office to the Bank on one side, and from Dr. Robertson's to Leventritt's old store on the other, is in ashes, besides the Church and old Dr. Boyleston's house. Some of the soldiers declare that they are acting under orders, and threaten to complete the work of destruction tonight. This makes us very uneasy, and we are expecting to be turned out of the house any moment.

So far, at half past twelve, every thing is perfectly quiet, however, and I hope will continue so. In the country, the enemy are carrying on most outrageously we hear, have burned Mr. John Adger's, occupied at present by Mrs. Clark, tied up Mrs. Anderson in her house, and threatened to burn it over her head, if she did not deliver up her silver. We hear have hung Mr. Harrison, son-in-law of Mr. C. Woodward, and killed his little son. They are sweeping the whole country for miles around, and I suppose there is no chance of Tommy's escape. O, if the horses had been given to our own soldiers. They carried off Dick yesterday morning, but he returned tonight, tired and frightened, and very certain that these wretches surpass any Yankees that he has ever seen. He is sleeping in the house now, and serves as a small comfort to us. I don't believe you can begin to imagine what this being left in the enemy's line is, and how very miserable it is to feel that we are completely at the mercy of this brutal soldiery, flushed with victory and eager to wreak their vengeance on our gallant little State. I earnestly trust, however, that our trial is nearly, if not quite over, as most of the Army must have passed on. One of the soldiers spoke the truth yesterday when he said, "You, South Carolinians, will remember Billy Sherman's march many a long day." I must close for tonight now, and will add our experience every day, until I find an opportunity to send this through the lines to you.

February 23rd. Contrary to our expectations, the night was unusually still--not a sound alarming us, though our ears were on the stretch during every moment of the time, and we were prepared to take to the woods. The negroes tell us that we had a guard without being conscious of it. The terrible threats, which the wretches have issued against us for our "insolence", the finding of the swords in the house, among which were several captured ones, and the admiration which they all expressed for the place and house left us still uneasy, but I trust in God's mercy. Not a Yankee has been to our house today. We have only seen a few at a distance. The negroes give rich accounts of their experiences, and concur in the opinion that they are the meanest nation on the face of the earth.

Springvale and every house on the place, excepting the negro quarters, is burnt. All of the negroes, except Peter, Simon Charlie and Closs, have made their escape, with loss of clothing and some provisions. Tommie came down this morning, hearing that the house was burnt, but will return to secure the horses, which were still safe from the enemy.

The story of the killing of Mr. Harrison, we hear, is false, but Mr. Brice's and Mr. John Adger's homes were both burned, and a good many others. There is no telling what to believe among the thousand reports that reach us. Poor Mrs. Robertson has borne herself bravely, but is suffering tortures on account of her loved ones.

February 24. We kept watch again last night, hearing that the country was full of stragglers, but we were much blessed again in being permitted to remain in our comfortable home. This morning, we commenced putting the house to rights, and have ascertained for the first time the extent of our losses. Hattie says that I must tell you that you never could imagine "ramsacking" carried to such an extent as was done here. Some of the Yankee officers told us the other day that he had never seen a house in such a condition. Each of us has lost a good many things, not enough to inconvenience us, but quite enough to heighten our already intense indignation. We are too relieved and delighted to hear of the safety of the whole of Mr. Robertson's party, after enduring hardships and losing everything, but the change of clothing they had on. They are pretty near home now, and soon will come up.

Just after dinner, about a dozen of Hampton's Scouts passed, riding down the road in search of stragglers. I never felt such reverence for our soldiers as I do now. I wish some of them would come to see us.

Not a Yankee in sight today. You cannot imagine the apprehension from which we have suffered during this dreadful week. If we could only fight, there is not one of us that would not enlist immediately. Betty writes that not a Yankee entered their house, they having been fortunate enough to secure a guard from the beginning. Mrs. Naylor's household suffered considerably, Aunt Martha not very much. Miss Finney's rooms were burnt, but she saved her clothing. Have not heard particulars of other friends. Late in the evening, we walked over to Mrs. Robertson's, and met the Doctor and the two Toms just returned from their eventful expedition.

25th. Raining the whole day, so that we have not been able to see any of our friends, although we are so anxious to meet them after our common trouble. Feel depressed as the excitement wears away, by our entire separation from friends in the Army.

26th. Although very wet, Hattie, Ria and myself walked into town and attended service in the Court House. It was an impressive and solemn occasion. Heard a fine sermon from Mr. Lord, on the text, "Man doth not live by Bread Alone." We were warmly welcomed by a host of friends, and spent a long time giving our experiences and listening to that of others.

Just as/were

Just as we were preparing to go to bed, Mr. Dwight arrived in excellent spirits, and looking much better for his sojourn in the bushes. Their escape was really wonderful.

27th. We went this morning to the scene of our expedition in the woods, and found our treasures beautifully packed away, and all safe. Disinterred them, and afterwards paid a visit at Mrs. Boyce's. We are enjoying intensely the blessing of quiet and immunity from the hated wretches. My little darling seems quite sick today. Lilla came to spend the night.

28th. This morning, we had the pleasure of seeing Lieut. Farley and an officer from Virginia, who called in to see how the Yankees had treated us. They are scouting in the neighborhood, and gave us many pleasant incidents of their recent exploit. We completed the work of disinterring, and found many of our articles injured by exposure to rain, especially a trunk number of likenesses. My little Louise continues very unwell. Mr. Dwight and Lilla with us all day. Daddy Saby came down, and gave us an account of the destruction of our dear old home.

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