

Echoes and Etchings

by

E. Alston Wilkes

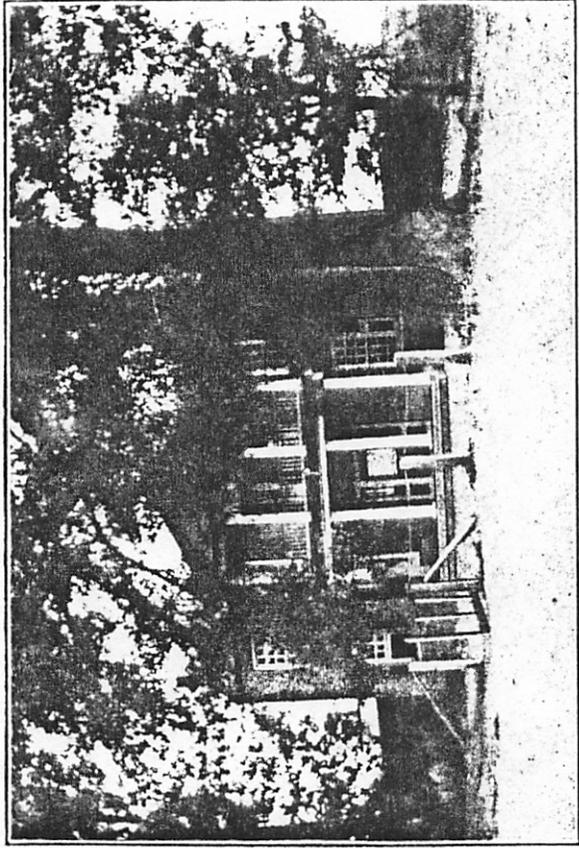


"Go, little Book! from this my solitude
I cast thee on the waters—Go thy ways:
And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,
The World will find thee after many days.
Be it with thee according to thy worth:
Go, little Book! in faith I send thee forth."



COLUMBIA, S. C.
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*This is only Chapter I of the book which
pertains to Fairfield County—*



The Home by the River

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PREFACE.

IT IS not necessary to apologize or write apologetically concerning the style, subjects and substance of these pages. It will not enhance the value of the book to say that it was written in circumstances unfavorable for composition and at times when there was lacking leisure so essential to elaboration and literary excellence. It does not help the cause for a political speaker to tell his audience at the beginning of the oration that he is really sick, but purposes to speak any way, praying their favor and indulgence. It does not pay for a preacher to tell his congregation that he has a headache, and had been in danger of a nervous breakdown, and might get in the same condition again, but that he would do the best he could, though handicapped by weakness and embarrassed by fears. He thus would prepare his hearers for a lame effort, and his apology would likely win more sympathy for his head and nerves than it would induce thoughts on the soul and salvation. It is best when a speaker consents to stand on platform before an audience to keep all physical and other troubles within, or not to take the stand. I will, therefore, let *ECHOES AND ETCHINGS*, with all its faults and shortcomings, go before a charitable public, fully persuaded that the critic's eye will detect the errors, and the honest-hearted will give the little volume honor and kind words, if it deserves success. It is not a work of fiction, or series of stories imaginative. It would be difficult to me, it seems, to create in the imaginative faculty—if I could—scenes, romance, places, persons, and plot them as real and live acting agents in love or doing dark deeds, when at the cross-roads, where I frequently pass, there stands a big fact full of tragic story, or across the street in that mansion another fact stands there with that "skeleton in the closet." I'd rather deal with the cross-roads' characters and that of

the mansion. I know them, and the "truth is stranger than fiction." This old world is novel enough for me, and so full, too, of freaks, fads and fools—and "psychological phenomena." Such facts as "The Trelevan Tragedy," for instance, are true. The real place might have been Conway, or some other town; but I haven't got it Conway, because some citizens would have taken offense had I so written it. "Ralph Ringwood," who might be in heaven now, may have been a business man of Conway and his name Peter Simonton, but I could not write him up as Peter, for fear of the Simontons, and giving offense to the family. A few chapters are reminiscent, and about the home by the river, and youth's pranks and follies, and the early years, which, if it does not greatly interest the average reader, will at least probably excite, for a moment, a kind fellow feeling, which makes all the world akin. Many, too, doubtless, who these lines may peruse, have fond recollections of their childhood home, of the dear sweet mother, now gone, and the garden, meadow, the brook and grove, where boyhood footsteps tracked long years ago. I have tried to hastily sketch some shifting scenes of the world about me. I have attempted to describe characters as I have known them and portray life with its tragedy and comedy as I have seen it. The object has been to incite to purity and goodness, and make men hate vice and love virtue more—and there runs a line of thought, here and there unconcealed, that would point all to Him whose ways are pleasantness and whose paths are peace.

E. A. W.

Barnwell, S. C., August 17, 1910.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL SHERMAN'S INVASION OF FAIRFIELD.

It is remarkable how far back the memory of some minds can go in the earliest years of this earthly existence. Some can bring to mind vividly and remember distinctly men, places, things and incidents that occurred when they were wee little beings of only three years or less. It is again rather remarkable how tenaciously memory clings to and readily recalls some special trifling incidents, and lets go more important events. For instance, here is one year when I fail to recall a single fact, few faces, or events except this: My great uncle, "Ned" Gibson, a bachelor and a physician, with whom I was sleeping one night when I was about four or five years old, placed my hand upon my heart, locating it for me, and gave me knowledge for the first time of the work and action of that important organ. Again, at five or six, I remember a pleasant remark of my mother to me one bright Christmas morning, and a little later on, my first fowl present, a frizzly hen, and old Mr. Veno, the well digger, and his promised gift—a shotgun—which was never realized. I can easily reproduce my feeling of admiration for Mr. Veno, and the exhilaration of the shotgun anticipation. And I remember the scene and occasion of my grandfather Wilkes' remarks to me once when I was four and a half. They were ungracious remarks, and repelling—"the unkindest cut of all." These, and many other insignificant occurrences of like nature stick to the mind, photographed, as it were, and often, as many do experience, in daily life, midst the trying tasks and tedious toil of matured years, and engrossing cares of this busy world—these little pictures of baby and boyhood days flit before you, and ever and anon come back again. One of the first and lasting impressions, often of the earliest years,

is the result of the contact with evil in the world. The trouble with the very young boy is not what he has not been taught, but what he has *caught* from this fearful and sometimes inevitable contact with that which defiles and with the older and sinful mind. It is not long before sin enters the innocent paradise of the nursery and trundle-bed. The future morality of a boy depends much upon the deportment and character of the nurse who bears him in her arms or leads him by the hand.

With reference to Sherman's invasion in the early spring of 1865, I remember, at the age of three years and six months, very few incidents—and the pictures are not complete, only parts here and there I can catch a glimpse of today. When the invading army took possession of fields and farm and premises of my grandfather, in Fairfield county, four miles west of Winnsboro, I recall myself sitting on the knees of a soldier near the potato house, in the backyard of the home, where the soldiers were roasting and eating sweet potatoes. I have a very vague recollection of that; but this incident, as far as it goes, I remember well: A soldier, either an officer or a cavalryman, took me up in his strong arms and, to my delight, placed me in his big saddle, on his fine black charger, and led the animal around the yard. I wanted to have the bridle in my hands, but he would not entrust me with the reins. He wore the "blue," but was doubtless a kind soul, and a father, too, perhaps, who had a dear little boy in his home somewhere in the North. My father, Eli. C. Wilkes, had died in 1863, just after Gettysburg, when the Confederate army was retreating south, following that terrific and disastrous campaign. He was taken from the roadside, where he had dismounted from his horse, and was conveyed, sick and with a burning fever, to the residence of Colonel Yancey, on the Shenandoah river, not far from Harrisburg, Va. There in that most Christian and hospitable home, nursed by

his devoted wife, who braved many perils to reach his bedside, he received the kindest attention from the family, but at last succumbed to that dire and dread disease, typhoid fever. The young soldier's body was brought to South Carolina and interred in his native soil. My widowed mother and myself returned to her father's, Robert Hawthorne, of Fairfield, saddened and sorrowing on account of the desolation and bereavements of the cruel war. She was there when Sherman had burned Columbia and was marching up the country, inspiring terror in the hearts of all peaceful inhabitants and leaving wrecked homes and a despairing people in his widening march. It having been known that the way from Columbia to Winnsboro would be the route of the invading host, many refugeed farther up the country. My grandfather urged my mother to depart. With baggage and baby boy she left the old home in a top-buggy, to which was hitched our faithful horse, Rob; but we had not gone many miles when the "king bolt" of the vehicle was broken and my mother, possibly considering this an ill omen, determined to beat a retreat and return home. The bolt was mended and the gearing fixed and, after two or three days' absence, to the joy of all, we arrived home. We were urged a few days before to depart, but received a most hearty welcome on our return. The proximity of the enemy, our uncertain fate, drew us close together, and my mother was happier to be with her aged parents, as she could now bear with them all privations and share with them all dangers. There was much hurry and hustle on place and plantation for two or three days before our Northern friends arrived. Household goods and chattels, bread and bacon, wardrobe articles and bureau valuables, were hidden here and there in the woods, banks of deep gullies, and buried behind high rocks, or elsewhere in the fields. Some of our neighbors, I have been informed, placed costly things and trinkets in coffins and interred them

in cemeteries, without prayer or ceremony uttered or expressed, and left the fresh mounds there in the hope of a profitable resurrection. Some skilfully removed the ceiling of the wall of the home and stored away their meal, flour, molasses and other groceries, and replaced the boards. If I am not mistaken, we had a quantity of food stuff hidden in that way, which was at one time fearfully jeopardized during the carnival. Our approaching opponents had won a most unenviable reputation for reveling, robbery and rapine, and rumors had gone forth that they spared "neither man, woman nor child." They were known, too, to be very careless with fire. Columbia, our beautiful capital city, was then smoking in its ruins, and the people, yet uninitiated, had fearful inward quaking and were much alarmed.

I insert an old letter from a Federal soldier to "Dear Wife," which was recently (1910) published in the papers. It discloses some facts and touches upon things and themes tender and delicate. One good note might well be written in favor of Lieut. Thos. Myers. If he were somewhat indifferent to the property and person of the "rebels," he, it seems was a thoughtful, affectionate husband, and loved the "grandmother" and "Aunt Charlotte:"

"A letter regarding Sherman's raid in Camden, S. C. The following highly interesting letter concerning Sherman's raid was found on Hobkirk Hill by an old colored woman just after Camden was raided by Sherman. This old colored woman brought this letter to a lady at Camden, who is now living in Charleston. The pitcher referred to is supposed to have been taken from Maj. John M. DeSaussure. The letter was written by a Federal officer while in Camden:

"Dear Wife:—

"Feby. 26th, 1865.

"I have no time for particulars, we have had a glorious time in this State. Universal License to burn and plunder was the order of the day.

"The Chivalry have been stripped of most of their valuables and fine gold watches, Silver pitchers, Cups, Spoons and Forks and etc., are as common in camp as blackberries.

"The valuables procured we estimate by companies—each company is requested to exhibit the result of its operation at any given place, one-fifth and first choice falls to the share of the Commander in Chief and staff, one-fifth to field officers of regiment and three-fifths to the Company. Officers are not allowed to join these expeditions without disguising themselves as privates. One of our Captains Commander borrowed a suit of citizen's clothes from one of our men and was successful in this place, he got a large quantity of Silver, among other things an old time Silver milk pitcher and a very fine gold watch from a Mr. DeSassure at this place. DeSassure is one of the F. F. H. of S. C., and was made to fork over liberally.

"Officers over the rank of Captain are not made to put their plunder in the estimate for distribution. This is very unfair and for this reason in order to protect themselves subordinate officers and privates keep back everything that they can carry about their persons such as rings, earrings, breastpins—of which, if I ever live to get home, I have about a quart. I am not joking, I have at least a quart of jewelry for you and the girls and some No. 1 diamond rings, and pins among them.

"Gen. Sherman has Silver and gold enough to start a bank his share in gold watches and chains alone at Columbia was Two Hundred and Seventy-five, but I said I could not go into particulars.

"All the general officers and many privates had valuables of every description even to Ladies' Embroidered Handkerchiefs. I have a share of them too.

"We took gold enough from the d— rebels to have redeemed their infernal currency. Whenever we come across it we burn as we consider it entirely worthless.

"I wish all the jewelry this army has could be carried to the old bay State it would deck her out in glorious style.

"It will be scattered all over the north and middle States.

"The d— negroes as usual prefer to stay at home particularly after they found out that we only wanted the able bodied men and to tell you the truth the youngest and best looking women. Some times we take off whole families and plantations of negroes by way of repaying the rebels but the useless part of these we soon manage to loose sometimes in crossing rivers, sometimes in other ways.

"I shall write to you from Wilmington, Goldsboro or some other place in N. C., the orders to march have arrived.

"I must close hurriedly. Love to Grand mother and Aunt Charlotte.

"Take care of yourselves and the children.

"Do not show this letter out of the family.

"Your affect. husband,

"P. S. :—

"THOS. L. MYERS.

"I will send this by flag of truce to be mailed unless I have a chance of sending it to Hilton Head. Tell Sadie I am saving a pearl bracelet and earrings for her but Lambert got the necklace and breastpin of the same set. I am trying to trade him out of them. These were taken from the Misses Jamison, daughters of the president of the S. C. Secession Convention. We found them on our trip through Ga."

My mother buried her valuables, with my father's papers, letters, pictures, articles of clothing, etc., not far from the

dwelling. On return trip from the funeral she forgot the watch—neglected to bury it in the box with the other things. It was my father's gold watch, sent home on the eve of the battle of Gettysburg, and the sacredness of association was far more precious than its real commercial value. She was in a path that ran through a field, uncultivated, and she hastily dug a hole by a small pine sapling and placed the watch in the ground. *That was the only thing that was not discovered and taken* by the roving and searching enemy. * * *

Now arose a sad dilemma and a most grave question, What must be done with Rob, the faithful horse, and our true and tried friend? How must he be concealed, how must he be saved? If we could have dug a hole and buried him like we did inanimate things it would have been cheerfully undertaken, but that was impossible. To let him remain in lot or stable would have been an easy capture for the invaders, and we doubtless would have had the painful experience of seeing him roughly handled, and hooked in harness to some piece of "Yankee" artillery. That could not be endured; something must be done to save dear old Rob. Rob had been a horse in his day—built somewhat on the pony order—short, round, compact. In color he was a sorrel or light bay, with long mane and tail. Often had *he* cantered, in days gone, gayly on Rob when he paid visits to his sweetheart, and merrily they would drive Rob over many miles of plain and hill together. He had therefore been considered a part of the family, was given the most careful attention and treated with unremitting kindness. In the particular section of Fairfield county where my grandfather resided the face of the lands adjacent the home were dotted here and there with large, conspicuous bowlders, which seem to grow and spring up out of the earth. Some of the high rocks were from eight to twelve feet in height and covered many square yards of earth. Since the War of 1861 a profitable granite quarry has been developed

there and many noble edifices have been corner-stoned and built of this excellent Fairfield rock. Between two of these large rocks that ran parallel with a passageway of six or eight feet, filled with undergrowth and bushes, we determined to conceal Rob. We, mother and myself, led him there by his halter one quiet early hour, a day before the invading army arrived—and tethered him between the high protecting rocks—the safest place we thought that could be found. Then and there were exhibited as sad and affectionate rites as were ever performed over the probable sacrifice of a noble and gentle horse that could not speak his “good-bye.” After his halter rein had been securely fastened to the limb of a stout bush, my mother threw her arms around old Rob’s neck and kissed him on his long flowing mane, and then she held me up, and as far as I could, placing my arms around the old fellow’s neck, I kissed him too. We feared that we would never see him again—a fear that was soon sadly realized. When the Federal troops had all departed we hastened to the place where Rob had been hidden—but he was gone. He had not tramped around his hitching place long before he was captured and led away. But the Yankees, the Yankees, innumerable! they soon were there around our home. All out there in the yards, lot and fields surrounding, invading barn, houses, and buildings, loft and cellar, searching, pillaging, pilfering. The roads were full, the woods were full of ’em. What a horrible condition, what a murderous scene! The same race as ours, the same religion, same speech, taste, temper and temperament. Our brethren of the same flesh and blood invading as enemies with fire and sword. All about the dusky darky cook in the kitchen, and the big black plowman in the sunny fields—that was mostly the inspiration of all the fuss and fury. What a benediction it would have been if all conspicuous statesmen who ruled and reigned could have waited for the sure and safe work of education and christian enlight-

enment! A progressive evolution would have accomplished in a decade or two far more for humanity, civilization and all sorts of rights, than what a revolution did in crime and blood. But man's ways are not God's ways, and he often thwarts heaven's most beneficent designs. I know there were very many smart speeches and thrilling things said and spoken about sacred liberty and sovereign rights of States—but if there had been no "nigger" in it, there would have been no such fratricidal strife about constitutional liberty and States' rights. Alas, indeed, there were one million funeral rites and our land after forty years and more does not cease to mourn. What a fearful, big, foul, fool thing it all was! If the North could have had more sunshine, and the cotton boll could have opened early, and the negro could have incubated and thrived, there would have been no crazed abolition sentiment, nor Appomattox and the Sherman-marching-to-the-Sea tragedies. Principles. A great deal has been said and sung and sworn about principles. Daring deeds have been done in the name of patriotic principles, but the inspiration of most of the patriotic principles depends upon which side of the creek you own. The driving force and conviction of worldly principles is mostly geographical. What did frozen Vermont, with her hard cider and apple butter and no cotton and no cane, want with the negro? The zeros would have immolated "cuffy" and would have made him a profitless investment and a useless institution. That being the situation, Vermont and the balance of the climate got pious and philanthropic, and wrote and read "Uncle Tom's Cabin"—and wept over it. Then they fou't. Three big brothers jumped on the other game fellow and overpowered him, holding him captive in purse and person. That's the sum and substance of the sad story. The same spirit worketh all in all among mortals here below. Let the State and status of our Jeff Davis and Abraham Lincoln be reversed—and what

must be the reasonable human supposition? If our Jeff Davis had been born and bred in Illinois in adverse circumstances, living on hard tack, reading by pine knot fires and going ten miles in shabby clothes to borrow a grammar and later on president; and Abe Lincoln had been begotten and reared in a cultured atmosphere where the cotton blooms in this sunny South—he would have held to the negro and swung in line on States' rights and States' sovereignty. And Davis in the White House would have danced as lively to "Yankee Doodle" as President Lincoln in Richmond would have to the tune of "Dixie." Davis likely would have been as statesman-like in '64 and '65 as the other proved to be, and Lincoln, had he fallen as President of the Southern Confederacy, would have suffered as philosophically as his brother American did in the dark, dreary prison of Fortress Monroe. All sectional division and animosity is as unreasonable as it is unrighteous. Christian principles and Christian enlightenment alone will obliterate it forever.

The invaders invaded thoroughly. My good grandmother had a peculiar breed of chickens among her other fowls in the poultry yard that alone escaped the marksmen and ingenuity of the "Yankees." They were very black chickens and could fly like crows. The negroes of the place lied roundly about the hidden treasures of "Massa" and "Missus," of which they knew nothing. Old Aunt Aggie, our negro slave and cook, scared out of her wits, was choked unmercifully and told all she knew and much more besides. The situation grew desperate; I think at an early hour the first day my mother was approached by a ruffian who demanded where her hidden valuables were, and especially the gold watch. She refused to divulge. He pointed his pistol at her, placed the muzzle against her breast and threatened her life if she did not tell him where her watch was. She again stoutly refused and told him face to face to shoot if he dared. He relented

and seemed to have been somewhat covered by the courage of a true Southern woman. I have that watch today, a "No. 3412 Liverpool"—a precious heritage I prize most highly. Soon after this event fire was threatened the house if confession as to buried articles were not forthcoming. Some furniture and quilts were piled up on the floor in the center of the large sitting room, and fire was being applied, if it had not already caught and begun to burn and smoke slowly, when my mother rushed out in the long, high, front piazza overlooking a sea of "blue coats" and thousands of men. She was a well-trained Master Mason's daughter, having taken in early life the "daughter's degree" in that great fraternity. She gave the "sign of distress"—the peculiar, that most impressive, most appealing masonic sign of distress. There stood the brave young woman with not a friend near, she knew, with no arm to screen or protect her—the poor mother helpless through fright—a younger sister paralyzed by fear—and the dear old paternal home about to be reduced to ashes. There she stood, collected, and gave the sign, once, twice. It was recognized by a young officer on horseback not far away—near where I think the front yard gate stood. He made his way hurriedly up to the piazza near where she was standing, and politely asked her what it was she wanted. She pointed to the room from which smoke was now issuing. He saw and understood. The fire was quickly extinguished and he had the miscreants driven from house, hall and porches. The home was entirely cleared, a guard was placed around the premises, and everything was saved. When the guard (consisting of several men) appointed were relieved, another took its place and we were spared conflagration, and the suffering and privation which would have inevitably followed.

My mother became acquainted with a chaplain of an Ohio regiment or brigade, whose name I regret I am not able to recall. I only remember the incident as it was related to me.

He was an Episcopal clergyman and lived in Dayton, Ohio. He probably had seen or heard something of my mother's heroism and admired her courage. He advised her to leave South Carolina and the South, as ruin, wreck and desolation would follow Sherman's invasion. He offered to conduct her to his home in Dayton, Ohio, and employ her as governess in his family, but she firmly refused to go. She could not leave home and her aged parents in their distress and destitution, and would rather meet adversity than dwell far away in comfort and comparative prosperity. I've always been proud, and the reader, I know, will pardon me for thus expressing myself—I've always been proud of my brave, sweet mother, and her spirit has cheered me in many a sad and lonely hour.

* * * * *

Invasions don't last always. Sieges will come to an end, the agony will disappear by and by. Our Northern friends—and some were indeed our friends—moved on and left us horseless and helpless, penniless and hopeless, and for a while the "blessing" at the table was asked over very plain diet, and parched corn ground for coffee. But following the dire and dread February, 1865, with its bitter memories, the April sun shone as sweetly and softly as ever before, and the Spring roses bloomed, and Sherman's army didn't scare all the birds away—and the spirit of the people returned to 'em again. A crop was planted and home and State reconstruction began. Spring passed, summer ended and the leaves fell, and when the roses bloomed again in 1866, I distinctly remember there stood as a bride in the parlor of the old Hawthorne home facing the mantel, my mother by the side of a worthy gentleman, Colonel Richard Woods of Chester county, and they were happily married. I thought this was all so very strange—a new papa!

1866 married at

1839²⁷ the house at least this
old