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A Faithful Narrative of Elizabeth Wilson.

New Haven, 1786. 12 pp.

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FAITHFUL NARRATIVE

OF

Elizabeth Wilson ;

Who was EXECUTED at CHESTER,

January 3d, 1786.

Charged with the MURDER

OF HER

TWIN INFANTS.

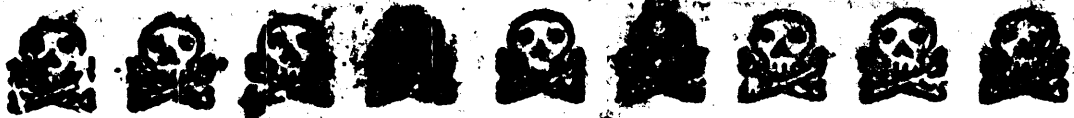
Containing some account of her

DYING SAYINGS;

With some serious reflections.

Drawn up at the request of a friend unconnected
with the deceased.

New-Haven : Re-printed in the year 1786.



Borough of Chester, Jan. 5, 1786.

On the third instant was executed here, pursuant to her sentence, Elizabeth Wilson; charged with the murder of her twin illegitimate infants, on the 12th of October, 1784.

As the case of this woman is of a singular nature, has engrossed the public attention; and as there are various reports circulating respecting her, the following narrative, drawn up at the request of a person unconnected with her, may be acceptable at this time.

WAS found, by a person with a dog, crossing the fields, in a piece of woods a little distance from the road leading from Brandywine to the Turk's Head, two dead infants. Upon enquiry, and from concurring circumstances, there was reason to conclude; they were Elizabeth Wilson's; who some time before was delivered of two children, not far from the place where they were found, and who about eight weeks before, had left the house with the children; having a design, as she said, of going to Philadelphia. She was accordingly apprehended, and after examination before Justice Taylor, was ordered to this jail.

She was brought to trial the last court of Oyer and Terminer, which commenced on the 17th of October last, before the Honorable Judge Atlee; circumstances were so strong against her, that she was brought in guilty, and received sentence of death.

Before

Z 88. 114

Before, at, and after her trial, she persisted in denying the fact ; her behaviour was such, in general, as gave reasons to conclude she was innocent of the murder of which she was charged, or was an insensible, hardened creature, and did not expect to die for this crime.

It was some time after she was sentenced, before she could be prevailed upon to make a discovery of the person that committed the horrid murder. A great deal of pains were taken to make her sensible that a promise of concealment under the circumstances she was in when made, and in a matter of such consequence, was not binding. She was very desirous of seeing her younger brother. † When he came to visit her, he proposed to him the making a real discovery of the truth ; he refused hearing it, until he had called several persons of character as witnesses. The account she gave them, or the confession she then made, and which was similar to the following one, together with their proceedings thereon, in finding the person charged with the murder, were presented to the Honorable the President and Council : who were pleased to grant her a respite for one month : with the respite came her death warrant, ordering her execution on Tuesday the 3d day of January, 1786.

During her confinement she was visited by serious people of different religious denominations, and appeared amazingly ignorant respecting her spiritual state, until some time after she was sentenced, when
many

† This note, in her own hand writing, was found on her table----- O could I but see my own brother ! to speak just a few words to him, to ease my broken heart, that is so distressed. Oh how hard a thing it is that I cannot see him ! Was he in my place and I in his, I would go to him, was't on my hands and knees ; but he will not come to me, to speak one word to me, before I depart this life and see man no more : so I just give myself up to the Lord, begging that he would hear my case, and give me life everlasting.

many were much affected at the relation she gave of her religious exercises, and the apparent concern and distress of her mind. She said the dungeon was the happiest place she ever was in in her life.

The night before she was to be executed she was visited, at her request, by two ministers of the Baptist persuasion; and who, besides visiting her, came to attend the execution. After some time spent in serious devotion, she made the following confession: dated

Chester, Dec. 6, 1785, Tuesday Evening, 10 o'Clock.

I ELIZABETH WILSON, daughter of John and Elizabeth Wilson, was born in East Marlbro' Township, Chester County, of honest, sober parents. From sixteen to twenty-one years of age, I had a religious concern, but thro' the subtilty of Satan and corruption of nature was led away to the soul-destroying sin of fornication, which I believe to be my predominant evil. I had three children in an unlawful way before I fell into the wretched company of † Joseph Deshong. At the time I fell in company with him I lived in Philadelphia at the sign of the Cross-Keys, in Chestnut-street, at the corner of Third-street. In the beginning of the year 1784, he insinuated himself into my company, under pretence of courtship, declaring himself a single man, and by repeated promises of marriage deceived and persuaded me to consent to his unlawful embraces. In a short time after I proved with child of the two dear innocents, for which I must shortly suffer an ignominious death. I told him of my situation, and then he dropt entirely his purpose of marriage; but told me I must stay in town until I was delivered,
and

† From her account and description of the man, and from some persons who used Mr. Bogart's house, (the Cross Keys,) 'twas found that the name he passed by with her, Joseph Deshong, was not his proper name.

and promised to bear all the expences, declaring I should not want for any thing. Accordingly I rented a room of Joseph Rhoads in Union-street. I stayed there a few weeks, and provided for myself; in which time he never came near me. And the time of my delivery drawing near, I was in great want of money, and after repeated inquiries after him I found that he had left me in that unhappy condition, I then found I could not live in town; so proceeded to the house of Josiah Wilkinson, in East Bradford township, Chester County, where I was delivered of my dear infants. I continued at the aforesaid house four or five weeks, and then I went to Philadelphia and left the children at Mr. Wilkinson's in order to find my deceiver, where I met with him and told him my deplorable situation. When I told him, I had two children, he looked in my face, saying, "the devil! you have?" I requested him to do something for me by fair means, assuring him if he did not consent, I should apply to the law: He answered, I need not go to law, for he would do for me, and seemed to sympathize with me, in my pitiful case. I then requested him to put one of the dear children to nurse, the other I purposed to keep on condition of his giving me a supply of money. To which he consented, and gave me a small trifle to bear my expenses back to the aforesaid Wilkinson's. He then appointed a day for me to return back to the city with my children, in order for him to fulfil his promise. The fatal appointed day being come, I, according to promise, set off to meet him at the appointed place (Newtown-Square) but contrary to my expectations, he met me within two miles of the aforesaid Wilkinson's house. When we met he kindly accosted me, and getting on his horse, he jumped him over the fence, and requested me to go into the woods with him. Accordingly I went with him, and sat down on a rotten log,

log, with both my children in my arms. He asked me to let him look at one of the children, in order to see if it look'd like him. He holding it in his arms, asked me what I thought I would do with them? I told him that I thought it was his place, according to promise, to do for them. After a little pause he laid the dear infant on the ground, taking the other one out of my arms, and laid it beside its dear little fellow sufferer, making this reply to my requesting him for money: I have no money for you, nor your bastards neither. He then requested me to take their dear lives; which I would by no means consent to, but requested him to let me have them, and I would beg for them. He then arose up, putting a pistol to my breast, forbidding me to make any noise; then he wickedly stamped on their dear little breasts, upon which the dear infants gave a faint scream and expired; he still keeping the pistol at my breast, forcing me most solemnly to vow, that I would never discover the dreadful act; to which I, thro' fear, consented. He then requested me to strip my dear dead infants naked. Thro' fear I took off each of their little gowns, but could proceed no further; my bowels yearning over my dear children. He then took them up, and made a place with his feet, and covered them with leaves, and throw'd a piece of brush over them, and took me to Philadelphia. To the truth of this relation, I appeal to the eternal God to witness; before whose dreadful bar I expect to appear the ensuing day. A guilty rebel I acknowledge myself to be. My sins are more in number than the hairs of my head; but my Righteous Judge doth know my innocence in respect of that cruel murder. I know I deserve not only death, but hell; yet, nevertheless, I hope to obtain mercy, through the blood and righteousness of the adorable Redeemer, to whose boundless mercy I commend my poor naked soul; venturing into that unknown world.

world, only depending, (I trust) on the all-sufficient merits of that precious ~~God~~-Man, that died on the tree.

“ Lord Jesus ! accept thy sinning creature ! and receive my spirit ! So prayeth the dying

ELIZABETH WILSON.”

• Taken from her own mouth, the evening before she suffered, by *John Stancliff*, Minister.

Present—Mr. Thomas Taylor, Sub-Sheriff,
Rev. Thomas Fieeson,
Joshua Vaughan.

This confession she signed ; afterwards the ministers were preparing to go to Philadelphia to lay it before the Council, which was about two o'clock in the morning : they were informed her brother had came down from Philadelphia that evening, stopt at Mr. Kerlin's, and said he would be in Chester early in the morning. It was thought proper to see him before the ministers went up ; two persons went for him to his place, two miles from Chester ; when he came, he informed he had a respite for her, which superseded the necessity of going that night. We are the more particular in this part of the relation, as we are of opinion, neither the prisoner, minister, nor any person in or about the jail, knew that she was respited. This confession was put into the hands of one of the Council.

During the time of her respite her behaviour was in general consistent with her situation ; but not appearing at all times so deeply affected, as ~~when the~~ ministers visited her, some reports of the prisoners, intimating the insincerity of her profession, gave uneasiness to her friends : but when she was informed of these reports she was greatly distressed, and accounted for them in such a manner, as to remove all scruple of her sincerity.

January

• Her respite was brought by her brother about an hour after confession was wrote, and execution put off to January 3d.

January the 3d, the morning of her execution; she was again visited by one of the beforementioned ministers, and other serious persons, who spent some time with her in religious exercises. The minister exhorted her to a steadfast faith in the Son of God, who was not ashamed to be called the "friend of sinners," and who came into the world to "seek and save that which was lost," endeavouring to impress on her mind the solemnity of death, and an eternal state, the necessity of a real change of heart and holiness of nature, as a meetness for the kingdom of God. Her behaviour was serious, solemn, and devout.

When informed there was no respite for her, and was desired to prepare for death, she received the awful summons with a considerable degree of composure; and, after a short space, said, "she did not expect to live." Hearing that her brother was gone in haste to Philadelphia, she was much moved and said, "My poor brother is gone to Philadelphia with an aching heart, he has been concerned about me, kind and tender to me; I hope the Lord will reward him for all his care." After some more serious conversation with her, she was taken with a fit, the woman attended her, and the minister left the room.

She was attended to the place of execution by the beforementioned minister, and a preacher of the Methodist order. On the way the sheriff put her in mind where she was going, and that if she had charged any person wrongfully, now was the time to retract. She said she had not, and seemed uneasy at her sincerity being called in question. At the place of execution, after exhortation and prayer, she requested her confession might be read: leave being obtained of the sheriff, it was read accordingly. She stood up and confirmed what was therein related, on the testimony of a dying woman; appeared penitent,

that, resigned, and engaged in prayer ; prayed that others might take warning from her, to shun those sins that brought her to this shameful end ; said she loved God and from her heart forgave all that had injured her, and prayed for forgiveness of her sins, and that the Lord would have mercy on her ; once more declared her innocence of some things, as before mentioned, and seemed uneasy that she should be suspected of insincerity. Being asked the state of her mind, she said her burden was in a great measure removed ; seemed easy at the thoughts of death : frequently expressing her confidence in the adorable Redeemer and Saviour of sinners.

The execution was prolonged to give time for her brother's return from Philadelphia.

The sheriff reminded her that she had but a few minutes to continue, and to make the best use of her time, and appeared much affected.

In her last moments she appeared perfectly calm & resigned ; took an affectionate leave of the minister, no longer able to bear the sight, and said, " she hoped to meet him in a better world." The moment before she was to be turned off, the sheriff asked her if with her dying breath she sealed the confession she had made ? When she understood who spoke to her, she moved her hand and said : " I do, for it is the truth." And in a moment was turned off, and quickly left the world, in exchange, we hope, for a better.

But here we must drop a tear ! What heart so hard, as not to melt at human woe !

Her brother came in all haste from Philadelphia, with a respite or letter from the Honourable the President and Council, to delay the execution, but through unexpected and unavoidable hindrances on the road, did not arrive until twenty-three minutes after the solemn scene was closed. When he came with the respite in his hand, and saw his sister irre-

everably gone, beheld her motionless, and sunk in death, who can paint the mournful scene ?

Let imagination if she can !

He took her body home, and some efforts were made to restore her to life, but in vain. The following she was decently enterr'd, and a large number of respectable people attended the funeral. The minister that attended her in her last moments attended her to the grave. The exercise was solemn ; a deep concern was conspicuous on the face on many, if not all that were present.

Thus ended the life of Elizabeth Wilson, in the 27th year of her age ; innocent, we believe, of the crime for which she suffered, but guilty in concealing, or rather attempting to conceal, a crime of so horrid a nature, which he was privy to.

May others reflect, that a few year past she was esteemed having a virtuous character.

May they, agreeable to her dying request, take warning from her sufferings and shameful end ; and shun the paths of vice, which lead to endless woe : and as the sin that brought her to this shameful end is so predominant, may they in an especial manner guard against it, and be kept from it.

May they consider that sin is hateful to God, contrary to his pure and holy nature, and that he cannot look on it, but with the utmost abhorrence.

May they seriously reflect on its malignant nature ! and dreadful ! dreadful ! consequences. The wages of sin, says an inspired apostle, is death. Painful idea !

Death, natural or corporal, a separation of the soul from the body. Death spiritual, a separation of the soul from God. Death eternal, a separation of soul and body from God ; the absence of all good ; the presence of all evil ; unspeakable torments in soul and body for ever and ever ; where our Lord says, their " worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

May they fly from sin to HIM that bled, and groaned, and died the painful, shameful and accursed death of the cross for sinners; that they may have healing by his wounds, and life by his death: so shall they be saved from sin and its dreadful consequences here, and for ever hereafter.

Which God of his mercy grant, for the sake of his beloved co-equal, and co-eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The following are taken from papers wrote by her own hand in the latter part of her Confinement, as appears from the dates.

ELIZABETH WILSON, her hand, the 2d day of November, 1785, under whose eyes those lines may come, I pray they may take warning by me, a poor distressed prisoner, that is begging for mercy. O Lord! turn not thyself from me! Oh my Heavenly Father! But let me intreat thee to shew mercy to me, a poor distressed sinner. O God! thou knowest my heart is broken within me! O Blessed Lord! help thou my poor begging soul, in the day that I leave this world; and give me life everlasting. World without end. Amen.

I will pray to thee, O my God! while I have breath to breathe. O Lord! have mercy on me a poor sinner! wash me clean, O my God! and make me fit for thy kingdom, where I can have rest and peace for my poor soul! for here I have none! Amen to this world.

ELIZABETH WILSON, in Chester goal, 11th day of November, 1785, under sentence of death, cries for mercy to God. Oh Lord! have mercy on me a poor begging sinner, that is now pleading. O Lord! be merciful unto me! heal my soul! for I have sinned against thee, blot out my iniquity, O my Heavenly Father! and give me to feel thy power

er more and more ! for my poor soul's sake. O Lord ! I remember thy blessed promise : That they that seek thee with their whole heart is sure to find thee. O my dear Redeemer ! look down with an eye of pity on thy poor unworthy servant, that can do nothing of myself without thy help, O Lord of life and glory ! hear thou my cries ! pity my poor distressed soul ! O my dear Redeemer ! wash me, purge me, from all my dross ; and make me fit for thy kingdom : where all glory is. O Lord ! I regard not what I suffer here on earth, to go to thee above, where all tears are wiped away, and there is no more sorrow. And so farewell to all this world, hoping that God will shew mercy to my poor begging soul in Heaven ; where there is joy and peace, for ever and ever more. World without end. Amen, and Amen.

ELIZABETH WILSON, in Chester goal, under the sentence of death, on the 22d day of October, in the year of our Lord 1785. O Lord ! help my poor soul, and shew an eye of pity to thy distressed servant, that is begging at thy door for mercy, for her never-dying soul ! O Lord of life and glory ! turn not thy ear from me ! O my heavenly Father ! but grant me mercy ! mercy ! mercy ! O Lord ! that I may say in peace. Amen to this world.

Psalms 55, verse 21. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter ; but war was in his heart : his words were softer than oil ; yet were they drawn swords.

Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee ; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved, but thou, O God ! shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction ; bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days ; but I will sustain thee.

F I N I S