

Source: Elliott Papers, University Archives, University of the South.

[Sada Elliott to Habersham Elliott, 2 May 1871]

Saints Rest
April 28, 1871

My dear brother:

I have been intending to write you for some time, but I find as I grow older I find it harder to do what I intend. But I have too much to say to stop any longer at excuses, so forgive me, *mon chere*, and let me go on. We have begun our move into the new house, and for a wonder we are not in a rush, as we usually are when there is anything to be done. We are moving in a quiet, grave, and dignified way, that will not be hurried, no one up here ever imagines that "the doctor" could be hurried, or ever had been made to go out of a slow walk.ⁱ The blessed old books have been unpacked, and are very nearly arranged in their proper order. The old book cases are up, just like home, and I can almost imagine I can see Papa walking up and down, stopping every now and then to look at and feel some pet book. I handle them just as though I were shaking hands with some dear old friends whom I had not seen for some time. We will have all ready when you come, and you will find it home, home as you remember it, the same old kernal, only in a pretty new shell. The piano is newer and better, and I shall be prepared to play for you as much as you want: Orpheus and any others you may fancy. When you bring up your two dogs we will have, at the least, five dogs, four pointers and one setter. John has a little pup, one of the students sent him, it is milk white with black eyes and named Bob Lee. We call him Lee in memory of Rese's mother. I tell Lucy he is much more interesting than Johnny B. and I am so true to your training, that I really believe I think so. John seems very happy over both baby & dog and pays about equal attention to them. Now my dear brother what do you mean by saying that I must not drag you out into Society? Do you not know, can it be true that you have not heard that I am going to abjure society and make tracks for the sisterhood? Leave "the world and worldly things beloved" and retire to the seclusion of a church home for old maids. Do you not realize that I, having reached the age of 22, have "quit struggling" and quite sneer matrimony down; squalling brats and curtain lectures being too much for my nerves. When a woman gives up all idea of matrimony, she either turns saint or woman's rights, and as the name of Elliott has never yet been disgraced, I do not propose to find my vocation in the Forum. The only thing left me then is saint - "picture it, think of it," Saint Sarah. It goes against the grain very much. I never was made for a saint.

May 2nd

I had to leave my letter and in the interim it has been blown off the table and soiled, but you must excuse that. Yesterday we had grand May doings, it being the first. If you had only been there, you would have never had to ask another question about our society – for everyone was there. I fear that there is no describing our society for it is so utterly novel and unique, that I could have no similies to guide your imagination by.

Beginning from the “South End” of the town, I will give you the families as they come. First, come the Tomlinsons, who live on the same spot where the Castleburys used to live.ⁱⁱ A square white house with green blinds, an unlovely porch and not the sign of a shade tree save a few freshly planted saplings. A straight gravel path leading from a fancy gate, set in a rail fence, terminates at the foot of a square pair of steps. This is “Chestnut Hill”, called so because all the saplings are oaks.ⁱⁱⁱ Mr. T. is very large & fat, with prominent, small, blue alligator eyes, a yellow skin that lies in large creamy wrinkles all over his face. He hath what is generally termed a “screw”.^{iv} He owed a good many debts in South Carolina, which he was quite able to pay, but deemed it safer to make over all his property to [his son and clerk] Willie and go into bankruptcy. He is now doing a thriving business up here. Willie is under the old man’s thumb, in fact, the only change in the youth is a vast increase in length; he must have the credit, however, of being fair and square in all his dealings and of striving against parental authority. Mrs. T. is dried up mentally, morally, spiritually, and physically.

Next comes the Polks, a widow lady, a distant cousin of our friends. She is a very nice, common sense, proper, dignified, kindhearted woman and never meddles in other people’s business.^v She lives in a melancholy, mulatto-colored wooden house, with pink blinds, named Waverly. The front yard is trampled into a desert, only redeemed by the shade trees, a dilapidated rail fence and no gate. She has three little children & keeps house for 26 boys.^{vi}

Next comes Mrs. Coley’s house, which is now occupied by Miss Gibson & her niece, Miss Jones, with whom Willie Tomlinson is “smit.” They have 8 boys. It is quite a neat cottage, white and green as usual, a decent rail fence & neat gate. Miss Gibson is “shadily” 50, lean and daggerdown, has to take medicine to keep ugly from striking in, but with all a kindly soul and much liked by hungry boys. Miss Jones is about Hesse’s^{vii} age, squarely built, but tall & rather fine looking, a general favorite, but nobody’s friend.

Then comes the Turnpike.^{viii} First on that road is the Dabney family. 1st Mrs. D., a large, handsome, loud-voiced, kind-hearted, spoiled, selfish, tactless, managing, meddling woman. 2nd Six stupid, ugly children. 3rd Miss Marye, Mrs. Dabney’s sister, a pleasant-looking and really fine woman about Hesse’s age & size. 4 Professor Dabney, a dear, delightful, abstracted, over-run, learned, entertaining, over-worked man,

delicate, refined, and venerable-looking, although only 38. Both the Dabneys and Miss Jones are refined. Mrs. Polk is a little western. All lack polish except Mr. D. They live in a melancholy, weather-stained, unpainted barnlike edifice named Alabama in a nice lot surrounded by the usual rail fence.

Next comes the Classic Oxford Row, four little cabins where dwell 8 youths.

Next comes the Greens. A nice house out of Downing's Architecture, rather variegated in color but generally good-looking, named Kendall; flanked by two cottages in which dwell 12 young bipeds. Bishop Green is a nice old man. [His daughter] Miss Lilly is about Hesse's age, plain and sickly but pleasant enough, not intellectual but not stupid, not graceful & not accomplished, generally liked. Mrs. Mercer Cotton, her sister, Mr. M. Cotton, & a small baby form the rest of the family. The last two are too negative to describe; only the baby is powerful ugly.

Next comes Judge Phelan's establishment, a huge ugly pinky brown house, with pinkier brownier windows. Flanked by two cottages in which dwell 13 young gentlemen. Quite a neat yard, fence, & gate, the fence being plank. The family consists of the Judge, his four daughters, & a little rip of a son. The ages of the daughters are rather misty, they range themselves between fifteen and 22, but some inconvenient old family friends who were here last summer put them between 20 & 30. Miss Cille (Priscilla) is quite handsome, amiable, weak, milky-minded, & badly educated, quite western and unpolished. The next, Miss Mary, is fat, plain, shrewish, fast & vulgar, smart but uncultivated, spelling "tailor" [as] "taylor", etc. Next is Anna, slender and gentle, sometimes lovely, always pretty, hair like Florence Locke's; retiring, conscientious, proper, refined, hard common sense, & a fondness for books. She runs the establishment & tries hard to keep order. Next is Carrie, a second edition of Mary, only better looking & more amiable. The Judge is an obstinate, conceited old Irishman and quite a humbug, picks his teeth at table, uses his fingers instead of his *mouchoir*^{ix} and is not nice. Their place is named "The Forks", being situated in a fork where the depot road joins the Turnpike.^x

Opposite The Forks is a dormitory called Monastery occupied by Professor Harrison & about seven youths.

Next in the same lot lives a Mr. Judd & family, he is a divinity student, was once on the stage. I should judge him to have been about third rate, his manner is a little tragic but he is good and self-sacrificing. He has a nice little wife and a pretty little daughter like little Phoe.^{xi}

Next to Mr. Judd comes the Elliotts, a very queer sort of family to tell the truth. They have just moved into their new house, which is quite a decent affair on the whole. The style is Gothic, color pale lemon, trimming white. The lot is quite a nice one though not fixed up yet. On the southern side of the big yellow house is a little yellow house

which is occupied by ten youths. The [larger] place is named "Saint's Rest." The family are six in number, not counting the baby. 1st is Mrs. Elliott, a charming old lady of the old school, perfectly indescribable; intensely pleased with and proud of all her children except the second daughter, Miss Sada, of whom she is a little doubtful. 2nd is "The Doctor" a good-looking stiff young man, very well satisfied with himself and all his belongings, but this last seems to be a family trait. He is quite popular and reputed to be scientific and smart. To me he looks as if he was a man who had "Tum-much oman": he is devoted to his mother, but I think his wife worries him a little, she is too much like an ancient relative of his whom I met once, a Miss Hetty Elliott, in fact I heard him tell her so once. 3rd comes Miss Hesse, she might be termed the "wheel horse" of the concern; runs the machine and bothers the Chaplain, makes him feel queer on the left side Miss [illegible] called her the "land lock", to laughter. 4th comes Miss Charlotte, quite a nice young lady, very high church as to theory, has a little too much Grecian bend, but generally liked and very pleasant. 5th comes Mrs. Elliott, *secunda*, a commonplace little woman, kind-hearted & amiable, but very fussy and wanting in tact, rather a grooved out mind and wanting in decision. 6th comes Miss Sada, not at all lacking in the family trait of self-complacency, very contrary to every one and every thing, and very obstinate, rather selfish and supercilious, quite a tease, not very intimate with anything but her own shadow. 7th comes the baby generally called John, by his loving mama "Jeannot", by his Aunt Sada "Jenny". Quite a nice little baby but not quite as wonderful as his adoring mother thinks.

Next to the Elliotts come the Gorgas family, consisting of the General, commonly called "Old Spot," Mrs. G., and six children, dubbed by Miss Sada "the little Gorgies" instead of "the little Gorgusses" as they have heretofore been called. The father is a medium-sized man, not very pretty, walks pigeon-toed and as though on eggs. His mind runs in a straight line, fixed at West Point, & has never been known to deviate. Mrs. G is about the same size as the General, not quite so pretty, rather tragic and soft soddery. Walks a great deal with her knees, reminds one a little of Miss Flight in *Bleak House*. Four of the Gorgies are girls, reminding one strongly of the little Kenwigses in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Their walk is rather a cross between father and mother, which makes it a spasmodic creep, they are uglier than both but quite nice children on the whole. The Chaplain, Gen. Shoup, lives with them. He is as erratic as the clouds, thin, good looking, smart, pleasant, honest, frank, distracted, and very intimate at the Elliotts. Wears long coat tails, has thin legs and they never go in the same direction, reminds one of a windmill.

Next comes the Seviars, very kind but rather contracted sort of people.

Opposite them lives Mrs. Cotton, a very pleasant woman, quite smart, broad-minded, sharp-tongued, keen, good looking, and about 52. Keeps Otey Hall. With her lives Mr. Cooper, a tutor, a very lame man who has to be rolled around in a chair, quite young and an example of Christian resignation and patience to anybody. There is also a Mr. Lee Cotton, called handsome but looks like a barber's apprentice, greasy waving

hair that falls poetically low on his brow, “a Killing Moustache” & bad teeth, keeps a wholesale grocery down at the depot.

Then comes the Fairbanks who live just where the Polks used to [live]. As the Major behaved so gallantly in the war he named his place “Rebel’s Rest”. They are as they were only a little more so.

Next comes the Library^{xii}, then the Holmes family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes & numerous canaries. Mrs. Holmes looks like Aunt Emma, rather wilferish and old “Lucien Dear” quite under hack. “Old Solution” as the boys call him, reminds one of Chadband & Stiggins^{xiii}, [a] fat, sleek, crawly sort of man. Kisses his wife on all occasions, besides all this is a dunderhead.

Next comes Tremlett Hall and the Cook family. Judge Cook a mild, meek, harmless, smiling old man. Mrs. Cook a spry, little undecided woman, hesitating at every thing, but now as my paper has given out I will desist.

You look worn out with all my uncharitable wordiness. As I know how men hate crossed letters, I will keep my repentance for the next, but it is all true. Everyone is quite well & long to see you. We are forever talking of you and your visit here, how nice it will be. Everybody sends love. Hereafter I will send you a weekly letter, poor fellow.

Goodbye

Your lovingest sister

Sada

ⁱ Sada’s and Habersham’s older brother John Gibbes Barnwell Elliott (1841-1921) was the University health officer and taught chemistry at Sewanee from 1870-1885.

ⁱⁱ This house was much expanded and eventually named Wyndcliff. It stands at 341 Kentucky Avenue and is now owned by Bran and Cindy Potter.

ⁱⁱⁱ These saplings are now very large oaks.

^{iv} She implied he had a permanent scowl; his face was screwed up in a frown.

^v Elizabeth Polk was a cousin by marriage of the late Leonidas Polk and his widow Frances

^{vi} Since the University did not have any dormitories until the 1890s, students lodged at boardinghouses owned by private individuals. Bachelor professors sometimes lived in larger boardinghouses to help keep order.

^{vii} Sada’s sister Hester was seven years her senior, and would have been about 29 years old when this letter was written.

^{viii} This road was built after the Civil War to connect the University with Cowan. It left the Plateau top just east of University View (where the Cross is located) and wound down to the Valley. You can still find remnants of the paving stones below its intersection with

Carruthers Road, and part of it is now traversed by the Perimeter Trail. The Turnpike met today's Tennessee Avenue in front of the current location of Quintard Hall.

^{ix} French for handkerchief or tissue.

^x Where Elliott Dormitory stands today.

^{xi} Theology student Harvey O. Judd's father, B. S. Judd, was an Episcopal deacon in Minnesota before moving to the Cumberland Plateau in the late-1850s.

^{xii} The University's first library was located where the ATO house stands today.

^{xiii} Hypocritical clerics in the work of Charles Dickens.