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Letter from Elizabeth Ott to Alton Easton, July, 1847

Elizabeth Ott

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Letter 5.th

St. Charles Mo. July 1847.

Col. A. K. Easton. —

Again my dear Friend, I feel that I may write you, my assurance arises not from the nature of what will fill these pages, but solely from your indulgent love, to it I commend myself trustingly, & hope this may afford a few moments amusement to him, whose regard is, to me, so precious.—

My last was mailed the 3^d. just a month after our parting, that afternoon I spent with Mrs. Easton alone, & you were the chief subject of our conversation, She told me of your outfit, & all she had learned of you at the Fort, & that you had the honor of having your command the best prepared of any that had left that point That was exceedingly gratifying, though "just what I should have expected," of one whose decision & judgment equalled [sic] yours. — Do you remember your last verbal injunction "You must take care of these shoulders." Today I have prepared to obey it. & it is the first I have used my thimble & I have sewed with great ease [the word might also be "care" but "ease" seems more likely in context] & but one week has elapsed since the operation

4th Sabbath. My class in S. School was unusually interesting & Mr. Smith unusually mild in his sermon, He has returned & desires to remain, but all are not pleased with his vascillation [sic] This afternoon I spent alone & must confess sad thoughts were my company in spite of all efforts to chase them away But a letter from brother Liberia [Siberia? See note below] came with consolation, He says of yourself "I am far from thinking him "vascillating" in his situation he has done no less than honor demanded & if I am a proper judge of my own feelings I should have done likewise, even against my whole family Men are called to surrender self, & private plans for public good & there is no alternative but to go forward in duty.

[In a previous letter (6.19.1847), Eliza's brother's name was clearly spelled "Siberia," and this occurs in all future references. In this document only, the "S" looks more like an "L". Since both "Siberia" and "Liberia" are unusual names, it is not clear from context which one is correct.]

July 5th. Spent the morning at L. Wood. closing school business with Mrs. Sibley – Satisfactory to both, We are now settled & paid off &c. After which I had a balancing of accounts with myself & find after the collectable bills are collected provided they can be, the difference to me from the change of ~~the~~ difference to me from L W. – School to the Town School will be above \$100, I state this because I feel it is your right to know all, — Still I have sufficient to save me from dependence & more coming to ensure it.

Let us look at the bright side, & you will see in some degree with me that I am still the gainer, What a perfect refuge I have found with Mrs. Easton, in the severe trials of the past months, How could I have born them at L.W. or how learned to appreciate Mrs. E. in any degree & not the least is the severe but wholesome lesson all have learned at L.W. through The Teacher there. I really pity Mrs. Sibley we little know how far her forbearance has been tested during that time, She now sees things as they are. Let me not overlook the chief good, my unrestrained enjoyment of your society. — Where else could I have learned so much of your true self, but here, & under all these changes [charges?] & trials. God in mercy separated me from that "clique," & shielded me from those eyes & cares [ears?] that would have withered me forever, He followed each cup of bitterness, with refreshing draughts from loves pure

fountain, He deprived me of a false friend against my will, & gave me a true one, whose excellence I may never fully appreciate. How can I be otherwise than grateful & happy, God grant that this years experience make me patient in future, as well for my own sake, as of others with whom I am associated

This afternoon Mr. Alderson visited me, to have a serious conversation, He has been behaving very silly among young ladies & had gone so far as to be not only physically but mentally sick, He was misled & urged on by indiscreet advice, He said "I am entirely out of order, I have come to have you talk to me, I think you can benefit me," I asked if he was in earnest, "Yes" he said walking the floor "& do not spare me," "Why is it I now dislike my home, & even my children," we discussed it fully [sic] & fearlessly, & many like questions followed, many which I remember [sic] "have I the right to distribute my children, & follow my inclination to travel," "How can I best honor my late wife," The discussions were no "childs play", I have not had my mind so taxed in a long time, & when I gave him a new view of the question he acknowledged it readily; When when [sic] about ___king time he said – "You have done me good, I feel it already, & shall go home a different man than I came," — I can give him the praise of being the real gent, while here, & my respect for him is much enhanced by this interview, & were I not heretofore used to this kind of confidence, I might have had my head turned a trifle, — His parting acknowledgment only inspired me with the hope that I might perhaps be a comforted to my dear friend, if those who only knew me in public, as it were found my society a benefit _____ [possibly two words, the first being "I" or "&"] Mr. Hendrix, has been the means, & not altogether innocent, of some of his folly, but that is past, & he is now resolved to be wise & "forego the power present, for a richer future"

July 6th The event of this day is a letter from dear Mother of you she says "Were I to blame him I should feel that I had done a great wrong – It is the call of his country He could not in honor decline to face dange [sic] & endure deprivation with those who have chosen him for their leader, I regard his case as I would a son in like situation, & in that view how very severe I should feel it; if any one added to his care, + trouble in the least, His part [hurt?] is enough for me to endure, May God keep him safely in my fervent wish & sincere prayer" Again she writes, "Would that I could send you & Alton some word of consolation, Let me refer you both to the 121st. Psalm, We must trust in God & be patient. I hope we may have a "family gathering" yet, still it seems very distant, but hope befriends us & tranquillity [sic] may yet provide our "family" — She is now at Grandfather"s. Her business very prosperous, The Piano though in daily use for 6 years at last, sold for \$200, the original cost, It was a choice instrument indeed — Father's paper impresses much, & Mrs. Easton is very much pleased with it & looks with interest to its arrival—

July 7th I woke this morning exceedingly happy I had dreamed of your own dear self — I found you just at a nights halt – The spot seemed very beautiful, I remember tall trees, & noting their long shadows on the green grass you were lying down, I asked if you were ill – You said "No; but fatigued, very tired" I sat down beside you, & pillowed [half the word was cut off by the copier, so this is mostly conjecture] your head — I feared to breathe lest I should disturb you I noticed people about & remarked it to you, & you looked up with a pleasant smile & said, "Do they trouble you now You need not be disturbed they will not notice us," & composed,

No. 2. [This begins the fifth page, so it is not clear why it is marked "No. 2."]

yourself again & slept, – I saw you eat & was happy, & satisfied to see you so cheerfully among your friends, though all were strangers to me, — Would that the reality of that time, was like unto the present sum of my dream Did you then desire my presence, & take a part in the pleasure

Mrs. Sibley spent the day with us & was more like herself than I have seen her in months
July 8th Visited Mrs. Glendy [?] Mr Coye's [?] sister, with Mrs. Sibley & we have persuaded her to go also
to Farmington in our company.— Her husband had died & escape to Oregon grieves her very much
indeed —

9th A letter from Sister Mary M gladdened & relieved me today, Of you, dear friend she says "I am very
sorry Col. Easton is obliged to go to S. Fee, [I think S. Fe, as in "Santa Fe," is intended] & I admire the
Spirit in which you bear it, I rejoice at the popularity which forces him to go, & congratulate you, on
possessing the heart of such an one, I should be glad to see him Have you his daguereotype," [sic] I,
answer "yes, safe in my heart hiden [sic. the author originally wrote "hid," then inserted an "en,"
apparently forgetting that she needed to add another "d."] from all eyes,'. I shall arrive in Ft. first &
surprise her. She is bringing me clothing, & money & though not rich, I shall be well to live, —————
10th. This morning I was weighed at Mr. G.'s & find I have lost 1 lbs since the last of March – but I trust
the three months before me, will restore it with large interest – Mr. Johns paid me a long visit to arrange
our journey & we set the day Wednesday. & the way is buggys, the company Mrs. M Mrs. G. Miss E
himself & Servant, — Mrs. Smith proposes that this journey will result in an engagement between Mr. J
& myself — How very modest, & wise, I really pity her
[It seems unlikely that Elizabeth would regard the loss of a single pound as significant. It is possible that
the number used to be a seven and the top of it has rubbed off. There is, however, nothing in the text
itself to suggest this except that the "1" is somewhat slanted to the right.]

I have spent some delightful hours with Mrs. Easton this week, for Miss Ann has been at Dr. Powells, &
today she has added the crowning gem, to her already unequalled kindness in offering me a home with
her whenever I need one, if I will only come to her. I told her I felt her sincerity, & also felt that I could
apply to her for aid next my own Mother, who claims me first, at right

Mrs. Sibley has been equally generous with me, & further insists that you expect me to live at L.W. in
her care – I told her I had rather be there than any where else but could only avail myself of her kindness
while I could be useful to her as a Teacher — Believe me dear Alton, I will never trespass upon the
kindness of your family As long as I am able to esteem you, I will not shame you, by a dependence upon
your family. Mrs. Sibley offers me for the coming year, If from 10 to 15 pupils \$200, & large privileges, If
no pupils as some p_____ of course nothing & I shall be necessitated to seek employment elsewhere —
– If Sister's school will warrant it, it will be there, If my health fails I shall go to Mother At all events be
not troubled about me, He who has hitherto "led me by a path I knew not" will not now forsake me Him
we can trust infinitely Let us do so, fully at all times

The St Charles Guards, are just off, & left armed each man with a bible, & now though far from
civilized life be their field of duty, still they can obey the command of their God, & "Search the
Scriptures," for themselves Capt Sublitze [?] comp'ny passed here today. —————

11th Sabbath & exceedingly warm, which aided me in not enjoying Mr. Smith's long sermon, I am [?]
naughty now days [these last five words are very uncertain]

This afternoon & evening I have spent in my "Sky parlor" reading, & thinking, & am become solemn &
hopeful. How important is solitude, to restore mental & moral waste How refreshing a respite from
human eyes, how awful, yet strengthening is a consciousness of the Divine presence when you can turn

frankly to the scrutiny of the Eye which which is both just & merciful to infinitude; all care of self is lost in the recognition o [clearly "of" is intended] a divine care of Providence

July 12th Mrs. Sibley called this morning & told us that Mr. Clough, had rec'd a letter from Eben, written 150 miles from the Ft. & at dinner Henry Clay told us of your doings on the Glorious 4th. & how it was broken up by Lieut. Lars. Express &c, How precious is even indirect news of you, & most anxiously shall I search the papers for the arrivals of Expresses from your region Mrs. Sibley had a little party this evening, but I did not feel like participating in its pleasures Today came the intelligence of the decease of Mr. Bird of St Louis formerly of St Charles, Mrs. B, is also very ill –

July 13th. The warmest day yet – Mercury 98,° & it has been the happiest day I have experienced in a long time, Mrs. Sibley sent for me early in the morning & I had a long interview [?] with her, & at last the unpleasant feelings that have harassed me so long, have been dissipated — Mrs. S "listened to me," some time since & has used her eyes, & ears since, & is at last frank, & willing to render all their due, & the best of all is, she is evidently happier than she has been in some months, The Major sat with us some time & was very cordial – Mrs. Eastman does her part, in her usual style,"

Mr. & Mrs. Smith have taken board with Mrs. Cummins, Mrs. Lee is still absent, but when she comes Mrs. Sibley will not spare her for her treatment of Jemima, "S___," After dinner I bid all goodbye at L.W. & Mrs. Sibley took me to Mr. S. Watson's where we spent a pleasant afternoon, called at Mr. Johns on the way up & bid Mr. Woodruff goodbye in the way "he claims," of me, & returned home late, & this letter has suffered sadly in consequence [?] & my watch, urges [warns?] me to leave my pen now till morning dawns But first I must add that Mrs. Sibley sent love to you & bade me say she had written you a long letter which she hoped you would receive,"— Mr. Easton also, & that I should say all are well, myself improved much this week, even in "uprightness" physically & in color –

[Regarding the above paragraph: a) The word rendered "urges" has been apparently rubbed out and drawn over; it is very unclear. The word intended is obviously a synonym of "urges," but it appears to be missing a "g." b) It is usually hard to make out the exact spelling of a word, so misspellings are not noted unless they are very clear. From the placement of the "i"'s dot in the word "receive," it seems highly likely, though not necessarily true, that the "i" and "e" were in the wrong places.]

July 14th. The morning of my departure has come, & I feel as if leaving home indeed, how I shall miss the same [?] privileges of this great home, & my dear "sky parlor," with its 'large freedom,' & Mrs. E society, & hearing of Alton, & seeing dear Aunt Mary, but the change seems necessary that I may the better appreciate the privileges I return too, [sic] & for a while to be away from the the [sic] complasent [sic] scenes & things of the past year & forward to think & act in a new way –

I dread the journey, mostly because I am not interested in the company, but I should be for Mr. J takes every pains to oblige me, as well do the ladies, but none can supply your place "by the fireside," "or in the way," I am alone everywhere But I do not grieve. believe me dearest, & I will try to improve every way for your dear sake. . I must close & feel sad, in spite of all reason for joy – I seem going from you, how very weak is "female nature", I must laugh though tears fall,. God be with you my Dearest Friend & preserve & keep you, & shield me from temptation, make me worthy of your ennobling love, & ever your own Eliza Ott.

[It is clear that Eliza forgot the “l” in the word “oblige” in the above paragraph. I filled it in for the convenience and understanding of the reader. She sometimes drops letters but the resulting words are not always so clearly discernable.]