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## The Legacy of "Ghost" Elliott

### A Suggestive Sketch of the Life and Achievements of the Famous Country Teacher of South-Eastern North Carolina

"Ghost" Elliott probably left no will, yet he left a legacy that accrued to the interest of several generations of children in the southeastern part of the state.

"Ghost" Elliott (probably no one knows his actual name) was a graduate of the University of North Carolina who taught country schools in Sampson, Duplin, Wayne, and possibly other southeastern counties of the state. He was a scholar and cared as little for money as possibly any man of similar ability in the state has ever cared. He made his home, while teaching, with the plain country people, and was as plain as his hosts. All his acquisitions in a long life of teaching would hardly have bought the Ford that the young man who now begins to teach expects to buy out of the surplus of his first year's salary.

Neither chick nor child had he, and probably never conceived it as possible for himself to maintain a horse. The story goes that once his class at the University was to have a re-union at a certain commencement. He did not disappoint his classmates, but was there, walking all the way from Sampson or Duplin to Chapel Hill. The reunion was a time of reminiscence and fun with the classmates. On the other hand, "Ghost" Elliott had conceived the occasion to be one in which he would have an opportunity to discuss the classics and the sciences with other scholarly men. All would, perhaps, be listening intently to some story of college pranks, when "Ghost" would hunch his neighbor and ask in an undertone what he thought of this or that passage of Latin or Greek that he quoted at the time. But the tradition is that the others did not greatly co-operate with the country scholar in his efforts to make the occasion a feast of learning.

The writer has had pointed out to him near Turkey, near the Duplin-Sampson line, a home in which it was said that Rev. J. L. Stewart, Rev. B. F. Marable, and "Ghost" Elliott spent a night together. If that is true, there is possibly no little country home in North Carolina in which three brainier men ever spent a night together. Stewart was a graduate of the University, preacher and lawyer too. He was learned in both theology and the law, and could have shone more brilliantly in either if it had been his only mistress. He was wealthy, as wealth then went, but preached regularly at country churches, charging the munificent salary of one hundred dollars a year. He wouldn't compete with the cheaper preachers, though it seemed to make little difference after he had accepted the pastorate at \$100 whether he ever collected it all or not.

Dr. Marable was a graduate of Wake Forest College and was in the beginning of his ministerial career a Baptist preacher. After marrying, he became a Presbyterian minister, making one of the few changes from the Baptist ministry to the Presbyterian that have ever been made in the state. The only other the writer recalls is that of Rev. J. J. Douglas, better known in the state as a poet than preacher, who still lives.

Probably "Ghost" Elliott was an agnostic, but he was no fool about his infidelity. He left no legacy of unbelief. The legacy of which I write was a number of his old students who had learned "Stoddard's Mental Arithmetic" under his tuition, and how to teach it. Stoddard's arithmetic had become the standard of scholarship in mathematics in several counties, and so remained for many years. Only a few weeks ago, Dr. J. M. Parrott, head of the state department of health, bemoaned the fact that the schools of today do not use Stoddard's arithmetic. He stated that he had once asked a leading school man of the state why it is not used, and had received the reply that it takes too much work to teach it.

The writer, as well as Dr. Parrott, was brought up on Stoddard's arithmetic. He was third in descent from "Ghost" Elliott. Elliott had taught a Davis boy in Duplin, who afterward married a Miss Dickson in Bladen, a sister of the late Dr. Pickett Dickson of Raeford. Mr. Davis taught his daughter Katie, and Miss Katie taught the writer as a lad. The "Ghost" method had come down in its purity. The writer never used a slate (tablets were unknown till he went to college) in "working" arithmetic problems or sums till he was

twelve years old. A pupil would have thought himself discredited, in both his own and the school's sight, if he had used a pencil in the solution of problems. At twelve, and probably at eleven, the writer could stand on the school house floor, hear a problem read, catch it and proceed to unravel it, and successfully at that. My recollection is that I had solved "in my head" every problem in the "arithmetic" when I was 12 years old, and it contained such algebraic problems as follows: A tree fell, breaking on its fall into two parts. The stump was the combined length of the other two parts; the longer of the two fallen parts was two-thirds of the length of the stump. The combined length of all three of the parts was 60 feet. What was the length of each of the three parts?

Now, that is not one of the actual problems, for I haven't a copy of the book, but is illustrative of the kind of work a boy was expected to do "in his head" before he was put to "ciphering." The answer to the above is 28, 18 2-3, and 13 1-3 feet, if any reader desires to test his skill in figuring it out. Maybe not a "practical" problem, in the minds of modern educators—but it compares favorably with one we recently heard a high-school senior trying to help a fifth-grade pupil solve: "If one must be at a certain place at ten minutes past two o'clock and it takes 15 minutes to reach the place, what is the latest time he must start?" O yes; practical enough but the bad part of it was that neither the senior nor the fifth-grader could solve it. "We could get the clock and see, but that wouldn't be fair," the senior, whose morals were better than her knowledge of arithmetic, was heard to say. Finally the writer was asked to help—how "fair" that was doesn't appear. I stated the time to start, but then the plaint was that it "must be put down like arithmetic." O, it must be on paper—whether the head is benefited or not! The grade depended on handing in the answers "like arithmetic." I fixed it for them "like arithmetic," and probably a fifth grade girl got a good mark on her arithmetic the next day.

My! we country boys wouldn't have asked for help on one of those Stoddard's problems if we had had to worry at it for a month—that is, the ones with mathematical heads wouldn't. Some folk could not learn under any method; others would learn under just any old kind of method, or no method. Possibly the two girls belonged to the former group; but they could not have been so numbskully about arithmetic if they had been trained by the "Ghost" Elliott method. "Scholars" didn't advance further than they knew, and if it had taken two weeks for one to learn that a half of 3-4 is 3-8, he would have stayed there till he learned it, and that fact and the principle by which it is derived would probably have, forever and a day, been a part of that pupil's being. Just as in geometry, each acquisition became the means of solving the next problem. Now, it is a matter of fact that I recently asked an eighth-grade arithmetic class in a North Carolina high school what half of 3-4 is and got the wrong answer, and never the right one—nor were the children sullen. The teacher said they had their minds on more difficult work and that accounted for the failure to answer. But what if that more difficult work had required that very knowledge? "More difficult work" should require every one of the elementary principles. If it doesn't, there was no use in ever studying the less difficult. If it does, then, day or night, on a moment's notice, those elementary principles should be on tap. Just as well think of sawing without a saw as of doing "more difficult" arithmetic work without those necessary tools supposed to have been acquired in the lower grades.

I am of the opinion that the Stoddard arithmetic was extensively used over the whole state, but it can be confidently said that "Ghost" Elliott was the master teacher of it in the southeastern counties. The book and the method of teaching arithmetic have long departed the schools, and a great loss it is to the children of the later generations. No pupil who had learned to analyze the problems in Stoddard's had any trouble with the "problems" in algebra when he reached that stage of his education. Besides, he had learned a portion of the language of logic and could handle his "sinces," "as's," "therefore's," etc., as no pupil can today till he has studied geometry.

Here I take occasion to say that I am sure there is

more time wasted today in teaching arithmetic than would be sufficient to give the bright children a three-year course in Latin. Tots start arithmetic in the first grade. They may be seen at the board adding 1 and 2. Probably a fifth of their time for eight years goes to the study of arithmetic. Yet two years, from the age of 11 to 13, should be sufficient to ground any bright pupil in arithmetic; but allow three, and that makes the time allotted to the subject for five years wasted. This time would serve to give a full high school course in Latin. And the pupil would likely know more arithmetic than he knows under the present regime. We have told in the Chatham Record heretofore how a prominent gentleman of this state, whose father had the same view as above expressed, began the study of arithmetic at the age of ten and within six months joined the class of boys older than he who had begun the session in Sanford's Common School arithmetic, after having studied arithmetic from two to four years. And one of the boys in the higher class is one of the brightest men in the state.

Herbert had never studied arithmetic, but he didn't have to be taught that 2 and 2 are 4. There is not a sensible negro boy in the state who would not, at the age of eleven, know what the first-grade child learns in arithmetic. And, certainly, children do not need arithmetic for any practical purposes before they are eleven.

The foregoing observations are based upon childhood's experience in the country schools and an experience of twenty years as a teacher. Not only did the writer know his mental arithmetic at 12 years of age, but he had learned it in sessions of school of three and four months, and under teachers who had never gone to school as much as the pupils of these days go by the time they are eleven years old. In fact, the writer had completed three algebras, including Wentworth's and Robinson's University Algebra, and had "been through" Robinson's Geometry, when he had been to school 53 months. When he had been to school, all told, 90 months, which is less than the children attend the city high schools in a course of eleven grades of nine months, he had completed every branch of mathematics in any school in North Carolina at that time, except any higher course in engineering that may have been provided at the University and there are others at his age that achieved the same in less time, as their studies were more crowded into the years approaching maturity, when time counted for more than it did with me at ten to seventeen.

That is my credential for setting up as a critic of the methods and achievements of the modern way of teaching arithmetic. Let only him who has achieved as much by another method or seen more achieved by the modern method dare to hoot at that old scheme which made the principles of arithmetic as familiar to a boy as his abc's.

### CAPT. ASHE'S RECOLLECTIONS OF "GHOST" ELLIOTT

After the foregoing article had gone to the printer, the editor asked his friend Captain S. A. Ashe if he remembered "Ghost" Elliott. The veteran was at first lost. In the flood of experiences of his ninety-odd years, he splashed around till it all came back to him, and an interesting and enlightening story was told of the old scholar and educator of the southeast.

When Captain Ashe had got his bearing, he told the following experience:

"I was a student at the Naval Academy and had come to my father's home at Rocky Point. My mother told me that Dr. and Mrs. Meares had moved up from Wilmington. Feeling it my duty to call upon the new neighbors, I went over to the Meares home. Soon an old man, dressed in homespun clothes, came. I was utterly surprised at the deference with which he was greeted by the aristocratic Mrs. Meares. I could but wonder what manner of man he was. After a while as we sat talking, Mrs. Meares asked the old man to tell about being run over by a train. He insisted that she had heard him tell it before. But Mrs. Meares would have him tell it for the sake of Young Sam Ashe.

"The old man told how he was walking on the rail-  
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