Poplar Forest.
19th May 1824.

Although the house does not afford a pen with which I can write decently, I will not longer delay answering my dearest Virginia's last letter, especially as it was my intention to have written by the mail succeeding that which brought it to me, & was only deterred from doing so by the impossibility of sending either to Lynchburg or New London.- my leisure moments this week, are devoted to Mama & yourself, & the next mail I hope will find me provided with folios to Caroline & Mary & to Harriet- I have also to write to Papa & to Jane Hackley, & besides all these debts which must be cancelled, my having just received Jane's frock that Cousin Ann hicked & frilled so nicely lays me under the obligation of enditing her shortly an epistle of thanks.- you see therefore my dear, that my hands have full employment- I say hands, & not head, the former only being engaged in the process of scribbling over some half dozen sheets of paper, where a few words not expressive of an inexpressible degree of love, constitutes the sole merit of the letter. Lucy still does the greater part of the housekeeping for me, - has her full share attending Jane when Nancy is at her meals, & yet in spite of this apparent exemption from every thing of consequence that could interrupt me, I find it impossible to do much either of reading or sewing, & cannot for a single half hour in any part of any day, devote either my time or attention undivided to one object- Jane, except when she is carried to walk, is almost constantly in the room with me, & as she sleeps very little, & frequently cries for me to take her, you will readily believe that she is often in my arms, tho perhaps not for any length of time, & that my business be it what it may, is frequently stopped, to play with & caress her, even

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[May 19, 1824]

when I do not lay aside my book, pen or needle to take her. besides this, instructing Josephine, during the week in needle work, & on Sundays in reading writing & arithmetic, & training for a Lady's maid, a little black imp, who gives me more annoyance by her ignorance & stupidity than her services can ever repay me, are terrible hindrances to all my undertakings — With Flame, I proceed, slowly enough it is true, but steadily; but both French, Italian have been laid aside for some time past, & botany with which I have lately amused myself, requires so much memory, that I despair of making any progress with it whatever. I am reading "Sumner's Botany" & find it extremely interesting, & as the long walks I now take enable me to find leaves & flowers in abundance, as specimens, I might pursue the study with equal advantage & interest, but I have not time for it — & my memory, always bad, is now absolutely & irretrievably gone — I can recollect nothing distinctly that I see, hear or read — & the confused remembrance of things which incessantly haunts me, bewilders my brain, & does not advance me one step in the acquirement of knowledge — But I am dwelling on an infirmity of which I have often complained before, & which to you, who labour under it also, can be no welcome theme — certainly for all that we do acquire great praise is due to us, for it costs us ten times the pain & trouble that it does other people —

of needle work, I have done absolutely nothing since I left Albemarle, since Jane's birth, I may say, (since I was married I might say, but this shame forbids) none, I mean that can count, for the heaps of clothes that I have patched, botched & darned, cannot pass for any thing tho in reality it has employed a very large proportion of my time — I am glad to hear that you practice so regularly on the harpsichord, for you know I always thought your ami right in urging you on that subject, & I can love you well at some future day be mistress of a piano, tho when is not yet precisely ascertained — Do tell me when you next receive letters from the South, & whether those hopes of soon meeting expressed in the last, are followed up by any thing decisive — Frances wrote to Bruce the last of January, but his letter is still unanswered — It is only, by way of retaliation

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I suppose, or as we would have said in the olden time, "tit for tat, or butter for fish" - after I came home I read that letter of Moore's which he wrote so soon after receiving Francis's for which he had been kept waiting 6 or 8 months, & I was so well pleased with the general style of it, & interested by the slight disgrace of melancholy by which I thought it was pervaded, that it made me like the writer even better than ever. - I have seen the letters of all Francis's correspondents, & Moore's I think are decidedly the best as to manner & the matter pleases me also, as approaching nearer to the sentiments & feelings expressed in the letters of girls & women - I would not by any means call them sentimental or romantic, & indeed some that I have seen might sooner be called comic & diverted me extremely, but there is occasionally a show of feeling & sentement, which young men generally scoff at & exclude. I have been so often interrupted my dear Virginia, that my ideas have lost all connexion; & when that is the case, writing must soon cease to be an agreeable occupation - the times when I like it best, is when I am hurried, but can write in quiet & undisturbed - to day I have Jane constantly at my ear & Lucy & Francis frequently in the room, besides being called off continually to attend to the servants who are at work. - Give much love to all around & let me hear soon from you again - I am afraid my Aunt & Cornelia hurt themselves by too great exertions in their "thicket of weeds" & at the borders - & do you also, my love, share in their labours? I would fain do something in my pleasure ground, but am not strong enough yet to do more than take regular & gentle exercise for my health - my walks at present extend to a mile, a mile & a quarter, & sometimes even to a mile & a half - but from principle, I abstain as yet from all violent exertions.

Lucy & myself were extremely shocked at hearing of poor Isaetta Carter's early death - her mother is much to be pitied, but her sister even more so, I think, for to her probably a long life is shaded by this inexpressible misfortune. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" is strong consolation for one advanced in years, but to the youthful, it can carry but little solace.

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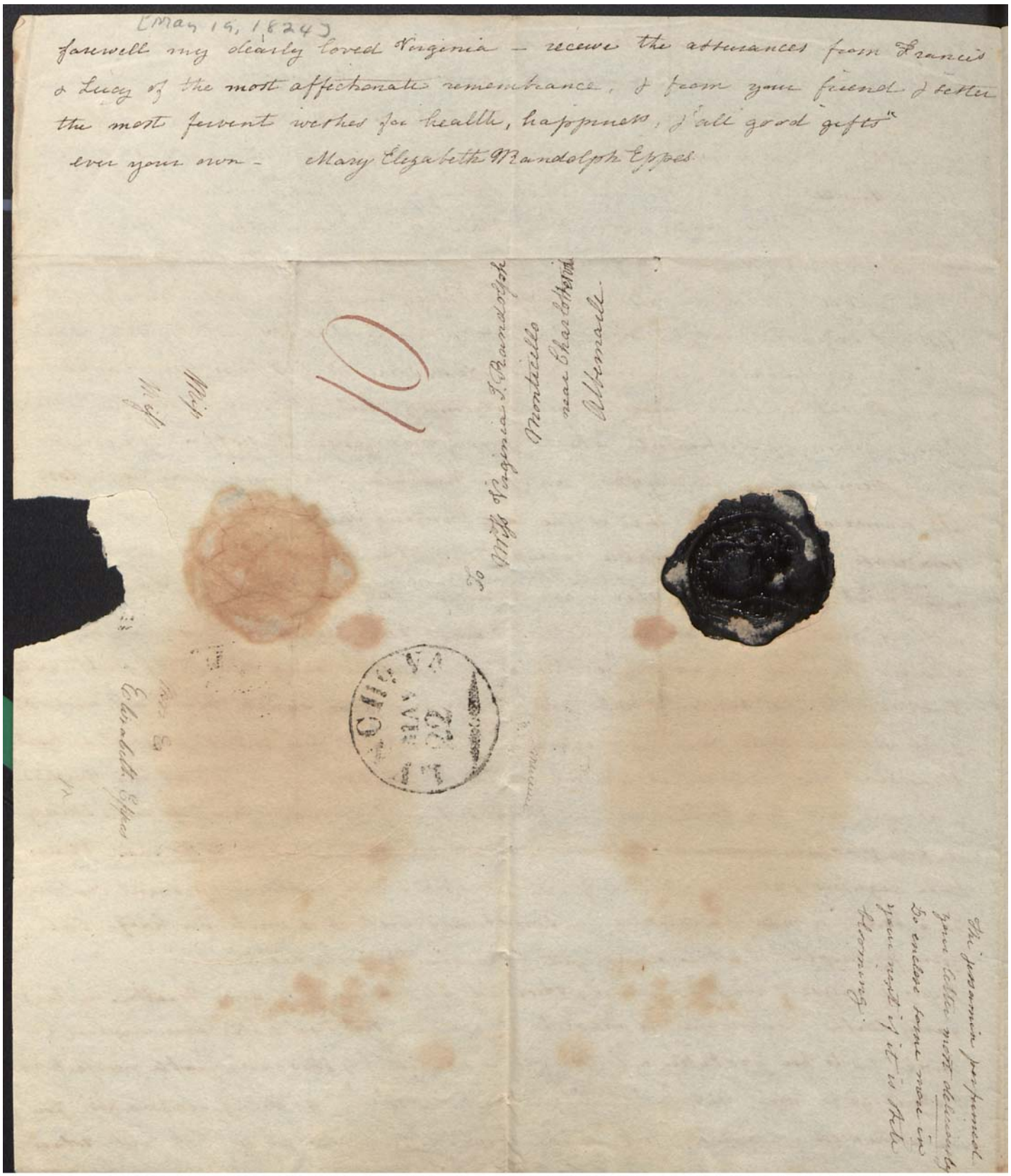

[May 19, 1824]

farewell my dearly loved Virginia – receive the assurances from Francis & Lucy of the most affectionate remembrance, & from your friend & sister the most fervent wishes for health, happiness, & "all good gifts"

ever your own – Mary Elizabeth Randolph Eppes

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To Miss Virginia T. Randolph
Monticello
near Charlottesville
Albemarle

Mrs Eliz. Eppes

The jessamine perfumed your letter most deliciously. Do enclose some more in your next if it is still blooming.

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