



**John Adams . letter of advice to his cousin Zabdiel . 1763. [Worcester, Mass.]
Massachusetts Historical Society, c 1967]**

THE LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS WASHINGTON, D. C. 20540

June 21, 1968.

Dear Lyman:

I was very sorry to miss seeing you at the last meeting of the NHPC, but I was happy to hear that you are feeling better.

Many thanks for the report on The Adams Papers and for the handsome, annotated facsimile of the 1763 letter from John Adams. I am sending it to our Rare Book Division, where it can be admired and used by many.

Sincerely yours,

L. Quincy Mumford Librarian of Congress

Dr. Lyman H. Butterfield The Adams Papers Massachusetts Historical Society 1154 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts

EEH:es 6/21/68 S.O. Charge 145-2346-68 THE ADAMS PAPERS

cc: Rare Books, with facsimile

RECEIVED RARE BOOK JUN 21 1968

JOHN ADAMS on Matrimony, Church, State, and His Own Temperament, in a Letter of Advice to His
Cousin Zabdiel Concerning His Settlement as a Minister of the Gospel 1763

FACSIMILE OF AN AUTOGRAPH LETTER IN THE COLLECTION OF HERBERT R. STRAUSS, WITH A
COMMENTARY BY L. H. BUTTERFIELD

Privately Printed · Christmas 1967

COPYRIGHT 1967 BY THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JOHN ADAMS' LETTER TO HIS COUSIN ZABDIEL 23 JULY 1763

BY the summer of 1763 the news had crept abroad from rural Braintree that Lawyer Adams was going to be married. "I hear that you are like to make yourself happy," his friend William Crawford wrote him from Worcester early in July, "by a conjunction with one of the fairest parts of the fair part of the Creation." Crawford then went briskly on to the problem of how to get certain books returned to himself that Adams had apparently had the use of since their days of intimacy in Worcester, when Adams had kept a school while reading law and Crawford had preached around the county while looking for a permanent settlement.

Surviving evidence does not suggest that many people knew or cared greatly in 1763 about the personal affairs of John Adams—a circumstance that makes the newly discovered document presented here all the more valuable. Eight years out of Harvard College, trained for the law largely through his own efforts, young John Adams had rambled among the rocks and woods of Braintree considering on the one hand whether he could make a living from the law that would enable him to marry and raise a family, and on the other hand whether he was worthy of a profession of such boundless intellectual dimensions. Jeremy Gridley had told him at the outset that he should "Attend enough to the profits, to keep yourself out of the Briars: but the Law itself should be your great Object." An early marriage, Gridley had kindly but firmly pointed out, "will probably put an End to your Studies, and will certainly involve you in expence."

Only a few months later, in the spring of 1759, Adams was saved, more by "Accident" (as he conceded) than by resolution, from a match that might have had just the consequences Gridley had warned against. Now, four years later, he had gained a footing in his highly competitive profession, and since the fall of 1762 had been courting Abigail Smith of Weymouth. Whether or not "one of the fairest parts of the fair part of the Creation," Abigail had a remarkably level head on her shoulders, and it was doubtless she who fixed the time for their marriage, which did not take place until October 1764. Stray receipts for carpenter's and mason's work in the Adams Papers show that Adams was making over the saltbox cottage at the foot of Penn's Hill that he had inherited from his father into better quarters for a family, with a separate room that had outside access for use as a law office and library. Here while waiting Abigail's pleasure he varied his reading in law folios with sarcastic entries in his diary about the political feuds between the Hutchinsons and the Otises that presaged a greater struggle in which he himself would join; with his first ventures in journalism, which took the form of essays written in country dialect and signed "Humphrey Ploughjogger"; and with sprightly letters to "Miss Adorable," "Miss Jemima," or "My dear Diana," according to his mood. (One of these last is directed on the cover "to Mistris nabagil smith Of Waymoah this with Ceare & Spead.")

Among those who had sometimes accompanied the fledgling lawyer in his rambles around Braintree and his calls at the Smith parsonage in Weymouth was his double first cousin, Zabdiel Adams (1739–1801), son of John's uncle Ebenezer Adams and his wife, the former Anne Boylston, sister of John's mother. Zab was four years younger than John, had been brought up on a farm a mile or so from that of John's father, had graduated from Harvard in 1759, and then kept “the Latin School” in Braintree for three years. John enjoyed the young schoolmaster's company because he was one of the few people in town who could talk about books and ideas. But he thought Zab's mind was too much “taken up with Arithmetical and Geometrical Problems, Questions, Paradoxes and Riddles. He studies these Things that he may be able to gratify his Vanity by puzzling all the vain Pretenders, to Expertness in Numbers”—a species of social diversion that Cousin John did not think highly of. After taking his M. A., Zabdiel preached where he was called, hoping for an offer to settle on generous terms in a good parish. The present letter indicates that he had considered but declined an Anglican church, which would have required a voyage to London for ordination, but was now tempted by a unanimous call from Georgetown, a tiny farming and fishing community on an island near Bath in Maine. John's arguments against Zab's accepting form the chief substance of the letter. They must have proved convincing, for the next that we know is that early in January 1764 Zab received a formal call, after a trial period of preaching, from the First Congregational Society in Lunenburg, a pleasant village in Worcester County. He promptly accepted, and served Lunenburg as minister for upwards of thirty-six years, the remainder of his life.

The story of that ministry, which was highly creditable, in fact distinguished if judged by the number of sermons the Reverend Mr. Adams was called upon to publish, is told in the fourteenth volume of Mr. Shipton's *Sibley's Harvard Graduates* (in the press as these lines are written). But the Adams cousins' hope of staying in touch with each other were not very well realized. In June 1776 Zabdiel wrote John Adams in Philadelphia saying it was “greatly to be wished that the Congress would declare us independant of Great Britain,” that “one general form of Government might be soon instituted over the whole of the united Colonies,” and that “forreign assistance” should be promptly sought, or the American cause might founder. “Whilst you in your exalted station, are concerting measures for the Salvation of America, I in my meek and humble one, am pointing out the moral causes of our disorders, and calling upon the People to repent.” John Adams was so pleased by these sentiments that he took time out at this critical moment in the deliberations of the Continental Congress to answer at once and at large. He described the division in public opinion over the issue of “Independency,” making clear where he himself stood on it, and pronounced Zabdiel's work to be quite as important as his own. “Statesmen my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand.... You cannot therefore be more pleasantly, or usefully employed than in the Way of your

Profession, pulling down the Strong Holds of Satan. This is not Cant, but the real sentiment of my Heart." No one who knew John Adams well could suppose otherwise.

A few later letters between the cousins survive, including one from the clergyman welcoming the statesman home in 1788 after a decade of service in Europe. Zabdiel regretted that he could not renew his youthful pleasure of conversing with John "on men and manners, on arts and sciences, on government and politicks." But he could "rejoice that you have lived to be the ornament and glory of the family from which you sprung; and what is infinitely more, that you have, under God, been honoured as a signal influence in bringing about a revolution in this country, in its nature great, and in its consequences very important; from which millions will, I doubt not, receive the most substantial fruits." It is inconceivable that John Adams did not acknowledge this tribute. The fact that his answer has not been found merely increases the likelihood that other letters from Cousin John to Cousin Zabdiel, early and late, remain to be turned up.

Meanwhile the present early one *has* turned up, and who, if he could help it, would have missed John Adams' picture of himself frisking like a lambkin among clover with "Bacon, and Cyder, and Books, and Girl and Friend"? The letter was totally unknown to the editors of *The Adams Papers* until the spring of 1967, when it was listed as the first item in Charles Hamilton's eighteenth sale of manuscripts by auction at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. Letters of John Adams of so early a date almost never come into the autograph market; and although this one was discovered too late for inclusion in its proper place in the first volume of *Adams Family Correspondence*, it could not be allowed to sink back into limbo. After a little consultation it was therefore, on 6 April bid in by Goodspeed's Book Shop for Mr. Herbert R. Strauss of Chicago, a collector who has long cultivated the generous habit of befriending scholars and scholarly institutions. Later inquiries revealed that the consignor to Charles Hamilton is a dealer in antiques and old books and documents at Plymouth, Massachusetts, who had come upon the letter not long before as an isolated item, somewhat mutilated as our facsimile shows, and later framed between two pieces of glass. It has now been expertly cleaned and repaired under Mr. Harold Tribolet's direction; its preservation is assured; and its first use is in this keepsake. It is pleasing to reflect on how many people collaborated in a prompt and effective manner to bring about this result. But then, after a moment, one wonders how many other perishable pieces of paper like this one, which could give enjoyment and throw glints of light on men and events of a past age, still languish unknown, unused, and subject to loss without a trace of what they could tell us.

L. H. Butterfield

Massachusetts Historical Society

For Mr. Zabdiel Adams George Town These

JOHN ADAMS TO ZABDIEL ADAMS

My Old Friend

Your kind Letter I received, and after an Interval occasioned by Commencement, am seated to return an Answer.—I acknowledge the Justice of your Rebuke for not answering your former Letters, and for not writing you since your Departure from happy Braintree.

Matrimony, my dear Friend is yet at a greater Distance from me, than nine Months. I wish it was not Nine minutes off.—Affairs in Church and State, are in a situation, you know not the most consonant to my Wishes and Way of thinking.—But Resignation is my Retreat, and Resource. “Quid supra Nos, nil and Nos.”* —“Erunt Vitia donec Homines,”† &c.—The—take Politicks for me.—Give me Bacon, and Cyder, and Books, and Girl and Friend, and I will frisk it, like a Lambkin among the Clover, whether H-t-n [*Hutchinson*] or O-t-s [*Otis*], or neither of them, are in or out of Power.

* Freely: What is beyond us, we can do nothing about.

† There will be vices as long as there are men.

But there is one Part of your Letter, demands a serious Answer.—The repeated Proof of the Approbation of Mankind, of which your Letter informed me, gave me Pleasure, for the same Reason that all other Instances of your success, have done the same, vizt because, you know, I love you, and I think you deserve success.—But considered as laying you under (what shall I call it) an Obligation or a Temptation to settle, at such a Distance from me and your other Friends, it gave me much friendly Anxiety. You ask my Advice, and you shall have it, with the Utmost Sincerity.—It is, by no means to think of settling, at that Place.

You ask my Reasons, and you tell me, you may hearken perhaps too often to me and your other Friends, in refusing first a Church of England and then a good dissenting Parish.—My Reasons are these. You are yet young enough to settle by, some Years. You have a Reputation as a Preacher which will not suffer you to want Business.—You have Talents and Abilities which entitle you to a better, and more conspicuous Theatre than George Town, and the same Talents and Abilities will, in no unreasonable Length of Time, procure you one—one that lies nearer to Science, Wealth, Sense, Politeness and Happiness than George Town can be supposed to be.

These you may take for the Ebullitions of Affection. [But?] they are sincere, if they are not disinterested.—A Ch[oice,] nay an unanimous Choice, does not (talk of Vox Populi Vox Dei as long as you will) lay any obligation on any Man to act any Part which will in all Probability, diminish his Happiness, or his Usefulness, especially, that will diminish both.

Frankness, you know has always been used between you and me, and will always I hope continue. Clear and certain Foresight, is the Attribute of No Man.—It is not impossible you may be a loser, by taking this Advice, but I assure you with the utmost freedom it is the best that I can give, at present, let what will take Place hereafter.

I hope to see you soon at Braintree and am your [assured?] Friend & most hml. sert.

JOHN ADAMS

July 23d. 1763

P.S. If you should not come soon to Braintree write me.—I am in great Haste. Hay, Corn, Barley, Law, Love, and Politicks, plague me to death, coming all together so in a Huddle.

N.B. dont let this P.S. be seen by Girl nor Politician, nor heard of, by Either.

[*Addressed:*] For/Mr. Zabdiel Adams/George=Town/These

PRINTED BY THE ANTHOENSEN PRESS REPRODUCTION OF THE LETTER BY THE MERIDEN GRAVURE COMPANY IN AN EDITION OF 500 COPIES FOR DISTRIBUTION BY HERBERT R. STRAUSS AND THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY