

# Privilege and Responsibility

By Abigail Adams

---

5 Some author, that I have met with, compares a judicious traveler to a  
river, that increases its stream the further it flows from its source; or to  
certain springs, which, running through rich veins of minerals, improve  
their qualities as they pass along. It will be expected of you, my son, that, as  
you are favored with superior advantages under the instructive eye of a  
tender parent, your improvement should bear some proportion to your  
advantages. Nothing is wanting with you but attention, diligence, and steady  
10 application. Nature has not been deficient.

15 These are times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still  
calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are  
formed. Would Cicero have shone so distinguished an orator if he had not  
been roused, kindled, and inflamed by the tyranny of Catiline, Verres, and  
Mark Anthony? The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending  
with difficulties. All history will convince you of this, and that wisdom and  
penetration are the fruit of experience, not the lessons of retirement and  
leisure. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and  
20 animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities, which would  
otherwise lie dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and  
the statesman. War, tyranny, and desolation are the scourges of the  
Almighty, and ought no doubt to be deprecated. Yet it is your lot, my son,  
to be an eyewitness of these calamities in your own native land, and, at the  
25 same time, to owe your existence among a people who have made a  
glorious defense of their invaded liberties, and who, aided by a generous  
and powerful ally, with the blessing of Heaven, will transmit this  
inheritance to ages yet unborn.