

Ward Nicholas Boylston Esq. Princeton - Massachusetts.

Washington 24. May 1819.

My dear Sir.

Your kind Letter of the 15th inst^h has just come to hand - It was quite a disappointment to me upon my return from Europe the year before last, and again when I visited Boston and my father's house the last Autumn, that the distance at which you then were prevented me from having the pleasure of meeting you. I hope to be more fortunate the ensuing Summer, it being my intention, and that of Mrs Adams to pass a few weeks with our friends at home, as soon as I can obtain a short release from this place - And if we can make our arrangements to travel by the way of Worcester, we shall take great pleasure in paying Mrs Boylston and you a visit at Princeton - We expect to leave this towards the end of July, and to be upon our return early in September, when if practicable we shall avail ourselves of your friendly invitation.

I have observed with pleasure and gratitude your persevering efforts of beneficence to the University at Cambridge, and had heard of the Institution of your ~~Institution~~ Prizes for Elocution, which cannot but be attended with good effects - Its operation by experience, may perhaps suggest some rules for the distribution of the Prizes, which, if you should conclude to make the Institution permanent, you may think it advisable to prescribe - Would it not for instance be useful to direct, that if one of the undergraduates, should
obtain

obtain one of the first prizes, he should not upon a succeeding year be admitted as a competitor to Speak in the same language? And would it not be proper to enlarge the circle of the languages in which the pieces may be spoken - at least by admitting the French? From the experience which I have had of the defects most common among the young Orators, I think it should be prescribed as an inflexible rule that no promptings should be allowed; and that whatever merit any of the Speakers might display; no prize should be given in any case where a failure of memory should be perceptible.

With regard to the Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory, I do most sincerely wish it could be given to a person capable of understanding its duties, and of performing them - To Mr. Keen it was a sinecure; given him for his wants and his vices, and not for any quality required by the place -

I speak the whole truth to you, because nothing else can do any good - But the Corporation of Harvard University, though including some of the best men in the world, is and for many years has been more of a Caucus Club, than of a Literary and Scientific Society - Bigoted to religious liberality and illiberal in political principles - When they have a place to fill, their question is not, who is fit for the place, but who is to be provided for? and their whole range of candidates is a Professor, or a Party man - or both. From what I have seen of Mr. Norton, and all that I have heard of him, I have great respect for his character and abilities; but to make him Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, could be squandered by nothing, but the appointment of a man born blind to lecture upon Optics, and make astronomical observations, with the telescope.

I have been so long absent from the Country, that I have no knowledge of the young men, whose talents would be their real recommendation to that Office, but I have no hesitation in saying that I think the clerical profession not well suited to it; and that it would be as reasonable to take a Professor of Theology, or of Anatomy, from the practising lawyers, as a professor of Eloquence from the Pulpit - The Pulpit is indeed one of the scenes of practical oratory; but it is oratory of the lowest class - The Pulpit Orator has no antagonist - There may be triumph without a victory; but there can be no victory without a Battle - Now as in the days of Cicero, the great struggle and the most splendid theatre of eloquence is at the Bar.

It cannot be expected that any man very eminent as a public speaker will accept the appointment to this professorship - The talent commands a market of a higher order - Neither does the Office require the exercise of the abilities necessary to a very distinguished Orator, for a man may be excellent as a judge and instructor of eloquence without possessing its highest faculties himself - But an impediment of speech, is a disqualification, the exhibition of which in that professorship, reflects disgrace upon those who made the appointment, and is an insult upon the founder of the Institution - They would have done better to send to Hartford, and to have offered the vacancy made by the death of Mr. Keen, to Mr. Laurent Clark. He, at least would have falsified no precept by his example.

Mr. Adams joins me in requesting you to present our best respects to Mrs. Boylston, and our joint thanks for her and your kind invitation - and believe me to be ever faithfully yours

John Quincy Adams -

Wm Quincy Adams
24 May 1819
Boston

I have been long absent from the country, but I have no knowledge of the young men, whose talents would be their real recommendation to that office, but I have no hesitation in saying that I think the classical professor not well suited to it, and that it would be as reasonable to take a professor of Theology, or of Mathematics, from the practicing lawyers, as a professor of eloquence from the subject. The subject is indeed one of the former of practical oratory, but it is contrary of the former class. The subject orator has no antagonist. There may be triumph without a victory, but there can be no victory without a battle. How can the days of Cicero, the great struggle and the most splendid theories of eloquence be at the bottom. It cannot be expected that any man very eminent as a public speaker will accept the appointment to the professorship. The talent commands a market higher order. It is then does the office require the exercise of the abilities to a very distinguished orator, for a man may be excellent as a judge and an eloquence without possessing its highest faculties himself. But an important Greek is a disadvantage, the oration of which in that professorship is a disgrace upon those who make the appointment, and is an insult upon the faculty of the institution. They would have done better to send to Hartford, and to have offered the vacancy made by the death of Mr. Mason to Mr. Stewart there. At least would have raised no prospect by his example. Mr. Adams joins me in requesting your present our best respects to Mrs. Boylston, and our joint thanks for her and your kind invitation - and believe me to be ever faithfully yours John Quincy Adams