

He carefully studied the art of parliamentary fencing, by comparing the speeches on opposite sides and noticing how arguments might be answered. He often attended the debates in the House, and there learned much that served him in after years.

In 1780, at the age of twenty-one, Pitt left Cambridge and was called to the bar. In the autumn of the same year a general election took place. He offered himself as a candidate for the university. The learned doctors, thinking it presumption in so young a man to solicit so high a distinction, placed him at the bottom of the poll. But he received a seat for the borough of Appleby. The country was at that time in a dangerous position. Army after army was sent in vain against the North-American colonists. France, Spain and Holland had united, seeking revenge for the wounds inflicted by Chatham. The command of the Mediterranean had been lost. The British flag could scarcely float in the British Channel. The king and parliament were alike unpopular, and had lost almost all authority. Even the ranks of the opposition had been divided, and were now but imperfectly united. The larger of these two parties had at its head the Marquis of Rockingham; but was led in the Commons by Fox, the ablest debater and one of the greatest orators England had seen. Pitt naturally joined the smaller section, composed of old followers of Chatham, now led by Shelburne.

On the 26th of February 1781, Pitt made his first speech in the House, in favor of Burke's plan of reform. Fox stood up at the same time but gave way. Macaulay says: "The lofty yet animated deportment of the young member, his perfect self-possession, the readiness with which he replied to the orators who had preceded him, the silver tones of his voice, the perfect structure of his unpremeditated sentences astonished and delighted his hearers." Burke, moved even to tears, exclaimed: "It is not a chip off the old block; it is the old block itself." "Pitt will be one of the first men in parliament," said a member of the opposition to Fox. "He is so already," was the magnanimous reply. On two subsequent occasions during the session he sustained the reputation he had acquired.

On the defeat of the Lord North Ministry, Rockingham became first minister. Fox and Shelburne became Secretaries of State. To