

William Pitt, the second son of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, and of Lady Hester Grenville, was born on the 28th of May, 1759. He was, from earliest childhood, a youth of genius and ambition. At the age of seven years, when the whole world was agitated over the news that Mr. Pitt had become Earl of Chatham, William exclaimed, "I am glad that I am not the eldest son. I want to speak in the House of Commons like papa." At the age of fourteen he was in intellect a man. When Hayley met him at Lyme in 1773, he was delighted and surprised at hearing wit and wisdom from one so young. But though strong intellectually he was weak physically, and was often ill. As in the case of Wilberforce, it was feared that it would be impossible to rear one so slender and so feeble.

On account of his feeble health he was not sent to school like other boys of the same rank; but received his first training at home under a clergyman named Wilson. He studied with extraordinary success. In 1773, when he entered Pembroke Hall, in the University of Cambridge, he had a knowledge of the ancient languages and mathematics such as few men carried up to the college. He was there placed under a B.A. named Prettyman, who was for more than two years the inseparable, and almost only, companion of his pupil. Till he graduated, Pitt had scarcely one acquaintance and never went to a single evening party. At seventeen he was admitted to the degree of M.A. without an examination. For some years, however, he continued to reside at college and to pursue his studies.

The stock of learning which he laid in during this time was truly great, but was all he ever had, for, during his busy life, he had no time for books. He took great delight in Newton's "Principia," and studied it carefully. He had a passionate fondness for mathematics, which required to be checked rather than encouraged. He also devoted much time and study to the ancient classics, and at the age of twenty had a thorough knowledge of Greek and Latin. He had set his mind on being intimately acquainted with all Greek poetry, and, it is said, could read the most difficult passages of the most obscure works of ancient literature with perfect ease at first sight. He paid very little attention to modern literature, and was intimate with few English writers except Shakspeare and Milton.