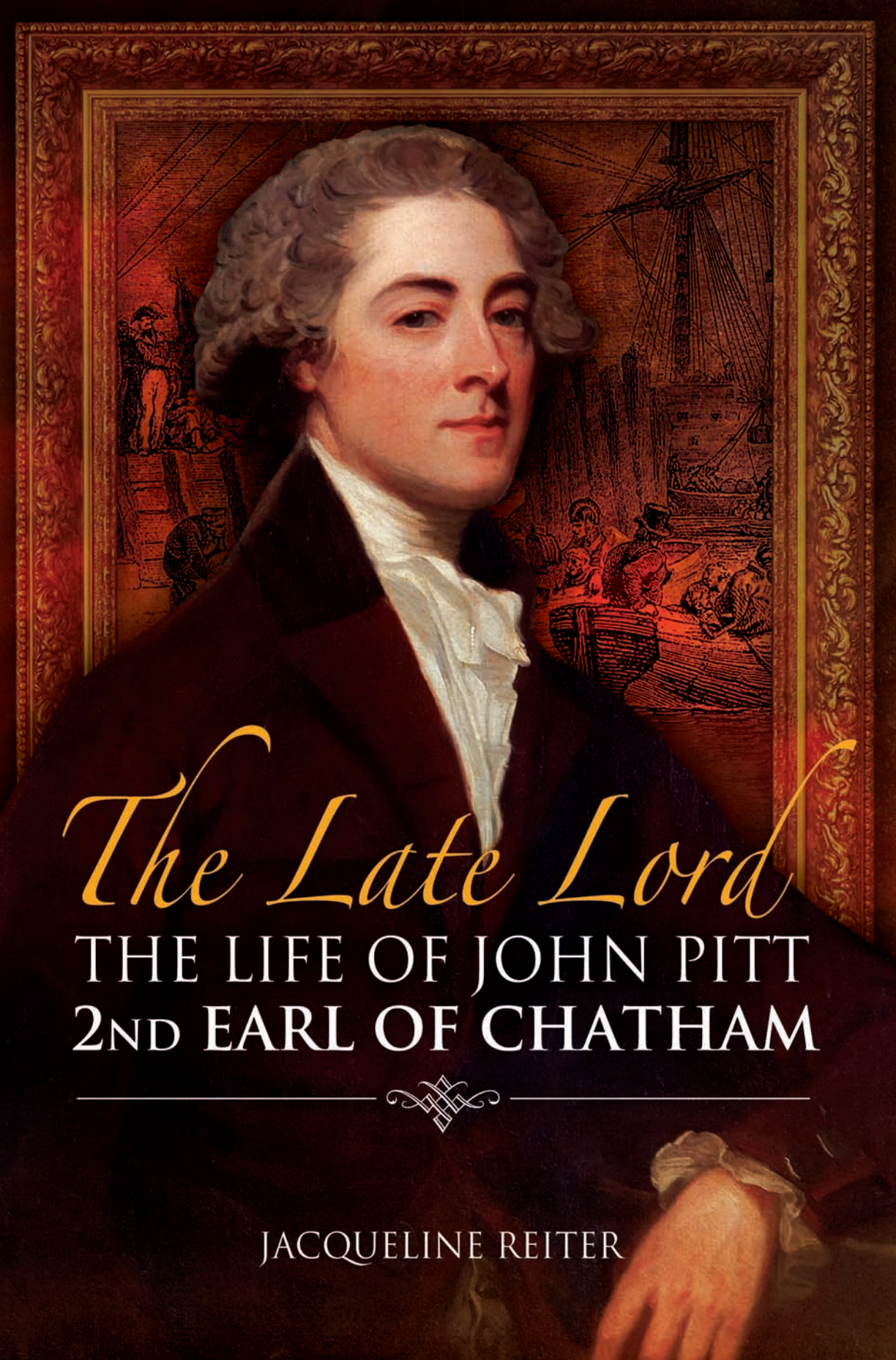

The Late Lord

THE LIFE OF JOHN PITT 2ND EARL OF CHATHAM

JACQUELINE REITER

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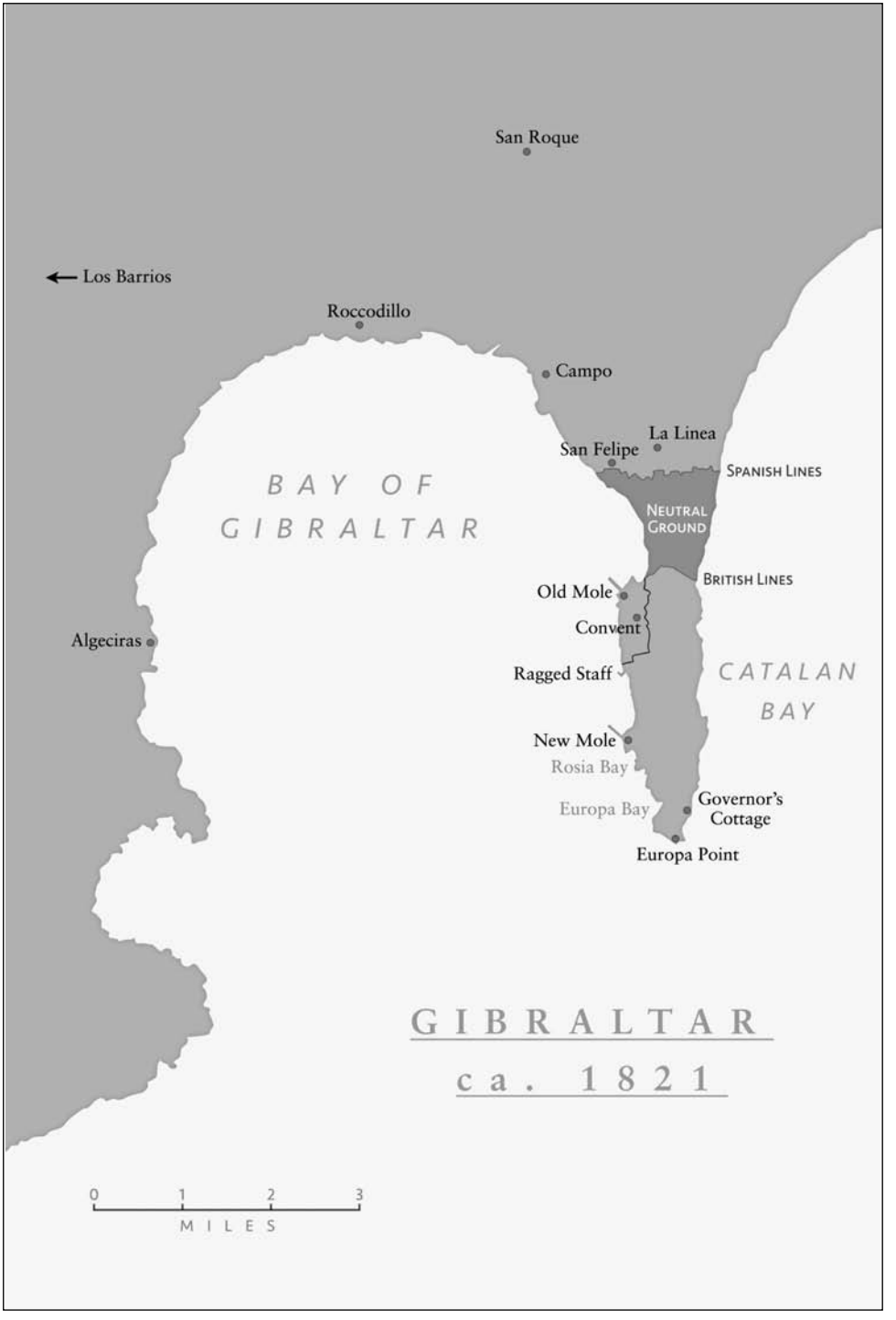
* * *

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
CC	*Chatham Correspondence*
CUL	Cambridge University Library
GNA	Gibraltar National Archives
HCJ	House of Commons Journal
HLJ	House of Lords Journal
JRL	John Rylands Library
NAM	National Army Museum
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NMM	National Maritime Museum
NRS	National Records of Scotland
PD	*Parliamentary Debates*
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
TNA	The National Archives


TEXEL
MARSDIEP
Den Helder
WIERINGEN
Callantsoog
Schagerbrug
Colhorn
Petten
Schagen
Winkel
Campe
Groet
Schoorl
Bergen
Koedijk
Hoorn
Egmont op Hoef
Alkmaar
Egmont op Zee
Heiloo
Egmont Binnen
THE HELDER EXPEDITION 1799
Limmen
Akersloot
Castricum
ZIJPE
Purmerend
Beverwijk
Zaandam
Harlem
AMSTERDAM
0 1 2 3 4 5
MILES


STONE DEEP
ROOMPOT
BREEZAND
Fort Den Haak
VEERE GAT
NORTH BEVELAND
THOLEN
Domburg
Grijpskerke
Veere
WALCHEREN
WOLVERSDIJKE
Arnemuiden
Zouteland
Middelburg
Goes
Dishoek
Coudekerke
DEURLOO
E. Zouburg
SLOE PASSAGE
SOUTH BEVELAND
Schore
EAST SCHELDT
Bergen-op-Zoom
Vijgeter
W. Zouburg
Nolle
Rammekens
Krabbendijke
Flushing
Borselen
Waarde
Bath
WIELINGEN CHANNEL
Breskens
WEST SCHELDT
CADZAND
Terneuse
Sandvliet
Liefkenshoek
Lillo
SCHELDT RIVER
Tête de Flandre
ANTWERP
THE WALCHEREN EXPEDITION 1809


San Roque
Los Barrios
Roccodillo
Campo
La Linea
San Felipe
Spanish Lines
Neutral Ground
British Lines
BAY OF GIBRALTAR
Old Mole
Convent
Algeciras
Ragged Staff
CATALAN BAY
New Mole
Rosia Bay
Europa Bay
Governor's Cottage
Europa Point
GIBRALTAR
ca. 1821
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Chapter 1

Lord Pitt
1756–78

The beginning of October 1756 was wet and stormy. A hurricane ripped through England from Newcastle to Bath, causing 'extraordinary' damage: 'Houses unroof'd, Stacks of Corn and Hay swept entirely away, large Oak Trees broke off at their Middles, and many other astonishing Effects'.[1] The wind blew just as hard in Kent, but for William Pitt in Hayes Place it was of no importance. He was 'in the joy of his heart', for close to midnight on the 9th his wife, Lady Hester, had given birth to a son and heir.[2]

In marked contrast with the child's later reputation for tardiness, his entry into the world was rapid. '[Lady Hester] had a sharp time, but not longer than two hours and a half,' the delighted father gushed to his brother-in-law. '. . . The young man meets with general applause for stature and strength . . . He is, however, as they flatter me, without appearance of heaviness, notwithstanding his size'.[3]

It was just as well Pitt could not peer into his son's future. The little boy, baptised on 7 November with the name of John, would spend twenty years holding Cabinet office, acquire a number of honours, including the Garter, and end his days as Governor of Gibraltar; but Pitt the Elder's hopes for his eldest son were not realised. Despite youthful promise, John suffered from life-long comparisons with the more famous members of his family. His career was blighted by his easy-going temperament and sheer bad luck. He fought as hard as he could against the hand he had been dealt, trying to overcome his many public and private disappointments, but he was ultimately the victim of his own family's success. His name became synonymous with one of Britain's worst military disasters.

All this lay in the future. For Pitt the Elder, his son's birth was a good

omen. He had been out of office for a year, following nine years as Paymaster-General of the Forces. This post was notoriously corrupt: its holders creamed off a percentage of the considerable funds passing through their hands by way of perquisites, and Pitt's ostentatious refusal to do so had earned him a reputation as an honest man. After publicly criticising his government's war effort in North America against France, Pitt was stripped of his office; but by the time of John's birth, the end of Pitt's exile was in sight. The war in America, which had spread to Europe, lurched from disaster to disaster. The prime minister, the Duke of Newcastle, needed more ministerial clout, and Pitt's reputation and powerful oratory made him the obvious choice.

In December 1756 Pitt took office as Secretary of State, and spent the next five years until his resignation in 1761 turning the war from a run of defeats into a series of victories. His strategy was to fight France on two fronts, by subsidising a large Continental force under Frederick the Great of Prussia and deploying British naval and military might in the colonies. The taking of Louisbourg and Quebec, victory at Quiberon and Minden, and successes in the West Indies all cemented Pitt's reputation as a war leader. 'Our bells are worn threadbare with ringing for victories,' Horace Walpole reported, and Pitt was widely credited with masterminding them.[4] But he never regained the dizzying heights of the 1750s. He was called to form a new government in 1766, but his decision to take the Privy Seal, a minor post without responsibilities, and a peerage as Earl of Chatham damaged his public standing. He lost support in the City of London, which cancelled celebratory illuminations in his honour when news of 'Lord Cheat'em' spread.[5] By the time his ministry fell in October 1768, his political reputation had been permanently compromised.

For little John, learning to walk and talk during his father's most glorious years, Pitt the Elder must have been a living legend. He and his four siblings (Hester, Harriot, William and James Charles) caught some of their father's reflected glory themselves. Whenever they travelled they were greeted by 'Croud[s] assembled . . . Bells and every kind Welcome'.[6] When a group of Mohecannuk Native Americans came to England to petition the King in a territorial dispute, they made a point of paying their respects to Pitt's eldest son and treating him as the representative of his absent father.[7] John had Pitt the Elder's name and political principles instilled into him from the cradle, and grew up with the conviction that being a Pitt was something special.

John's importance within the family as the eldest son was never in doubt, and he never forgot that he bore the weight of his father's expectations. He was, however, unlikely to follow Pitt the Elder into the House of Commons: at the age of 5 he became the heir to a peerage. In 1761 Pitt the Elder accepted a pension of £3,000 per annum for three lives and a Barony for his wife. Lady Hester Pitt was created Lady Chatham in her own right, and on her death John would become Baron Chatham. When his father formed his ministry in 1766 and accepted the Earldom of Chatham, John's status grew still further, and brought him the courtesy title of Viscount Pitt – 'Pitt' for short to his family.

Like his siblings, Lord Pitt was not particularly robust. He never outgrew his childhood tendency towards frequent fevers and digestive troubles, and even as an adult he was described as delicate. When he was 13 his parents talked of sending him to Eton, but in the end he and his four siblings were educated at home – Hayes Place in Kent, and Burton Pynsent in Somerset – by a private tutor, Edward Wilson.[8] Whenever they were separated Pitt wrote to the others in terms of great affection, although his lax writing habits were satirised by his brother William: 'I have told Pitt that I will not suffer him by any means to get off without giving me the History [of his travels] . . . tho' if it might be held in a nutshell it would hardly be worth the trouble of taking the inside out'.[9] Pitt was two-and-a-half years older than William, four-and-a-half years older than James, but he had no other companions even close to his own age. When Lady Chatham took Pitt and her daughters to London in April 1772, leaving William and James at Burton Pynsent due to ill-health, she wrote that 'Pitt does not know how to do as yet without' his brothers.[10]

Pitt's character was beginning to emerge. His 'boisterous' spirits and 'fly[ing] about' were recorded on more than one occasion by his mother, and he loved being outdoors.[11] His father described him at 18 months old, '[figuring] in his Green Surcoat, among the daizies [*sic*] and blossoms, in great vernal delight'.[12] He never lost his fascination with nature, boldly exploring Cornish underground rivers and showing his mother the aurora borealis above Hayes Place, but his first loves were riding and hunting.[13] 'Pitt lives much abroad, and grows strong,' Lord Chatham wrote in November 1771. 'The hounds and the gun are great delights, without prejudice to literary pursuits'.[14] 'I face frost and snow every day with my gun on my shoulder to the no small terrour of the larks and thrushes,' Pitt reported to his tutor with obvious satisfaction, and at 14 he received a

Spanish gun-barrel as a gift from one of his father's friends.[15] When he was 20 his mother apologised for his not writing letters to family because 'He is following the Fox Hounds, for the first day this season'.[16]

This reflected Pitt's lifelong tendency to put pleasure before obligations. Unlike William, who had to be restrained from working too hard, he required encouragement to succeed. He was undeniably intelligent: Mr Wilson's records of the children's performances in the schoolroom prove that Pitt often outstripped William in the Classics and Mathematics. (This superiority gave William occasion to note, cuttingly: 'Your Greek was excellent, and (I think) with practice you may become a Thucydides'.[17]) Pitt's parents, aware of their eldest son's tendency to rely on his abilities, pushed him to excel, and he responded well to their encouragement. Lady Chatham's sister-in-law noted Pitt's 'fresh ardour . . . upon commendation[;] a mind so well turn'd as his will ever feel the utmost satisfaction in being approv'd'.[18] Lady Chatham lavished praise on her eldest son in letters to her husband, knowing he would show them to Pitt:

> Your charming Boy cannot be enough admired in the sweet combination of his Talents, and the indearing [*sic*] manner in which they have been exerted with so much Propriety. I must love Him better for it, if I can. I long to tell him the infinite satisfaction I feel from your account of him, and that I am in debt to him both on your account, and His own, for his Winning Behavior.[19]

As for Chatham, he was quick to point out Pitt's superior performance in a play put on by the children for their parents in 1773: 'William is certainly very correct [in his speech], but Pitt will be *the* orator'.[20] Pitt's grace and gentlemanly attitude, indeed, seemed to point him towards a successful public career.

Yet Pitt never shook off a degree of sloth. Later he was notorious for it, but it sprang from a sense of inferiority rather than self-satisfied belief in his abilities. Chatham's biographer Brian Tunstall notes, shrewdly, 'He seems to have received rather less attention than he deserved'.[21] As an adult those closest to him noticed a surprising vulnerability beneath the surface. Mr Wilson's obvious amazement, and Lord and Lady Chatham's pride, at William's growing intelligence cannot have been easy to watch. There are few hints that comparisons were made in family circles between

the two boys to Pitt's detriment, but outsiders did, and Pitt must have been aware that, although loved, he was not the favourite child.[22]

Whether Mr Wilson or Chatham planted the suggestion in his mind is unclear, but by the age of 16 Pitt aspired to join the army. In April 1773 Chatham wrote to his friend, the political philosopher Thomas Hollis, regarding a retired engineer named Captain Kennedy of Lyme Regis. Hollis had introduced Kennedy to Chatham the previous summer and Chatham wanted to know whether Kennedy might teach his eldest son engineering. He vouched for his son's eagerness in terms that suggested a military career was Pitt's own choice: 'His mind is strongly bent on the pursuit, and I am sure he will be a diligent disciple.'[23] The arrangement was made, and in June 1773 Pitt accompanied his father and brother William to Lyme Regis. They stayed in the building known locally as the 'Great House' on Broad Street, close to the beach, and here Pitt learned the basics of military engineering from Captain Kennedy.[24] Chatham was delighted with Pitt's clear enthusiasm:

> Pitt, whom I cannot too much applaud, sticks close to Mr Kennedy, *morning* and *after-dinner*, and is ardent in the *nobler Chace* of future Fame, from Sieges to Come, and Trenches to be yet open'd. . . . Nothing cou'd be more fortunate than falling into the acquaintance of Mr Kennedy, who is just, in all respects, the thing to be wish'd for our young Militaire to frequent. Such society . . . tends to put our *Boy*, on his *Man's legs*.[25]

Not everything was about work. The 'Militaire', or the 'young Vauban', was permitted a few afternoons off to bathe in the sea with (and splash water over) his brother William. They took tea with local society, and Pitt, already a keen social animal, 'danc[ed] all night with Lyme-Regis misses, and gay Matrons, till almost two'.[26]

At 17 Pitt was comparatively old to join the army, and he was anxious to be commissioned as soon as possible. Taking his father's advice, he sought an ensigncy in the 47th Regiment. Its colonel was General Guy Carleton, the Governor-General of Quebec. This held strong appeal for Chatham, whose most glorious hour had been the fall of Quebec to General Wolfe in 1759, and Carleton readily agreed to appoint Lord Pitt one of his aides-de-camp. Although a vacancy in the 47th did not exist, the Secretary-at-War, Lord Barrington, persuaded an existing ensign to

transfer to a vacancy in the 29th, and the King waived the usual fees for purchasing the place.[27] By mid-November 1773, Ensign the Lord Pitt's future course was set.

In the summer of 1774, Lord and Lady Chatham travelled with their eldest son to London. Pitt had never been further from home than Cornwall, but he embraced this new adventure with enthusiasm. On 6 July he appeared at court, where he took official leave of the King, and on 20 July he sailed with General Carleton for Quebec.[28] He left England, and childhood, behind him.

* * *

Pitt arrived in Quebec in September 1774. He left no record of his impressions, but for a boy who had never seen anything more imposing than the Bristol Channel and the Welsh mountains Quebec was a strange but awe-inspiring place. The Chateau St Louis, Carleton's residence as Governor where Pitt lodged, looked out over a town that was both literally and figuratively divided. Perched on the edge of a tall cliff, Quebec's Upper Town, filled with wealthy homes, convents, churches and government buildings, spilled down into the narrow streets and dockyards of the Lower Town on the banks of the St Lawrence. The province contained about 80,000 inhabitants, a small proportion of them in Quebec, Montreal and Trois-Rivières, the rest scattered across small settlements.[29] Most of these *habitants*, as they were known, were of French Catholic origin, and co-existed uncomfortably with the English-speaking merchants.

General Carleton recognised that the majority of Quebec's citizens were French Catholics, and was reluctant to impose a British system too quickly. Cold and aloof to those outside his closest circle, he was respected but mistrusted by those who worked with him. He had spent most of the early 1770s in London advising North's government in the framing of the Quebec Act, which established a Governor's council of both British and Quebecois delegates and sanctioned the continuation of French customs and religion. There was scope for revision, although Carleton flat-out disapproved of establishing troublesome American-style elected assemblies, and the French-speaking *habitants* were pleased with the results. Predictably, the English-speaking merchants were outraged by what they saw as a consolidation of despotic control. Their economic

links with the southern colonies acquired a political complexion. Tension had been growing for some time between Britain and her colonies over heavy taxes to pay for the expensive Seven Years War, and Lord North's government had passed several Acts designed to tighten British parliamentary sovereignty over America. Secret committees were set up in Montreal and Quebec to correspond with the American disaffected.[30] Despite these signs, Carleton failed to see the southern troubles coming until it was nearly too late. In September 1774 the British army in Quebec was about 1,800 strong, but Carleton immediately sent 2 of his 4 regiments to Boston in response to the Commander-in-Chief General Thomas Gage's request for reinforcements. It was an astonishingly short-sighted move that left him with 800 regulars, a scattering of Indians and Scottish emigrants, and an unreliable militia.

For now, Lord Pitt's life in Quebec reflected this astonishing lack of urgency. No letters of his from this time survive, but others wrote home on his behalf to reassure Lord and Lady Chatham that their son was happy and well-treated. His day began with studies between 7 and 9, followed by breakfast with General Carleton and his wife. At 11 he attended Carleton at the mounting of the guard, and the rest of the day was his to spend as he pleased: reading, fencing or practising musket drill.[31] This leisurely life ended in April 1775 with the outbreak of rebellion in America. Carleton, at last aware of his exposed position, begged the Secretary of State for 10,000 reinforcements, but all available troops were diverted to Boston. By the time the government sent five regiments north the weather had turned icy, and only one regiment managed to land. Meanwhile, American eyes were turning northwards. In May 1775 the Continental Congress, America's revolutionary legislative body, ordered an invasion of Canada. General Benedict Arnold took possession of the British forts of Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain, then moved inland and laid siege to Fort St-Jean.

Under these dramatically changed conditions, Pitt's position as Carleton's aide-de-camp became embarrassing. Lord Chatham's sympathy for the American cause was well-known, and the Americans immediately recognised the benefits of capturing his eldest son. Chatham was a powerful politician and Pitt would have been a significant pawn in American hands. American officers were provided with his physical description to make sure he was not killed in action, and his treatment as a prisoner-of-war had been planned down to the last detail.[32] There were

plenty of opportunities to capture him while he and Carleton moved between Quebec and Montreal over the summer of 1775, overseeing the raising of the militia. At one stage Carleton and Lord Pitt were allegedly 'within a quarter of an hour of falling into the hands' of the Continental Army, and narrowly escaped.[33]

Pitt soon discovered he had no control over his career in such politically charged circumstances. Around the time America was plunging into conflict, Lord Chatham suffered a relapse of the same mental illness that had crippled his ministry in 1766–8. At the end of June 1775 Lady Chatham wrote Pitt a long letter to remind him of his obligations to his father's political identity. As Chatham's heir, any actions Pitt took would reflect back on his father. Lady Chatham put pressure on him to return to England before he was forced to fight the American colonists against Chatham's wishes:

> I can . . . venture upon no advice to you, but that of entreating you to be sure in every part of your conduct to take care that your Actions shou'd be consistent with your Honor. That They may be so determine nothing without the Advice of Those Persons whose Knowledge whose Honor and whose Heart are chiefly to be trusted.[34]

Lady Chatham told a friend that she had given Pitt 'a *free power* to decide upon his own situation', adding to her son William: 'He will be the Judge, circumstanced as he is, what will be consistent with his Honor.'[35]

But Pitt, reading his mother's letter, knew his 'free power' was a nonsense. The decision to send him home had already been made. He dutifully sailed for England at the beginning of October carrying dispatches, and arrived in London on 2 November 1775.[36] For a few months his military future was in doubt. Having left Canada, he could not well serve anywhere else in the rebellious Colonies. Matters came to a head in February 1776 when his leave expired: there were, as Lady Chatham observed, 'strong objections to his remaining in the Army, and declining to serve'.[37] Since her husband was still ill, Lady Chatham took it upon herself to make Pitt's decision to resign his commission for him.

Pitt knew he was being used as a political weapon to reaffirm Chatham's opposition to the American war. The circumstances of his leaving the army may have seemed honourable to Lady Chatham, but

others disagreed: 'Lord Chatham has been censured exceedingly on all sides . . . in letting his son Lord Pitt embark with the King's forces, for the subjugation of the Americans, and after such permission for recalling him so abruptly, and making him throw up his commission'.[38] Even Pitt's uncle, Lord Temple, 'was sorry the young man was thrown out of the army . . . Had *not his father determined for him*, he ought to have gone [back to his regiment], as an officer was to obey orders without enquiring the fairness of them'.[39] But the young man was more than an officer: he was a Pitt, and his first duty, as his mother emphasised, was to his family. Reluctant though he was to abandon his career before it had properly begun, it never crossed his mind to do anything but subordinate his interests to theirs. It was the first time he was required to abandon his ambitions for the sake of a close relative. Unfortunately for him, it would not be the last.

* * *

Now that he was a civilian again, Pitt began his political apprenticeship. He had a guaranteed seat in the House of Lords as the heir to his father's Earldom and, while Chatham remained incapacitated, he was expected to act as head of the family. Throughout 1776 and 1777 he attended debates in the House of Lords, listening to speeches by Chatham's protégé, Lord Shelburne, from behind the Throne.[40] He attended court functions, appeared at dinners held by prominent members of the Chathamite opposition, kept family and friends abreast of Lord Chatham's health, and acted as a scribe for his gout-stricken father.[41] Pitt's public profile, in fact, was so high it led to rumours that he meant to stand as a candidate for Westminster in the next general election.[42]

By this time Lord Chatham's health was improving, but the American situation was deteriorating fast. In July 1776 the Americans declared their independence, an act Lord Chatham deprecated. America was 'the great source of all [Britain's] wealth and power': 'I will as soon subscribe to Transubstantiation as to Sovereignty (by right) in the Colonies,' Chatham fulminated to Lord Shelburne.[43] A year later General Burgoyne's army was destroyed at Saratoga. Not only was a large proportion of the British army in North America lost at one stroke, but the defeat showed that the rebellious colonials were a force to be reckoned with.

In February 1778 France allied with the rebels and declared war on

Britain. Pitt could finally rejoin the army without the certainty of being sent to fight his American brethren, and he gladly seized the opportunity. He had, as yet, no regiment to join, but the newspapers reported him taking the rank of lieutenant as a gentleman volunteer. By the middle of April his destination – Gibraltar – was widely reported, but it was not until mid-June that the *London Gazette* noted his appointment to the 39th Foot.[44] By then Pitt's circumstances had changed yet again, this time permanently.

On 6 April, Lord Chatham received news that the Duke of Richmond intended to propose a motion in the House of Lords to acknowledge American independence. Richmond's argument was simple: while Britain warred with France, she could not afford to fight on two continents. Although suffering from gout, Chatham resolved to attend the debate and resist Richmond's motion, and – as he often did – he brought Pitt and his two younger sons with him. Chatham was clearly unwell, although he did utter some powerful lines:

> Shall we tarnish the lustre of this nation by an ignominious surrender of its rights and fairest possessions? Shall this great kingdom . . . fall prostrate before the House of Bourbon? . . . Shall a people that seventeen years ago was the terror of the world, now stoop so low as to tell its ancient inveterate enemy, take all we have, only give us peace? It is impossible! . . . Let us at least make one effort; and if we must fall, let us fall like men![45]

But it was Chatham who collapsed, only a short time later, felled by a stroke. Pitt never recorded his feelings on seeing his father drop, but the shock must have been immense. When John Singleton Copley commemorated the event in *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, he portrayed Chatham surrounded by his three sons, William gesturing in alarm, James weeping and Pitt, in his military uniform, clutching his dying father's arm.

Lord Chatham recovered from his seizure enough to be carried to his house at Hayes, but over the next few weeks he slipped away. His reputed last words were to Pitt: 'Go, my son! Go whither your country calls you . . . spare not a moment, which is due to her service, in weeping over an old man, who will soon be no more.'[46] In fact Pitt had already left for Gibraltar, and was summoned back to Hayes from his ship at Portsmouth,

where he had just embarked with General Robert Boyd.[47] He arrived just in time to witness his father's death on 11 May. The new Earl of Chatham was given a short time to settle his father's immediate affairs before returning to Portsmouth and sailing to Gibraltar, bearing one of Britain's most celebrated titles.

All his life he had been reminded at every turn of his obligations to his father, his family and his country, in that order. His father was now dead, and he was expected to act as head of the Pitts himself. His duty to his country still remained to be fulfilled. That he must live up to his new title was never in question. A few days after his father's death he wrote to his friend Lord Granby, the future Duke of Rutland, trusting that he 'inherit[ed] his father's opinions, principles, and love of his country'.[48] This was more than a desire to emulate his father's patriotism. It was a measure of the burden the Earldom of Chatham placed on his shoulders, and which he was never allowed to forget.

Chapter 2

‘The Child of the Publick’ 1778–88

‘The present Lord Chatham is about 22 Years of Age, of a very delicate, tender Constitution, which he inherits from his Father,’ the *Public Advertiser* reported, with evident curiosity. ‘He has been bred up . . . principally in the House, in a very domestic way’.[1] As private as his upbringing had been, the new Earl was semi-public property because of his parentage. ‘One looks upon him as the Child of the Publick,’ Lord Grantham, Britain’s ambassador to Spain, told his brother, who agreed Chatham had ‘a difficult part to act’ to balance the expectations revolving about him.[2]

Chatham’s position was unusual. As an Earl and an automatic member of the House of Lords, he had an expected political and social role. Although family networks and connections still drove British politics, Chatham was very much an anomaly. At a time when acreage was directly correlated to importance he had comparatively little land, and eventually sold the little he had. His earldom was new, his ancestors had been accountants, lawyers and freebooters. Chatham’s political importance was defined by who he was: penniless and landless, his name was his only asset.

It was, however, a powerful one, and, with the first Earl looming large in public consciousness, Chatham might have stepped into the void his father’s death had created. Why, then, did Chatham not establish himself as an influential figure? One possible reason was his military career, which meant he was abroad for long stretches until mid-1781. Another obstacle was Chatham’s personality. Physically, he was tall, thin and very dark-haired, with a pronounced downward slant to his nose which, along with the shape of his face, put acquaintances strongly in mind of his father.[3] But the same people who found his appearance so imposing were

disappointed to find he had not inherited his father’s character. Grantham thought him ‘rather prim’ and ‘reserved’, which he ascribed to Chatham’s ‘very private Education’.[4] The *London Evening Post* noted ‘the appearance of much mildness in his countenance’ in 1779, and two years later the philosopher Jeremy Bentham saw ‘a kind of reserve, tempered with mildness, but clouded with a little dash of bashfulness’.[5] In any case, by the time he settled permanently in England in 1782 Chatham had missed his opportunity to stand forward as his father’s political successor. That role passed to his brother, William, and Chatham never regained it.

Chatham stayed just under a year in Gibraltar, before securing six months’ leave to address some of his more pressing responsibilities as head of the family.[6] He began the long journey home in March 1779 with two friends, Hugh Conway (later Seymour) and a Scotsman named Adam Colt. The travellers spent a fortnight in Madrid with the British ambassador, Lord Grantham, who took time out from the deteriorating diplomatic situation to show them the sights and introduce them to Spanish high society. In early April Chatham went north through France to Paris, carrying dispatches detailing the collapse of relations with Spain. He arrived in London on 7 May and, just over a month later, took his seat in the House of Lords for the first time. He used the occasion to draw attention to his patriotic status as a military man defending his country, appearing in the scarlet and green regimentals of the 39th Regiment. The stratagem worked, and the newspapers enthused over Chatham’s ‘very elegant, manly, and graceful figure’.[7]

He took his seat at a critical time. Lord North’s government had been in power for nine years, but by mid-1779 the strain of war with the American colonies was beginning to tell. The opposition was nominally headed by the Marquis of Rockingham, a powerful northern magnate, whose following included an impressive array of Whig landed aristocracy as well as able orators and administrators such as Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox. The Rockinghams differed in their approach to the American war from the Chathamites, now led by Lord Shelburne. Both factions deplored the struggle and insisted it could not continue, but the Rockinghams proposed granting unconditional independence, whereas the Chathamites preferred a federal union based on reciprocal commercial advantages. This subtle but significant difference had so far prevented the opposition working harmoniously to unseat North’s government.

Chatham’s name and military identity made him a valuable addition

to opposition ranks, and his few political acts showed his determination to follow his father's line of politics. He took his parliamentary duties seriously, attending whenever the House of Lords discussed the American war or other military issues, and putting his name to two official Protests entered into the Lords' Journal. The first was in February 1781, against Lord George Germain's elevation to the House of Lords as Lord Sackville, on the grounds that Germain had been cashiered for disobeying orders at the Battle of Minden in 1759. The second was in June 1783, on the Lords' rejection of the Public Offices Regulation Bill, a measure proposed by Chatham's brother.[8] Despite these moments of prominence, Chatham kept a low profile. He offered his presence and vote when required, wielded the proxy votes he was entitled to cast for up to three other absent lords and helped manage the occasional conference between the Lords and Commons, but made no speeches. This no doubt suited his inclinations.

His social circle was predictably limited to Whigs of unimpeachable Chathamite pedigree. He visited Lord Shelburne in London and at his Wiltshire house of Bowood, dined with Thomas Townshend, who headed the Chathamites in the Commons, and consolidated a connection with Charles Manners, 4th Duke of Rutland. This friendship, deep and sincere on both sides, was a defining feature of Chatham's life, and his connection with the Rutland family lasted well beyond Rutland's premature death in 1787. Rutland had started his career under Rockingham's auspices, but placed his extensive political and financial networks at the Chathamites' disposal in the mid-1770s. His expansive good-humour complemented Chatham's quiet, serious character perfectly, and they shared a love of hunting and aristocratic splendour. The correspondence between the two men was frank, open and affectionate. Rutland opened almost all his letters to Chatham with 'My dearest Friend' and signed off in a variety of touching ways: 'I am ever the most attached & Sincere of your Friends', 'God Bless you my dear Friend & love you as much as I do', or simply: 'Ever unalterably yours'. Chatham, normally extremely restrained in his correspondence, was similarly effusive: 'with the truest affection, your ever attached friend'.[9]

Chatham might have established himself with Rutland's political backing as a political force to be reckoned with, but, even had he wanted this, he did not get the opportunity. Parliament was prorogued two weeks after he took his seat, did not sit again till the end of November, then rose

again for Christmas. By the time Parliament reassembled in January 1780, Chatham was no longer in England. He had transferred out of the 39th Regiment over the course of the summer, and in the autumn Rutland gave him a captaincy in the 86th, a new regiment he had raised. In the new year Chatham received news his regiment had been ordered on foreign service. For a long time nobody knew where it was to be sent. America was a distinct possibility, and Chatham breathed a little easier when it was ruled out. His relief lasted only until the actual destination was confirmed: the Leeward Islands, where, according to the newspapers, ‘near thirty were buried every week’ from yellow fever.[10] ‘I felt excessively sorry that military Ideas could not suffer him to attend to all the various Motives which might . . . have inclin’d him to avoid going out, in *such* a manner and at *such* Time,’ Chatham’s brother William regretted, but Chatham had sacrificed professional considerations to private necessities before and refused to do so again.[11] In fact he did not remain in the West Indies long. He was on leave from September 1780 to January 1781, and before he could return evidence of the climate’s dangers arrived all too devastatingly in the form of news of the death of his youngest brother James in Antigua. As the head of the family Chatham’s life was too important to waste and he did not return to his regiment. In December 1782 he left the 86th altogether and purchased a commission in the London-based 3rd Foot Guards.[12]

By this time, Chatham’s political importance had declined sharply. While he had been in the West Indies, his brother William had been elected for the parliamentary constituency of Appleby-in-Westmorland. He took his seat in the House of Commons on 23 January 1781, made his maiden speech a month later to rapturous acclaim and spent the following year fully living up to this spectacular debut. Accordingly, when North fell in March 1782 and Lord Rockingham formed a coalition government with Lord Shelburne, it was William Pitt and not the Earl of Chatham who was offered a minor government post. Pitt declined, but accepted the Chancellorship of the Exchequer in July when Shelburne became First Lord of the Treasury after Rockingham’s death.

Pitt’s meteoric rise put an end to Chatham’s time in the spotlight. Although he might have resented Pitt’s success, Chatham was probably delighted to find the pressure to perform removed from his shoulders, and he gladly took advantage of it to focus on his family responsibilities. This was not exactly the easy option. His father had never demonstrated much

interest in finance, and died deeply in debt. Parliament had voted £20,000 to pay the most pressing obligations and settled an annual pension of £4,000 on the Earldom to help relieve the new Lord Chatham from embarrassment, but these huge sums, in the 5th Earl Stanhope's words, merely enabled Chatham 'to maintain – and no more than maintain – the family honours'.[13]

Chatham had inherited two estates: Hayes Place in Kent and Burton Pynsent in Somerset. Burton theoretically provided an income of £3,000 a year, but actually represented an annual loss.[14] Both estates were mortgaged to the hilt, Burton for £13,175 including interest and Hayes for £10,000.[15] By 1778 the first Earl had tangled his estate in so much debt one creditor refused to agree to any more loans unless Chatham informed his children of the obligations secured on their inheritance, 'that they be [not] alarmed at it hereafter'.[16] Further complicating the situation was Pitt the Elder's will, which divided the money raised by the Hayes and Burton mortgages between his eldest daughter and three younger children.[17] In practice, this meant the second Earl had to sell his inheritance to provide his siblings with theirs.

By the time Chatham returned permanently to Britain the need to sell Hayes was pressing. The effects were auctioned off in November 1784, and the house itself sold the following year for £8,500. The proceeds were divided according to the terms of Pitt the Elder's will, but Chatham himself saw less than £1,000 of the final sum.[18] He could have done with more, for by 1785 he was in considerable debt on his own account. In December 1780 Chatham and Pitt paid a lump sum of £3,500 to the Duke of Rutland in return for an annuity of £300 derived from three of Rutland's Cambridgeshire estates – a lump sum acquired partly through two separate loans for £1,500, secured on two chambers at Lincoln's Inn, themselves purchased by the brothers with two further loans.[19] In 1785 Chatham borrowed an additional £3,150 through three moneylenders secured on the earldom's £4,000 pension.[20] Over the years this pension was further mortgaged out to Chatham's banker Thomas Coutts, the Jewish moneylenders Asher and Abraham Goldsmid, and various private creditors, until the security the sum offered must have worn exceedingly thin.

Chatham did not learn from his father's impressive disregard for his personal finances. The 4th Duke of Rutland put his hunting lodge of Cheveley Park at his disposal from August 1787. After Rutland's death in October, Chatham was allowed to continue using Cheveley as a country

seat during the minority of the 5th Duke. He made full use of the privilege until 1798, and Cheveley’s proximity to Newmarket drew Chatham into the ruinous world of horse breeding and racing, in which he had already shown interest in 1780.[21] While in town, he frequented card-tables more than was safe on his slender funds. He was a member of several clubs, including White’s and Brooks’s, and there were accounts of his sitting ‘up all night’ gambling, or ‘cut[ting] in and out’ at whist.[22] By the time Chatham was middle-aged, he was said to have ‘totally ruined Himself by Play’.[23] Although such stories come second- or third-hand, there are enough of them to suggest they were not ill-founded. Whatever the truth, Chatham followed the same pattern for the majority of his life: spending, borrowing and using his pension and an assortment of often hastily contracted life-insurance policies to secure his enormous loans.

Unlike his father, Chatham had no heir on whom to inflict his difficulties, although he demonstrated a clear intention to continue the dynasty. His choice of bride was dutifully determined by politics, but also by love. During Chatham’s stay in Madrid on his way home from Gibraltar, the British ambassador Lord Grantham noticed something singular about his guest. Chatham’s travelling companions ‘found out new Acquaintances [prostitutes] at Madrid, but Lord Chatham never went with them, & I would not swear that he is not in possession of a most precious Jewel’.[24] Some weeks later, Grantham’s brother Frederick Robinson met Chatham at a dinner held by Thomas Townshend, later Lord Sydney, a former political associate of Chatham’s father. By the end of the evening Robinson had solved the riddle. ‘If [Chatham] has a mind to set that Jewel which you suppose him possess’d of very beautifully,’ he told Grantham, ‘he might consult Miss Mary Townshend’.[25]

Robinson was right: Chatham had fallen in love with Townshend’s second daughter. Mary was already considered a beauty, elegant, dark-haired and quietly intelligent. She was the perfect match for the reserved, highly private Chatham, but at 16 she was too young for him to press his suit seriously, and his departure for the West Indies the following year slowed down their courtship. Still, he never forgot her, and once he settled permanently in Britain he renewed his attentions. By the summer of 1782 the fashionable set was full of Chatham’s attachment to ‘the beauty in Albemarle Street’ (Townshend’s London residence).[26] Chatham played it cool, dismissing such gossip as ‘Stock Jobbing Reports’, but he fed the rumours himself by visiting the Townshends over the summer.[27] By May

1783 the match seemed certain, and Chatham's sister Harriot wrote excitedly to her mother of the couple's very public '*amicable*' behaviour at a ball.[28]

Harriot had reckoned without the streak of schoolboy bashfulness in Chatham that made him miss nearly every opportunity to bring his suit to a point. Although he came '*very near*' proposing on a trip to Frognal, the Townshend family's country estate, he did not do so, and by 6 May Mary was 'not a little fidgetty [*sic*]'.[29] 'I think in this sort of way all sides may be likely to get *Frampy*,' Harriot grumbled, but Chatham did not screw up the courage to propose until 5 June.[30] The marriage contract, dated 5 July 1783, settled £5,000 on Mary as a dowry, and the wedding took place five days later.[31] The match cemented a close alliance between two strongly political families and, despite its fitful start, it was very happy. Although there were posthumous rumours that Chatham never travelled without a mistress, he and his wife remained close throughout the thirty-eight years of their marriage, despite the many difficulties and outright tragedies that beset it.[32] They made a handsome young couple, and Chatham did not hesitate to use the occasion of his wedding to make a typically ostentatious display of rank. Following a short honeymoon at Hayes, he and his bride were presented at court for the first time as a married couple on 31 July, riding the short distance from Albemarle Street to St James's Palace in an extravagant cavalcade of carriages and sedan chairs.[33] The new Countess of Chatham turned heads in her 'white sattin [gown], richly trimmed with silver fringe &c. Her head-dress was elegant, and she looked very beautiful'.[34]

For now, the newly wed Earl of Chatham was kept from domestic bliss by the memorable political events in which he was closely involved through his brother. Pitt resigned the Chancellorship of the Exchequer when Shelburne fell over the question of peace with America. Former prime minister Lord North had joined his considerable following with that of Charles James Fox, scion of the Rockingham party and formerly North's bitterest political enemy. Many found the blatantly pragmatic nature of their junction repellent, but the coalition tipped the numbers definitively against Shelburne. His resignation in February ushered in several weeks of uncertainty as the King fought against the likelihood of a Fox-North ministry headed by the Rockinghamite Duke of Portland. Chatham's brother was one of the men to whom the King offered the Treasury as a stopgap. Although still only 23, Pitt had shone during the

debates on the peace and was carefully building a reputation as a champion of moderate economic and electoral reform; but, faced with the near-certainty of heading a minority government, he refused.

Fox and North took office at the beginning of April 1783. Despite an embezzlement scandal, they maintained their solid parliamentary support till the end of the session. Pitt, however, kept in touch with the King over the summer through his cousin Earl Temple and Lord Thurlow, who had been Lord Chancellor until Fox and North came to power. In October, word reached him that an opportunity to attack Fox and North had offered itself in the shape of their East India Bill. The Bill proposed to vest Indian patronage in the hands of a fixed term, politically nominated Board of Control, and could be interpreted as an attempt to entrench the government in office independent of the King’s pleasure – an infringement of the King’s prerogative to choose his ministers. Once Pitt was certain the King would throw his authority behind a new ministry he agreed to act. The King allowed his name to be circulated by Earl Temple in opposition to the India Bill, and, as a result of this constitutionally dubious course of action, it was thrown out of the House of Lords on 17 December 1783. Portland, Fox and North were dismissed, and Pitt installed in their place.

Chatham was not directly involved in the plotting that preceded his brother’s elevation to power. He dutifully attended the Lords debates on the India Bill on 15–17 December and continued regularly attending throughout January and February, but otherwise kept his distance from the political manoeuvring.[35] When Lord Temple unexpectedly resigned the Secretaryship of State on 22 December 1783, throwing Pitt’s fledgling government into temporary chaos, Chatham wrote to his mother with a hint of disapproval:

> You will have so far seen, by my last letter, conveying to you what had taken place, that my mind was not perfectly at ease . . . I had but too much reason for it . . . With what hopes of Success we stand I know not, but, in any case, as we now stand on ye most *unquestionable* ground, whether we go on or are beat, we can risque no loss of Caracter [*sic*] with the Publick, and in making a stand for the King and ye Constitution, my Brother’s Caracter must I think rise whatever may come.[36]