

Burton Oynsent.

BY E. CHISHOLM BATTEN.

WHEN Wolfe fell on the Heights of Abraham, in 1759, the name of Pitt was the most illustrious in the civilized world, and was pronounced by every Englishman with pride and by every enemy of England with mingled admiration and terror.

“Then ’twas praise enough
To fill the ambition of a private man,
That Chatham’s language was his mother tongue,
And Wolfe’s great name compatriot with his own.”

Cowper’s “Task.”

It is the fashion of historians to contrast the position of Pitt, when he was the secretary who with one hand wielded the democracy of England, and with the other smote the House of Bourbon, with that of Pitt when he was Chatham, and to style him then as only the ruin of Pitt, though an awful and majestic ruin.

The peace of Paris, in 1763, forced the nation to provide for the expenses of the war which the peace ended but did not pay for. There were two expedients; either to continue the land tax at four shillings and threepence in the pound, or else to provide some other tax and reduce the land tax to two shillings, as it had been a few years before. Mr. Grenville, the first minister, thought it desirable to have the power, in-

stead of taxing the landed interest, to charge stamp duties on the American Colonies. The minister proposed, in March, 1764, a resolution as follows : "that towards further defraying the war expenses, it may be proper to charge certain stamp duties on the Colonies and plantations." "In these few words," says Professor Smyth, "was contained the fatal resolve that tore asunder the Empire of Great Britain."

When the resolution was carried, Pitt was ill in bed. He was strongly opposed to the resolution, and he afterwards said "If I could have endured to have been carried, so great was the agitation of my mind for the consequences, I would have solicited some kind hand to have laid me down on this floor to have borne my testimony against it."

In January, 1765, Sir William Pynsent, the owner of Burton Pynsent, died, having devised it to Mr. Pitt, to whom he was personally unknown; and on the 22nd March, 1765, the American Stamp Act, almost of course after the resolution of March, 1765, had been carried in the House of Commons, was passed and became law.

Early in the summer of 1765, Mr. Pitt, and his most affectionate wife and their family, took possession of Burton Pynsent.

The family that accompanied them to Burton Pynsent were five children—three sons and two daughters : John, the eldest, born in 1756 ; William Pitt, the second son, born in 1759 ; and James Charles, the youngest, in 1761. The daughters were Hester, born in 1756, and Harriet, in 1758.

"Whatever might be the vicissitudes of his public life, Pitt," says Lord Macaulay, "never failed to find peace and love by his own hearth. He loved all his children, and was loved by them ; and of all his children the one of whom he was fondest and proudest was his second son." He no sooner entered into possession at Burton Pynsent, than he commenced planting and planning there with all the enthusiasm and taste, of which he was so efficient a master.

Ever since his marriage, in 1754, to Lady Hester Grenville, they had lived at Hayes Place, in Kent; and when they came to Burton Pynsent Pitt found full scope for his skill and taste in his favourite art, landscape gardening.

He had been an early disciple of the new school of landscape gardening, founded about 1740, when the fashion commenced for remodelling country seats, which fashion continued to about 1785 or 1790, when it in a great measure ceased. His friends, Mr. Lyttleton, Mr. Richard Grenville, and Pitt entered into Parliament about the same time, became associates, and for several years always sat next to each other in the House of Commons: all belonged to this school. The names of Hagley and Stowe tell the same story, and it is strongly attested.

Within a very few years of the improvements of Hamilton at Pains Hill, and of the Lyttletons at Hagley, "the great Pitt," says George Mason, "turned his mind to the embellishment of rural nature. He first exercised this talent for design at the South Lodge upon Enfield Chase. The first ground surrounding the enclosure was then wild and woody, and is diversified with hill and dale. He entertained the idea (and admirably realized it) of making the interior correspond with the exterior scenery. His temple of Pan is mentioned in the Observations of Wheatley.¹ But the singular effort of his genius was a successful imitation of the picturesque appearance of a bye lane on the very principles Sir Uvedale Price (Essay on the Picturesque, ed., 1870, p. 26) supposes it might be possible. Probably Sir Uvedale was not in the least aware of such a design having been carried into execution near fifty years before.

Mr. Marshall speaks, in "Planting and Rural Ornament," third edition, 1803, of the great Lord Chatham's good taste

(1). "An Essay on Design in Gardening." second edition, *see* p. 129. But because the place had then changed its owner, the name of the great man that planned it is totally omitted in the second edition.

in modern gardening, "as he shewed by his own villas in Enfield Chase and at Hayes Place, near Beckenham, where the mansion house was erected by the Great Commoner, who took much delight in improving the grounds."²

Lord Rosebery, in his sketch of the second Pitt's life (London, 1893), tells us that he planted and planned with all the enthusiasm which had marked his father's operations at Hayes and Burton Pynsent.

Burton Pynsent was for some generations, from the accession of James I, the seat of a respectable family, the Jennings family, the last of whom married Sir William Pynsent. Addison says, in the 583rd number of the "Spectator" (June 18th, 1714), "I could mention a nobleman whose fortune has placed him in several parts of England, and who has always left these visible marks (planting) behind him, which shew he has been there. He never hired a house in his life without leaving all about it the seeds of wealth, and thus bestowing legacies on the posterity of the owner." It is impossible to visit Burton Pynsent, without tracing the hand and the eye of Chatham as a master of the art of landscape gardening. The house had been little occupied by its octogenarian owner for many years before its coming into Chatham's possession. A very few old trees, cedars, and elms near it, seem to have been all that indicated the existence of any pleasure grounds. The north ridge of hills, upon the edge of which the old house stood, rises with a steep ascent, though from only a couple of hundred feet above West Sedgmoor; but the slope, like the whole of this lias range of hills, is waved indented and clothed with hanging dwarf woods. These woods alternately swell into bold projections and recede into picturesque hollows.

It was a difficult problem how to deal with these grounds of Burton Pynsent. To make the old house fit for the residence of a public statesman like Pitt, the finest orator in the

(2). *Loudon's "Encyclopædia of Gardening,"* London, 1822.

Commons House of Parliament, only so to add to an unambitious country house, as to make it commodious was comparatively easy: but to produce pleasure grounds without running water, and on the edge of the precipice on which the house stood, and with a deficiency of fine timber, was an effort of skill, the effects of which shew that a master in rural improvement has been there. Burton Pynsent afforded an excellent field for bringing out Chatham's favourite art of landscape gardening on its sharp declivities.

Thomson, in his "Autumn," couples Chatham's name and fame with that of his brother-in-law's place at Stowe, speaking of "the wide extended walks; the fair paradise of Stowe."

The good taste of Pitt at once fixed upon no fantastic object—no temple of Pan. His son William's remarks upon Stowe, in a letter to Lady Hester, in comparison with Burton Pynsent, in 1783, are: "So far as the mere pleasure of seeing goes, I had rather be the visitor than the owner. Sedgmoor and Troy Hill are not to be exchanged for the Elysian Fields, with all the temples into the bargain."

The mode in which Mr. Pitt improved the grounds at Burton Pynsent was a happy audacity which none but a master in the art of rural ornamentation could have devised: it was first to gratify a proper desire in a generous mind to erect a noble monument to the memory of Sir William Pynsent, his benefactor, on the estate which he had presented to Pitt's family; and he availed himself of the opportunity of adding to its beauties a lofty column to preserve the memory of Sir William, and yet modestly to omit any reference to the person who erected it.³

It was not to increase the apparent extent of the pleasure grounds, but to bring them into a visible relationship with the

(3). It was but a few months ago that the most distinguished statesman of the present day found no words more apt to express his sense of what he felt towards a distinguished colleague than those at the base of the pillar at Burton Pynsent.—*Hoc saltem fungar inani munere.*

old Renaissance house of the Jennings'; that Pitt selected a spot about four hundred yards from the house, on which a noble column, of one hundred and fifty feet in height, was erected; the hill above Sedgmoor, a field fatal to Protestant rashness, there two hundred feet, at an angle of fifty feet: a hundred feet more gave the predominant feature to the house and estate.

The planting of the small park of fifty-six acres, on the level to the north of the house, was of a character to develop the view of the monument from the best rooms, so as to lead the eye up to the knoll, on which the new woods were planted with a variety of kinds of timber trees.

Young as the second Pitt was, when his father acquired Burton, he was fully capable of appreciating the position of the Great Commoner, his father. In August, 1766, when the world was agitated by the news that Mr. Pitt had become Earl of Chatham, William exclaimed "I am glad I am not the eldest son: I want to speak in the House of Commons like papa."

Lord Chatham went on, in Somersetshire, with the training and educating his wonderful son, encouraged by the steady love and admiration of his noble wife. When Lord Chatham's health permitted, he never suffered a day to pass without giving instruction of some sort to his children, and seldom without reading a chapter of the Bible with them.

What lessons he taught his son, William, at Burton Pynsent, we learn from the letters he wrote to his nephew, Thomas Pitt, afterwards Lord Camelford, then at Cambridge, at about the same age. In 1750, from Bath (October 12th) he writes: "I hope you taste and love those authors (Horace and Virgil) particularly: you cannot read them too much: they are not only the two greatest poets, but they contain the finest lessons for your age to imbibe: lessons of honour, courage, disinterestedness, love of truth, command of temper, gentleness of behaviour, humanity, and, in one word, virtue in its true signifi-

cation." "My own travels at present are none of the pleasanter : I am going through a fit of the gout with much proper pain and what proper patience I may. *Avis au lecteur*, my sweet boy ; remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. . . Here ends my sermon, which, I trust, you are not fine gentleman enough, or, in plain English, silly fellow enough, to laugh at. Lady Hester is much yours. Let me hear some account of your intercourse with the Muses."

Again, from Bath, 14th January, 1754, the uncle writes to his nephew at Cambridge.

"I come now to the part of the advice I have to offer to you, which most nearly concerns your welfare, and upon which every good and honourable purpose of your life will assuredly turn. I mean the keeping up in your heart the true sentiments of religion. If you are not right towards God you can never be so towards man. The noblest sentiment of the human breast is here brought to the test. Is gratitude in the number of a man's virtues? if it be, the highest benefactor demands the warmest returns of gratitude, love, and praise. *Ingratum qui dixerit, omnia dixit*. If a man wants this virtue, where there are infinite obligations to excite and quicken it, he will be likely to want all others towards his fellow creatures, whose utmost gifts are poor compared to those he daily receives at the hands of his never-failing Almighty Friend. 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,' is big with the deepest wisdom. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ; and an upright heart, that is understanding.' This is externally true, whether the wits and rakes of Cambridge allow it or not ; nay, I must add of this religious wisdom : 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' Hold fast, therefore, by this sheet-anchor of happiness, Religion. You will often want it in the times of most danger : the storms and tempests of Life. Cherish true religion as precious as you will fly with abhorrence and contempt

superstition and enthusiasm. The first is the perfection and glory of the human nature; the two last the deprivation and disgrace of it. Remember the essence of religion is a heart void of offence towards God and man; not subtle speculative opinions, but an active vital principle of faith.

Go on, my dear child, in the admirable disposition you have towards all that is right and good."

Nor was the great Commoner less distinct in his public utterances. During the session of 1759-60, when every month had its illuminations and bonfires, and every wind brought some messenger charged with joyful tidings and hostile standards, he said in his place in Parliament, "The more a man is versed in business, the more he found the hand of providence . . . there was no such thing as chance: it was the unaccountable name of nothing. All was providence."

Among the lessons which Pitt taught his son was *noble disinterestedness*—the noble disinterestedness which made the father disdain the cupidity of the placemen who preceded him.

Like the old Romans—

Privatus illis census erat brevis;

Commune Magnum.

The first appointment Pitt obtained in England was in 1746, that of Paymaster-General. It had been the custom of the holders of this office to avail themselves of certain perquisites. A sum of £100,000 a year was set apart for the use of the Paymaster-General, to provide for irregular payments in advance, and it was customary for the paymaster to apply, as perquisites of the office, the income of the balances to his own use, on investing them in the public funds in his own name. In this way the balances afforded an extra income of £3,000 or £4,000 a year to him. Besides this perquisite, it was the custom of the Paymaster General, in the case of an English subsidy to a foreign state, to be paid by that state a commission of an eighth per cent. upon the subsidy.

The spirit of the father did not fail the son when the coalition ministry were defeated and Fox's India bill rejected by the House of Lords, and the son appointed First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. The opposition in the House of Commons, by repeated majorities, attacked the young minister and insisted upon his resignation. With this demand the son of Chatham steadfastly refused to comply.

While the contest was raging the Clerkship of the Pells, a sinecure place for life, worth three thousand a year, became vacant. The appointment was with the young Pitt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He gave it to his father's friend, Colonel Barré, now afflicted by blindness. By this arrangement a pension, which Lord Rockingham had granted to Barré for his life, of £3,000, was saved to the public. "It is a great thing," says Macaulay, "for a man who has only three hundred a year to be able to shew that he considers three thousand a year as mere dirt beneath his feet, when compared with the public interest."

The second Pitt, in his speech on the 21st February, 1783, appealed to the memory of Chatham with reverent affection: "My earliest impressions were in favour of the noblest and most disinterested modes of serving the public. These impressions are still dear, and will, I hope, be for ever dear, to my heart. I will cherish them as a legacy infinitely more valuable than the richest inheritance."

Pitt was Paymaster-General of the Forces for nine years and a half, from the 25th June, 1746, to the 25th December, 1755; and the income of balances, if they were invested for those nine years and a half, would have been some £30,000 at least.

During Pitt's continuance in the office of Paymaster-General he declined to invest the balances, and his integrity appeared most manifest upon his dismissal. It was then found that the balances belonging to his office were all deposited in the Bank of England.

Soon after he took the Paymaster's office a subsidy had to be paid to the King of Prussia, and the agent of the king paid the commission of an eighth on the subsidy into the office of the Paymaster-General. Pitt returned it, and begged the offer of this present might not be repeated, and it was not attempted again.

In the spring of 1765, Pitt entered into the discussion about the repeal of the Stamp Act and the conduct of Lord Bute, and, in his speech, alluded to his organizing, in 1757, two Highland regiments, and said—

“I sought for merit wherever it was to be found: it is my boast that I was the first minister who looked for it and found it in the mountains of the north. I called it forth, and drew it into your service: a hardy and intrepid race of men; men who, when left by your jealousy, became a prey to the artifices of your enemies, and had gone nigh to have overturned the State in the war before the last. These men, in the last war, were brought to combat on your side: they served with fidelity, as they fought with valour, and conquered for you in every part of the world. Detested be the national prejudices against them! they are unjust, groundless, illiberal, unmanly. When I ceased to serve his Majesty as minister, it was not the *country* of the man by which I was moved; but the man of that country wanted wisdom, and held principles incompatible with freedom.”

In speaking of these gallant Highlanders, Pitt could never forget that they, under the command of General Wolfe, had helped to obtain the victory of Quebec, which secured the possession of Canada to England, and put an end to the power of France in North America. On a later occasion, when General Fraser, of Loval, in 1774, was at Oporto commanding the Loval regiment, raised in 1757, Chatham wrote to the General: “I have taken care that merit should be allowed to display itself and that valour should never want a sword.”

Pitt, speaking on the king's speech, in November, 1765, at the end of the session, when the king stated that America had resisted the Stamp Act, said—

“I rejoice that America has resisted: three millions of people, so dead to all the feelings of liberty as voluntarily to consent to be slaves, would have been fit instruments to make slaves of all the rest.

The minister asks when were the Colonies emancipated. I desire to know when they were made slaves!

In a good cause, on a sound bottom, the force of this country can crush America to atoms. I know the valour of your troops, the skill of your officers: but on this ground, on the Stamp Act, where so many here will think it a crying, I am one who will lift my hand against it: in such a cause your success will be hazardous. America, if she fell, would fall like the strong man: she would embrace the pillars of the state, and pull down the constitution along with her.

The Americans have not acted in all things with prudence and temper. They have been wronged; they have been driven to madness by injustice. Will you punish them for the madness which you have occasioned? Rather let prudence and temper come from this side.

‘Be to their faults a little blind;
Be to their virtues very kind.’”

At this time, when Pitt was declining office, Lord Temple writes from Stowe to Mr. Mackenzie (Oct. 13th, 1765):—
“Mr. Pitt is, in my notion, indispensable, and you know, I think, too much regard cannot be shown him. The determinations of his mind, since he went into Somersetshire, I know not: whenever he is called upon, as before, I take it for granted he will give them with the same duty and zeal.”

In February, 1766, the Stamp Act was repealed in spite of the king's opposition, and it was arranged that a ministry should be formed, of which Lord Chatham should be a member.

In May, 1766, Lord Temple wrote a very kind letter to his sister, Lady Chatham, at Burton. He says:—

“Many kind compliments and brotherly good will attend Mr. Pitt, a good journey to you as I mentioned at Burton.

Your most truly affectionate brother,

TEMPLE.”

Lady Chatham writes, on 22nd July, 1766, to her brother, Earl Temple:—

NORTH END.

“You will not wonder, my dear Brother, that my answer to your last kind letter is dated from here. Mr. Pitt’s fever returning again. I arrived here yesterday, and had the comfort to find Mr. Pitt is considerably mended, but with not so good looks as when we parted. I long to show you *Burton Pynsent*, because it belongs to us, and because there is something not quite common about it. You know I have your promise.

Your most loving Sister.”

Lord Chatham’s life at Burton Pynsent was the life of a country gentleman, with a loving and sympathizing wife and family. His wife was as half his soul, and his children were bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Lady Hester Pitt was a loving sister of the two Grenvilles, before she was the fond wife of Pitt.

“This brings the best wishes of Burton Pynsent,” Mr. Pitt writes, October, 1765, to Earl Temple, “that sickness may long since have bid adieu to Stowe, and that your Lordship may be at this present writing immersed in the amusing cares of building and gardening, with the whole train of the arts.

As to your Somersetshire friends our bill of health is fairer than it has been. Lady Chatham, thank God, is quite recovered and the small flock tolerably well.

I propose carrying my legs, since they will not carry me, to Bath towards the middle of November, if I hold out so long, and try once again to prop a shattered tenement with the help of steel waters."

A letter from Lady Chatham to him at Bath, from Burton Pynsent, of November 17th, 1765, tells us of the family habits and feelings in their new home :—

"Nine o'clock came, the duties of our Sunday evening done, and the little ones retired to bed, I musing by the fire, comes in my dearest love's letter. What a charm did it immediately spread over my mind, and with what love and gratitude to the Almighty did I read that my prayers had been answered."

Pitt could now get time to attend to the cares of Burton Pynsent. He proposed in his letter to Earl Temple, of the 29th October, 1765, to join with his wife and their trustees in selling his place, "Hayes," and investing the produce of the sale in Somersetshire :—

"Thus you see, my dear Lord, how the passion of dirty acres grows upon a West Saxon of yesterday, and that I meditate laying rapacious hands on a considerable part of the county of Somerset, but this under Peter Taylor's good pleasure.

I advance apace in bricks and mortar : but the monumental column⁴ must wait the return of spring to lift its head upon a weather-beaten promontory, where I trust fortunate chance may one day lead your Lordship's peregrinatory steps."

Burton Pynsent afforded an excellent field for bringing out Chatham's favourite art of landscape gardening.

In September, 1767, there was great distress from the high price of provisions. Lord Chatham stayed during the summer at Burton Pynsent. It was of this year that the story is told by Lady Holland, of little "William Pitt, not eight years, and

(4). The Burton Monument.

really the cleverest child I ever saw, and brought up so strictly and proper in his behaviour, that, mark my words, that little boy will be a thorn in Charles' side as long as he lives."

In 1768, the Genoese claim to Corsica had been made over by the Republic to the Crown of France. A remonstrance was transmitted to our ambassador, at Paris, by Lord Shelburne, and delivered by the ambassador to the court of Versailles. It was treated by that court with indifference. Our ambassador insisted upon a recall, and Lord Shelburne was dismissed from his office. The connexion between Lord Chatham and Lord Shelburne induced Lord Chatham to resign the Privy Seal in the autumn of 1768.

After his resignation, and amidst the lowering of the character of the House of Commons by the removal of its great leader to the House of Lords, in that House Lord Chatham spoke, in 1769, in support of a motion for augmenting the number of seamen. The keeping up the naval strength of England, was a recurrence to the principle which had animated him in his wars with France and induced him to discourage the subsidizing the land armies of the allies of England on the Continent. He testified his regard for the great Naval Commanders, Admiral Sir Charles Saunders and Admiral Boscawen, by the display of their full-length portraits in the ball room at Burton.

In 1770 the session ended on the 19th of May. Lord Chatham and his family went down to Burton Pynsent. On the 3rd of August, 1770, he writes to Lady Chatham, who was absent from home, at Burton :—

"I am to thank my love a million of times for the most interesting packet I ever received. You describe in words which are only yours, sentiments which are equally mine. Every beauty I see at delightful Burton quickens with a most ardent wish that we should have shared them together.'

In February, 1771, Lord Chatham moved for the opinion of the judges, and, when the House of Lords adjourned, went

to Burton Pynsent, and on the 22nd September he writes to Mr. Calcraft.

“I intend to prolong my stay at this place : between farming, hunting, and planting now beginning, we are all, young and old, highly pleased to find our day not long enough. Whether we shall, by and by, find the evenings too long I purpose to put to the test. Lord Lyttleton was so good as to give us a day here on his return from Mount Edgcombe.”

To Lord Lyttleton Chatham was indebted for his entry into Parliament, in 1735, and their friendship had continued ever since.

Lord Chatham on every occasion opposed the ministry in their American policy. In 1773, he spoke of the position of the troops at Boston :—

“You irritate your Colonies to unappeasable rancour. It is not repealing this or that act of Parliament : not the annihilation of a few dirty shreds of parchment that can restore America to your bosom. You must repeal her fears and her resentment, and you may then hope for her love and gratitude.”

He was training his favoured son, William, for the Bar, the profession he had intended for him. He caused the second Pitt to be admitted at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, on the 26th April, 1773, when he was not yet fourteen, and while he was still under the care of his tutor, Mr. Wilson, at Burton Pynsent. He went up from Burton Pynsent to Pembroke Hall, on 3rd October, 1773, thoroughly furnished with the methods of a great orator in enunciation, correct expression, and emphatic elocution.

The ministry in the session of 1774, proposed a measure for quartering soldiers in America : this step was opposed vigorously by Lord Chatham, and he made a last endeavour towards conciliation :

“My Lords,” said he on the 27th May, 1774, “this country is little obliged to the framers and supporters of the tea tax. The Americans had almost forgot, in their excess of gratitude for the repeal of the stamp act, any interest but that of the mother country. This temper would have continued, if not interrupted by your fruitless endeavour to tax them without their consent I would advise the noble lords in office to adopt a more gentle method of governing America : proceedings like these will never meet with the wished-for success. Instead of these, pass an amnesty on all their youthful errors ; clasp them once more to your fond and affectionate arms, and I will venture to affirm, you will find them children worthy of their sire. If otherwise, I will be amongst the foremost to move for such measure as will make them feel what it is to provoke a fond and forgiving parent : a parent, my lords, whose welfare has ever been my greatest and most pleasing consideration. The period is not far distant when she will want the assistance of her most distant friends, but my prayers shall be ever for her welfare.

Length of days be in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour. May her ways be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths be peace.”