

# LETTER

William Pitt (1708–1778), Member of Parliament for Seaford (1747–1754)

to his Thomas Pitt (1737–1793), his nephew

Bath, 12 January 1754

Your letter from Cambridge affords me many very sensible pleasures. First, that you are at last in a proper place for study and improvement, instead of losing in London any more of that most precious thing, time. Secondly, that you seem pleased with the particular society you are placed in, and with the gentleman to whose care and instruction you are committed. And, above all, I applaud the sound, right sense, and the love of virtue, which appear through your whole letter.

You are already possessed of the true clue to guide you through the years of education in the maxim you lay down, namely, that the use of learning is to render a man more wise and virtuous; not merely to make him more learned. Go on, my dear boy, by this golden rule, and you cannot fail to become everything that your heart prompts you to wish to be, and that mine most affectionately wishes for you. There is but one danger in your way, and that is, perhaps, natural enough to your age, the love of pleasure or the fear of close application and laborious diligence. With the last, there is nothing you may not conquer; and the first is sure to conquer and enslave every person who does not strenuously and generously resist the first allurements of it, lest by small indulgences, he fall under the yoke of irresistible habit.

*Vitanda est improba Siren, Desidia!* I desire may be fixed to the curtains of your bed and to the walls of your chambers. If you do not rise early, you never can make any progress worth mentioning; if you do not set apart your hours of reading—if you suffer yourself or anyone else to break in upon them—your days will slip through your hands unprofitably and frivolously, unpraised by all you wish to please, and not really enjoyed by yourself. Be assured, whatever you take from pleasure, amusements, or indolence for these first few years of your life will repay you a hundred-fold in the pleasures, honors, and advantages of all the remainder of your days.

You are to qualify yourself for the part in society to which you are called by your birth and estate. You are to be a gentleman of such learning and accomplishments as may hereafter distinguish you in the service of your country; not a pedant, who reads only to be called learned, instead of considering learning as an instrument of action.

I have not the pleasure of knowing the gentleman who is your tutor, but I dare say he is every way equal to such a charge, which I think no small one. I hope he will concur with me as to the course of study I desire you may begin with; and that such books, and such only, as I have pointed out, may be read.

*The Young Man's Book of Classical Letters* (Grigg and Elliot: Philadelphia, 1841):69–70.

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<sup>1</sup> Steer clear of the wicked temptress, Laziness (Horace)