

political force. That it became so, shortly afterwards, was due less to circumstances inherent in the situation of spring, 1768, than to those which developed out of the activities of John Wilkes.

was pro-government, since Chatham, though incapacitated by mental illness, was still nominally head of the ministry. Rockingham's friend, Barlow Trecothick, came fourth. Wilkes, with 1247 votes to Trecothick's 2957, trailed far in the rear.

CHAPTER II

THE WILKITES, 1769-76

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AT the end of 1767 Wilkes was in desperate straits. Since his expulsion from the Commons in 1764, his estates had been in the hands of his creditors. All property not tied by entails had been sold. His flight to France had for the time being saved him from imprisonment after conviction for seditious libel, but his failure to return to face his sentence had led to a pronouncement of outlawry. After the fall of Grenville in 1765 Wilkes hoped for better things from the politicians who had denounced the government over general warrants. But his patron, Temple, remained in opposition, the king was hostile to him, and neither the Rockinghams nor their successors in office, Chatham and Grafton, could (or would) do anything for him. They had taken up his cause, partly out of conviction, partly for a stick to beat the ministers, but they had little or no respect for Wilkes himself, none of them regarding him as a desirable ally; and private charity was the best they would offer. By late 1766, as his successive requests for a pardon and for political rehabilitation were ignored, hope deferred exasperated him beyond endurance. In the notorious second *Letter to the Duke of Grafton* the vials of his wrath overflowed in a vitriolic attack on Chatham. He felt victimized and abandoned. Was such neglect the proper reward for his doughty journalistic services? 'No man', he declared, 'has made such sacrifices.'¹ The one gleam of hope was the favourable popular reaction to the *Letter*, the success of which his brother reported in glowing terms.

¹ To Temple, 16 Nov. 1767, *The Grenville Papers*, ed. W. J. Smith (4 vols., 1853), iv, 189.