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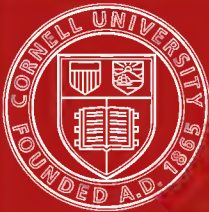
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CHATTERTON



# CHATTERTON

A BIOGRAPHY

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IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS Biography, published originally in 1856 as part of a volume of Collected Essays, and subsequently in similar companionship, is now re-issued by itself, after having been for a considerable time out of print. There has been some revision throughout, and the concluding chapter has been much enlarged.

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PART I  
BRISTOL



## CHAPTER I

### WILKES AND LIBERTY

WAS there ever a time that did not think highly of its own importance? Was there ever a time when the world did not believe itself to be going to pieces, and when alarming pamphlets on 'the present crisis' did not lie unbought on the counters of the book-sellers? Poor mortals that we are, how we do make the most of our own little portion in the general drama of history! Nor are we quite wrong, after all. There is nothing really to laugh at in our laborious anxieties about this same 'present crisis,' which is always happening, and never over. 'We live in earnest times': what is there in the incessant repetition of this stereotyped phrase but an explicit assertion by each generation for itself that the great sense of life, transmitted already through so many generations, is now, in turn, passing through *it*? The time when we ourselves are alive, the time when our eyes behold the light, and when the breath is strong in our nostrils, that is the crisis for us; and,

although it belongs to a higher than we to determine the worth of what we do, yet that we should do everything with a certain amount of vehemence and bustle seems but the necessary noise of the shuttle as we weave forth our allotted portion of the general web of existence.

Well, many years ago, there was a 'crisis' in England. It was the time, reader, when our great-great-grandfathers, intent on bringing about your existence and mine, were, for that purpose, paying court to our reluctant great-great-grandmothers. George III., an obese young sovereign of thirty-three, had been then ten years on the throne. Newspapers were not so numerous as now ; Parliament was not open to reporters ; and, had gentlemen of the Liberal press been alive, with their present political opinions, every soul of them would have been hanged. Nevertheless, people got on very well ; and there was enough for a nation of seven millions to take interest in and talk about when they were in an inquisitive humour. Lord North, an ungainly country gentleman, with goggle eyes and big cheeks, had just succeeded the Duke of Grafton as the head of a Tory ministry ; Lord Chatham, throwing off his gout for the occasion, had, at the age of sixty-two, resumed his place as the thundering Jove of the



Opposition ; Bute and other Scotsmen were still said to be sucking the blood of the nation ; and Edmund Burke, then in the prime of his strength and intellect, was publishing masterly pamphlets, and trying to construct, under the auspices of the Marquis of Rockingham, a new Whig party. Among the notabilities out of Parliament were Dr. Samuel Johnson, then past his sixty-first year, and a most obstinate old Tory, his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds, fourteen years younger, Goldy, several years younger still, and Garrick, fifty-four years of age, but as sprightly as ever. In another circle, but not less prominently before the town, were Parson Horne and Mrs. Macaulay ; and all England was ringing with the terrible letters of the invisible Junius. But the man of the hour, the hero of the self-dubbed crisis, was John Wilkes.

Arrested in 1763, on account of the publication of No. 45 of the *North Briton*, in which one of the King's speeches had been severely commented on ; discharged a few days afterwards in consequence of his privilege as a Member of Parliament ; lifted instantaneously by this accident into an unexampled blaze of popular favour ; persecuted all the more on this account by the Court party ; at last, in January 1764, expelled from his seat in the House of

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