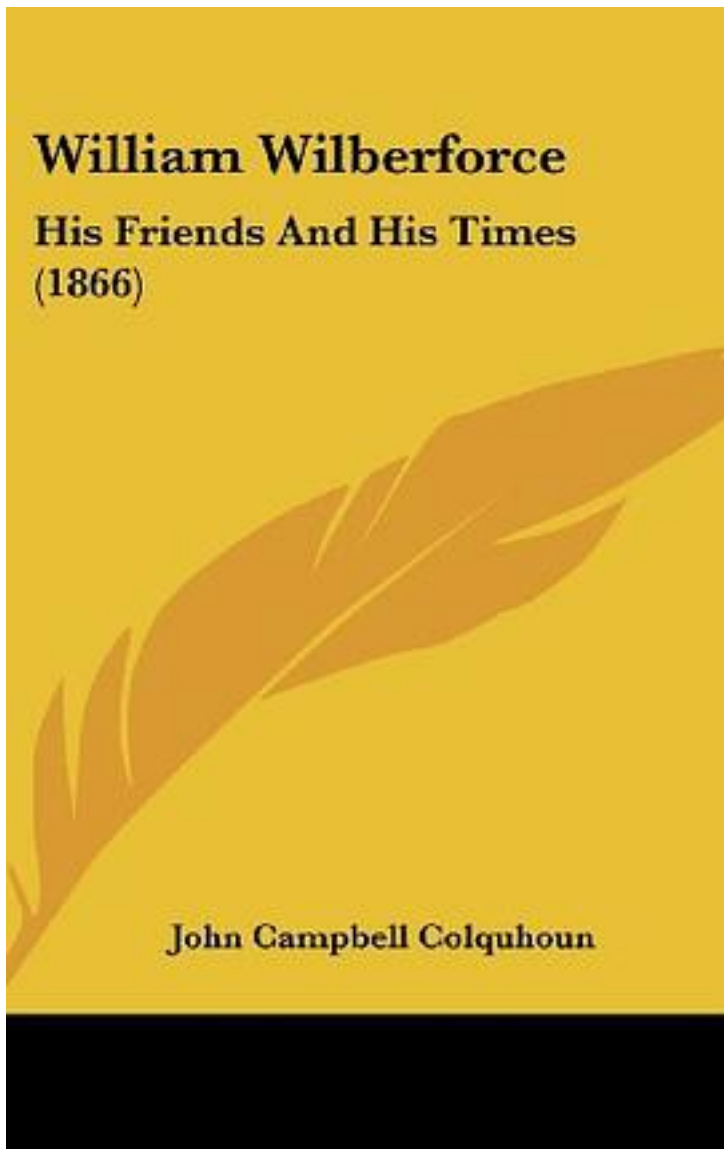


William Wilberforce



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出版者:Harcourt

出版时间:2008-06-16

装帧:Hardcover

isbn:9780151012671

The former leader of Britain's Conservative Party, Hague has lately immersed himself in biography writing. As with William Pitt the Younger (2005), this depiction of William Wilberforce recurs regularly to the political arena of the House of Commons. Pitt and Wilberforce were friends and precocious members, both entering the Commons in their early twenties, but Wilberforce's talents lay not, as Hague describes, in ministerial leadership. Sociable, eloquent, but indolent, Wilberforce experienced an evangelical conversion around 1786 that expelled the laziness from his character without compromising his geniality. Dedicating his political life to moral causes, Wilberforce decided on two: "the reformation of manners," as he confided to his diary, and the abolition of African slavery. Wilberforce's campaign against vice had scant historical effect, but that against slavery in British realms arguably prodded the Western world toward abolition. Why Wilberforce's effort (trade in slaves was banned in 1807; abolition occurred in 1834) followed a tortuous path becomes understandable as Hague explains the parliamentary practicalities that Wilberforce faced. Incorporating Wilberforce's domestic life, Hague's effort is a well-rounded portrait of the pioneering British abolitionist.

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