

THE LIFE AND TIMES

OF THE

REV. SAMUEL WESLEY, M.A.,

RECTOR OF EPWORTH,

AND FATHER OF THE

REVS. JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY,

THE FOUNDERS OF THE METHODISTS.

BY

L. TYERMAN.



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# THE LIFE AND TIMES

OF

## SAMUEL WESLEY.

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### CHAPTER I.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO—1640-1665.

SAMUEL WESLEY was born a little more than two hundred years ago ; and a brief review of the state of the nation and of the Church at that period will be useful in illustrating some parts of his history.

From March 1629 to April 1640, the houses of legislature had not assembled ; never in English history had there been an interval of eleven years between one parliament and another. Charles I. had systematically attempted to make himself a despot, and to reduce the parliament to a nullity.

To make bad things worse, Archbishop Laud, in the year 1640, convened Convocation, which ordered that every clergyman should instruct his parishioners once a quarter, in the divine right of kings, and the damnable sin of resistance to authority. By the divine right of kings was meant, that the Supreme Being regarded hereditary monarchy, as opposed to other forms of government, with peculiar favour ; that the rule of succession, in order of primogeniture, was a divine institution anterior to the Christian, and even to the Mosaic dispensation ; that no human power, not even that of the whole legislature, could deprive the legitimate prince of his rights ; and that the laws by which, in England and in

other countries, the prerogative was limited, were to be regarded merely as concessions, which the sovereign had freely made, and which he might at his pleasure resume.

By the same ecclesiastical parliament, all clergymen and all graduates in the universities were required to take an oath, that everything necessary for salvation was contained in the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, as distinguished from Presbyterianism and Papistry ; and they were also required to swear that they would not consent to any alteration of the government of the Church, by archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons. Those refusing to take such oaths were threatened with heavy penalties.

This assumption of ecclesiastical power, on the part of Convocation, was most offensively absurd. The nation for years had been divided both in politics and religion ; and it was not to be expected that such decrees could be issued without provoking resistance and creating trouble. Hence, in the same year, and in the year following, we find a crowd of events which exerted a most powerful influence on the subsequent history of the nation. The House of Commons, which, after an interval of eleven years, was again brought together, appointed a grand committee of the whole house to inquire into the scandalous immoralities of the clergy. Above two thousand cases were presented, and the work of cleansing the Augean stable became so heavy, that the grand committee had to divide itself into four or five sub-committees, called White's, Corbett's, Harlow's, and Dearing's committees, after the chairman of each. An act also was passed by the House of Commons, that the clergy should not be magistrates, neither should officiate as judges in civil courts. Lord Strafford—eloquent and bold, but imperious and cruel, Charles's most trusted counsellor, and one whose object it had been to make his royal master as absolute a monarch as any in Europe—was arrested, tried, and beheaded. The Star Chamber and the High Commission courts, the former a political, the latter a religious inquisition, were abolished. Thirteen bishops were impeached by the Lower House of Parliament, Archbishop Laud being one of them. The London apprentices began their riots. Two hundred thousand Protestant men, women, and children, were massacred in Ireland, and thousands more had to flee to England, naked and famished, to obtain subsistence. The papistical butchers, not satisfied with this, proceeded to threaten that, when they had wreaked their vengeance on