

THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF THE
REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.



JOHN WESLEY, M.A.

THE
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OF THE
REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.,
Founder of the Methodists.

BY THE
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"THE OXFORD METHODISTS," &c.

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CHAPTER I.

WESLEY AT HOME, AT SCHOOL, AND AT COLLEGE.

1703—1725.

JOHAN WESLEY was born at Epworth, in the county of Lincoln, on the 17th of June, 1703,¹ and was the son of Samuel and Susannah Wesley, the former being the learned, laborious, and godly rector of the Epworth parish from about the year 1696 to his death in 1735. The Wesley family consisted of nineteen children, but, of these, nine died in infancy. The name of one of the dead infants was John, and the name of another Benjamin; and when the subject of this biography was born, his mother united the two names by calling him John Benjamin. Second names are of little use, and are often troublesome, and probably for this reason Wesley's second name was one which he never used.² 1703

When Wesley was born, Queen Anne was commencing the twelve years of English sovereignty which some have regarded as the Augustan age of English learning. War was raging on the continent, and, at home, an embittered fight was being fought between fiery Churchmen and fierce Dissenters. Anne warmly favoured the high church party; and to

¹ To prevent confusion, the reader is reminded that in 1751 the old English calendar was set aside, and that introduced by Pope Gregory XIII., in 1582, substituted in its place. This was done by act of Parliament for the purpose of harmonizing the computation of time in England with that of the rest of Europe. In consequence of this alteration, the anniversary of Wesley's birth, since 1752, has been, not the 17th, but the 28th of June.

² See Crowther's "Portraiture of Methodism."

1703

augment Church livings, gave out of the royal income "the first-fruits and the tenths," amounting to £16,000 a year. While Wesley was yet an infant, the Whigs raised the cry of "the Church in danger;" but Parliament passed a resolution that the cry was unfounded, and that those who gave it birth were enemies to the queen, the Church, and the kingdom. Five years after this, Dr. Sacheverell preached his firebrand sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral, and threw the nation into a state of unparalleled excitement, the ultimate result of which was, the Tories became more powerful than ever; and Queen Anne, in meeting her Parliament in 1710, no longer condescended to use the word *toleration* in reference to Dissenters, but spoke of *indulgence* to be allowed "to scrupulous consciences," while, after a long continued struggle, the high church party succeeded in passing the obnoxious bill against occasional conformity. All this occurred during Wesley's childhood.

At the time of Wesley's birth, his brother Samuel was a sprightly boy, thirteen years of age, and a few months afterwards was sent to Westminster School, where he became distinguished for his scholarship and genius, and soon obtained a host of literary friends, from Lord Oxford, the Mecænas of his age, down to Addison, Atterbury, Pope, and Prior. Emilia Wesley, so gifted and so beautiful, was a year younger than Samuel, and was developing her exquisite sensibility and taste under the mental and moral cultivation of her mother. The ill-fated Susannah was a frolicsome child, eight years old. Mary, already deformed by an early sickness and the carelessness of her nurse, had arrived at the age of seven, and was fast becoming the favourite of her father's family. The almost unequalled Mehetabel was six, and was so advanced in learning that two years afterwards she read the New Testament in Greek. Anne was yet an infant; and Martha, Charles, and Keziah were still unborn.

In the year of Wesley's nativity, his father was writing his "History of the Old and New Testament, in Verse;" and also had the pleasure or mortification (we hardly know which) of having his pamphlet on Dissenting academies surreptitiously published by a man to whom it had long before been sent as a private letter. Before Wesley was three years old