

John Wesley - Evangelist: Chapter 1

Epworth Ancestry - Birth - Home-Life

images

THE name Wesley is inseparably linked for all future time with that of the little town of Epworth, in the isle of Axholme, North Lincolnshire. [Axholme, or Axelholme; in Saxon, Eaxelholme.] For the present, however, it is needful to pass from the north-east of England to the southwest. The researches into the family history, made by order of the first Earl of Mornington, disclose the fact that the Wesley (Westley, Wellesley) family had their original seat at Wilswe, or Welswe, near Wells, Somerset. The genealogy has been traced as far back as to Guy, who was made a Thane by Athelstan, circ. A.D. 938. Guy's great-grandson was Walrond of Welswey, and the grandson of this latter, Roger de Wellesley. [It has been suggested that these variations conform strictly to the etymological probabilities of the case. Wilswe, or Welswe, meant the way of the well —Wils or Wels being the contracted genitive —and we (for weg) the noun thus qualified. It may then be inferred that the home was on the way to some well-known spring —perhaps one of the springs from which Wells takes its name. In the sixth generation the name changes to the familiar Wellesley (well = welle, and leye = land —our lea, as meaning meadow). Thus we have no longer the way of the well, but the land of the well, and we may infer, either a removal to the estate on which the famous spring was situated, or that the family domain now included the actual locality of the well. | The Irish branch of the family, after alternating the two family names (both now more strictly surnames), eventually adopted 'Wellesley,' while the other, the senior branch, from which the Epworth family were descended, adopted Wesley —variously spelt Westley, Wesly, and Wesley. The elder line of the descent have become Wellesley-Wesley. —See Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, vol. I, p. 67.]

One branch of the family is traced to Sir Richard de Wellesley, who became the head of the Wesleys of Dangan, co. Meath, Ireland, from which branch the Marquis of Wellesley, Governor-General of India, and his brother Arthur, Duke of Wellington, descended. Sir Richard's eldest brother, Walrond de Wellesley, second Baron Norragh, became the head of another branch. He succeeded to the family estate, Wellesley Manor, co. Somerset. His son Gerald, the third Baron, having offended King Henry IV., was deprived of his title. Gerald's son and heir, Arthur, took the name of Westley; but his son Hugh, who was knighted, resumed the name Wellesley. Sir Hugh's grandson, Walter, took again the name Wesley or Westley. Walter's son, Sir Herbert Wesley, or Westley, of Westleigh, co. Devon, married Elizabeth, daughter of Robert de Wellesley of Dangan Castle, Ireland, so that in their son Bartholomew, born 1596, these two branches of the family were united, his father representing the original stock, and his mother the Wellesley branch of that stock, of which she was a descendant. Hence proceeds the Epworth branch of the family. Bartholomew married a daughter of Sir Henry Colley, of Carbery Castle; and their son, John Westley, [Many interesting particulars respecting Bartholomew, and his son, John Westley, are collected in *The Fathers of the Wesley Family*, by William Beal. 2nd ed. London, 1862; *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*. By Adam Clarke. 2nd ed. Two vols. London. Tegg; and the subsequent researches of G. J.

Stevenson, in *Memorials of the Wesley Family*. London. Partridge, 1876.] who married the daughter of the celebrated Puritan, John White, known as the Patriarch of Dorchester, was the father of Samuel of Epworth, the father of Wesley.

The mother of Wesley was Susanna, daughter of the Rev. Samuel Annesley, second son of Francis Annesley, Viscount Valentia, the eldest son being Arthur, Earl of Anglesea. The mother of Susanna was daughter of another John White, a distinguished Puritan lawyer in London. Of Bartholomew Westley's early life but little is known. No family record has been preserved to inform us where he was born, or how his early days were spent. But we learn that he was sent while young to one of the universities, that he was diligent in his studies, which included physic and divinity; and that as a clergyman he was distinguished for plainness of speech, so that he was not a popular preacher to those that looked more for garnished words than for important truths. [Calamy.] He lived for some time at Bridport, and certainly preached at Allington, a suburb of that town; [The pulpit which he used there is still preserved in the Wesleyan school-room at Bridgport.] after which he held the livings of Charmouth and Catherston, villages in the southwest of Dorset, from which he was ejected, even before the passing of the Act of Uniformity, in 1662. It is thought that he then became an itinerant preacher at Bridport, Lyme, Charmouth, Netherbury, Beaminster, etc. He also practiced medicine, for which he was fitted by his university training. He resided for some time at Charmouth, until the Five Mile Act drove him away. His last years were spent in seclusion, probably at Lyme, where he made over his fields to his son John, then Vicar of Winterbourne-Whitchurch. He died about the age of eighty-five; but the exact time and place of his burial were, until recently, unknown. We now learn that his death (which was probably hastened by the premature death of his son, John Westley) took place at Lyme Regis, in the year 1670, and that he was buried there on February 15 of that year, 'in the beautiful sea-girt churchyard—almost within sight of the "Whitechapel Rocks," and of the secluded dell where he and his persecuted parishioners were wont to meet during the troublous times that followed the Restoration. [Broadley, *John Wesley and his Dorset Forbears*.]

John, the son of Bartholomew Westley, was born, perhaps at Bridport, about the year 1636. His early education was probably gained at Dorchester Grammar School; afterwards he entered New Hall, Oxford, where he made considerable progress in Oriental languages. He took his Master's degree, and, on account of his seriousness, industry, and progress, gained the special attention of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. John Owen, Cromwell's chaplain. On leaving Oxford, he joined an 'associated' church, and was appointed an evangelist or missionary, and preached at Melcombe, Radipole, and other places in Dorset. He was never episcopally ordained. In 1658, he became Vicar of Winterbourne-Whitchurch, having been approved by Cromwell's 'triers,' and appointed to the living by the trustees. Soon afterwards he married a niece of Thomas Fuller, daughter of John White, who was a notable figure in the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Westley laid aside the Liturgy, and introduced the Presbyterian or Independent form of worship. A prolonged conversation which he had with the Bishop of Bristol is recorded in the Nonconformists' Memorial, and throws much light upon the position, character, and views of Westley. His preaching was the means of the conversion of sinners, wherever he exercised his ministry.

These were bitter times for the nonconforming clergy; matters were ripening for the black Bartholomew Day of 1662. Spies and informers were abroad, and John Westley (or Wesley, as he sometimes signed his name) fell a victim. Frivolous articles were drawn up against him, and he was imprisoned for more than five months. Early in 1662 he was seized when coming out of church, was again east into prison,

and after a time once more set free. This was within a month of August 24, when he and two thousand more were ejected from their churches and their homes. Soon afterwards his son Samuel was born. Early in the following year he removed to Melcombe; but he was presently driven from the town, and a fine of 20 was imposed on his landlady, and five shillings a week upon himself. As a homeless fugitive he visited Ilminster, Bridgewater, and Taunton, where he preached almost every day, being treated with great kindness by the Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists. For some weeks he was the enthusiastic fellow-labourer of Joseph Alleine. By the generosity of an unknown friend, a home was provided for himself and family at Preston, to which he removed in 1663. Here several of his children were born. He ministered, as he had opportunity, at Weymouth and places in the vicinity, though after 1664 he was prevented from preaching by the passing of the Conventicle Act. But he could not be wholly silenced, and began to preach in private at Preston and elsewhere. He afterwards became pastor to a small company of people at Poole, with whom he continued until his death, though he was several times apprehended, and four times imprisoned. At one time he was obliged to leave his wife and family and flock, and for a considerable period remained hidden. At length his sufferings and privations, the decay of spiritual religion, the loss of friends, together with the increasing virulence of the enemies of religion, overpowered him, and he died at the early age of thirty-three or thirty-four, about the year 1670.

Samuel Wesley was born at Winterbourne-Whirchurch, in December, 1662. [The following entry is taken from the old parish register: —"1662 —Samuel Wesly, the son of John Wesley, was baptized December 17."] He received his education at the Dorchester Free School, where he remained until he was fifteen years of age. His widowed mother being at this time very poor, he was sent, through the kindness of Dissenting friends, to an academy at Stepney, in the hope that he would enter the Dissenting Ministry. Here he remained two years, by which time, he says, he was a dabbler in rhyme and faction, and, encouraged by some of the Dissenting ministers, wrote 'silly lampoons on Church and State.' He advanced in classical learning, and had the advantage of attending the ministry of Charnock, and other popular ministers of the day; he once heard 'friend Bunyan.'

Being engaged to reply to some severe strictures written against the Dissenters, he entered upon a course of reading which led to a change in his views, and, in consequence, to his attaching himself to the Established Church. Encouraged by the offer of an exhibition of 10, he determined to go to Oxford. Accordingly he set out early one morning, 'footing' it all the way. He entered himself as a servitor of Exeter College, supported himself for five years, took his degree, and removed to London, where he was ordained deacon, August 7, 1688. He obtained a curacy, with an income of 28, and afterwards a chaplaincy on board a man-of-war, where he began his poem on The Life of Christ.

He then obtained another curacy, and soon after married, as was said above, Susanna, daughter of Dr. Annesley, a leading Nonconformist divine, at whose house he with other earnest students had frequently found a welcome. In 1691, he was appointed to the parish of South Ormesby, with an income of 50 and a house 'a mean cot composed of reeds and clay.' Here he spent nearly six of the best years of his life, and wrote some of his most able works, and here five of his children were born. About the year 1696 or 1697 he removed with his wife and family to Epworth, where the special interest of the family history commences.

Samuel Wesley was strict in the observance of his duties as parish priest; well-read, scholarly, devoted to his book and his pen, a passionate student of the Scriptures in their original tongues, a voluminous

writer both in prose and verse, an active, bustling man, brimming over with wit and genius, a vivacious and inordinate worker, knowing little of rest and nothing of self-indulgence-qualities which were afterwards highly developed in his son. His talents and erudition soon brought him into notoriety, and he busied himself with Church matters, and by compulsion gave heed to business affairs, for which he was not specially fitted, this leading at times to not a little interruption of the family comfort. He usually attended the sittings of Convocation, holding such attendance to be part of his duty. This he performed at an expense of money which he could ill spare from the necessities of so large a family, and at a cost of time which was injurious to his parish. But he was a man of unimpeachable integrity, of lofty moral sensibility, and very firm in his attachment to principle. His struggles with poverty, and his difficulties amongst his boorish parishioners, together with many interesting facts in the family history, are told at some length in Tyerman's *Life and Times of Samuel Wesley*.

Of the ancestors of Susanna Wesley, her biographer says, [*The Mother of the Wesleys*. By the Rev. John Kirk. 5th ed., London. Jarrold, 1868.] some of them, as we have seen, could boast patrician blood, and occasionally filled important stations in the Commonwealth, while others rejoiced in a higher, a spiritual nobility. Her father was 'Samuell, the sonne of John Anslye,' probably of the parish of Haseley, in Warwickshire, in the church of which parish young Annesley was baptized in March, 1620. He was serious from his earliest days, a diligent reader of Holy Scripture, and, during his college course at Oxford, remarkable for his temperance and industry. On his entering upon his first living in the parish of Cliffe, in Kent, his parishioners, fonder of rioting and drunkenness than of sobriety and religion, hailed him with 'spits, forks, and stones,' and many times threatened his life. 'Use me as you will,' said the courageous young parson, 'I am resolved to continue with you until God has fitted you by my ministry to entertain a better. Then, when you are so prepared, I will leave you.' When he did leave them, it was amid their tears and cries, and a thousand other tokens of heart-felt love. He afterwards became Vicar of Cripplegate, where he remained until he shared the fate of his fellow Nonconformists in 1662. For the next ten years he appears to have lived in obscurity, 'his Nonconformity creating for him many outward troubles, but no inward uneasiness.' Taking advantage of the Declaration of Indulgence, in 1672 he licensed a meeting-house in Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate Street, where he gathered a large and flourishing church, to which he lovingly ministered for twenty-five years. He was blessed with a hardy constitution. 'The days of "hoare frost" and chilling winds found him in his study at the top of the house with open windows and empty fire-grate.' He was temperate in all things, used no stimulants, and he could endure any amount of active exercise and toil, preaching twice or thrice every day of the Week without any sense of weariness.

He died December 16, 1696, and was buried at St. Leonard's, Shoreditch. At his funeral sermon it was said that 'in him the Church had lost a pillar, the nation a wrestler with God, the poor a benefactor, his people a faithful pastor, his children a tender father, and the Ministry an exemplary fellow-labourer.'

During his residence in Cliffe he had married the daughter of John White, 'a grave lawyer,' a Puritan from his youth, very decided in his religious principles and active in the ecclesiastical controversies of the time. He was a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Mrs. Annesley is spoken of as a woman of superior understanding, and of earnest and consistent piety. She spared no pains in endeavoring to promote the religious welfare of her numerous children. Susanna was the youngest daughter among 'two dozen, or a quarter of a hundred,' children born to this honoured pair. Mr. Kirk opines that those grand qualities of character so much admired in Susanna Wesley were inherited from

her mother, and that the godly ordering of the family in Epworth rectory was an imitation of that which prevailed in the house of the Nonconformist minister, under the care of Susanna Wesley's own mother.

If there be any virtue in an ancestry which combines learning, respectability, and godliness on both sides, John Wesley may certainly claim a true nobleness of descent. He came of people having a mental and spiritual history. It is impossible to mark these particulars in the family record, without being impressed with the singular providence that brought together through successive generations the many elements of character that were needful to one who should be a suitable agent of Divine grace in so great a work as that to which Wesley was called. His was no ordinary ancestry; he was no ordinary man. He inherited the stern tenacity and the devotional temper of the Puritan. The hard training which developed in him great powers of endurance, the spiritual discipline which led him to so profound a reverence for sacred things, the teaching of poverty which gave to him the sense of independence of wealth, and of superiority to its claims, were not unknown to many of his forbears. Moreover, the persecution and suffering for great principles which many of them endured, and which embedded those principles so firmly in their minds, he shared. In the mental culture that gave both quickness in acquiring knowledge and the power to retain it; in the development of the poetic and musical faculties, which in this family attained to so high a degree of perfection; and in the facility of public speaking which successive individuals displayed, and which culminated in the extraordinary powers of its final example - in all these we mark a collocation of distinguishing characteristics that formed the special qualifications of Wesley for his remarkable career.

What shall be said of Susanna Wesley, who takes rank with the most celebrated mothers that history recalls. We learn that she was early devoted to reading, first, the 'good books' which she recognized as among the mercies of her childhood, and then a fearless venture upon the troubled waters of the theological controversies of the day, when she well-nigh made shipwreck of her faith on the rock of Socinianism, from which she was rescued by the 'religious orthodox man' who afterwards became her husband. By what means she, educated among the Dissenters, was led to attach herself to the Church of England, we might have known, had not the fire which destroyed the Epworth parsonage also consumed a manuscript containing 'an account of the whole transaction, in which,' she says, 'I had included the main of the controversy between Dissenters and the Established Church, as far as it had come to my knowledge.' Her aptitude in writing is shown in her excellent letters to her children, and in the papers prepared by her for use in their instruction. [See Stevenson's *Memorials of the Wesley Family*; *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. I.; and Clarke's *Wesley Family*, vol. I., in which appears her own account of her method of training her children and regulating her household, contained in a letter to her son John, dated July 24, 1732.] These were dissertations on the Creed, the Ten Commandments, obedience to the Law of God, the Being and perfections of God, and an exposition of the principles of Revealed Religion.

She was an admirable woman, of highly improved mind, and of a strong and masculine understanding; an obedient wife, an exemplary mother, a fervent Christian. [Southey.] Her consummate management of her numerous household, her patient endurance of the pinch of poverty, her unflinching courage in the midst of trouble and danger, her deep concern for the spiritual welfare of her fellow-parishioners, her devotion to her able but somewhat erratic husband, 'her orderliness, reasonableness, steadfastness of purpose, calm authority, and tender affection,' [Rigg.] find ample illustration in the numerous references to her which are to be found in the various Wesley memoirs, more particularly in the *Life* by

the Rev. John Kirk. But it is her wonderful skill in the training of her children, especially in its bearing upon the future of her illustrious son, that claims attention here.

The children in that parsonage home were the subjects of a mild, a tender, and a loving, if inflexible, rule. Mrs. Wesley took tireless pains with her numerous offspring.

We must banish all notions of harshness, haste, or irritability of temper in this gracious woman. Calmly, gently, firmly, and lovingly she moulded the plastic spirit of each child. Watching the first buddings of intelligent activity, she was beforehand with her gentle guidance, not waiting for a habit to be formed and then with severity correcting it. The rule, if inflexible, was not harshly imposed. Her biographer says, 'All her commands were pleasant as apples of gold in baskets of silver.' The guide and teacher of those little children and growing youths was their best, most loving, and most beloved friend - a wise, sweet, and saintly woman. They were not left to the care of ignorant or peevish servants, or uninterested teachers. She, with her husband's aid, was their teacher, until, under her eye, the elder were able to give instruction to the younger. Her household was ruled by law, and she was the law-giver; but law in her tongue was the law of kindness. The schooling and training of her children were the outcome of her own training: their discipline followed her own self-discipline. In the light of modern customs the time for recreation may seem to have been short, when we remember the rule by which she regulated her own amusements in early life-never to spend more time in any matter of recreation in one day than she spent in private religious duties. Not so bad a regulation as at first sight it appears to be, for she set apart at least one hour in the morning and one in the evening for such duties. 'The nursery, the yard, and the adjoining croft, however, occasionally became scenes of high glee and frolic.' [Kirk.]

It was into this family, on the seventeenth day of the sunny month of June, 1703, that the eleventh child, and fourth son, of the nineteen children of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, was born at Epworth parsonage; and a few hours after his birth, being weakly, he was baptized by his father. The babe was named John Benjamin, after two of the children deceased, who respectively bore these names. ['I have heard him (Wesley) say, that he was christened by the name of John Benjamin; that his mother had buried two sons, one called John and the other Benjamin, and that she united their names in him. But he never made use of the second name.' Crowther's Methodist Memorial, 1810, p. 5. This accords with a family tradition.] The latter name was never used either by Wesley himself or by the family. Little 'Jacky' went through the training common to all the children of that home. His sleep in infancy was measured-three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon, gradually shortened until he needed none in the daytime. By the close of his first year he had been taught 'to fear the rod,' whether of punishment or of authority, and, if he cried, to do so 'softly.' His meals were strictly regulated as to time and quantity, and he was further taught to eat such things as were set before him, at the three daily meals, and to desire nothing between. As soon as he could speak he was taught the Lord's Prayer, which he then repeated daily, morning and evening. He was instructed to speak and act with propriety, and never to be rude in word or behaviour, even to servants. When calling a brother or sister by name, he learnt to preface the name with 'brother' or 'sister,' as the case might be. On his fifth birthday he, like all the others, save Kezzie, learnt the alphabet, and immediately began his reading lessons at the first chapter in Genesis. This birthday performance was a notable event in the life of each child, for which due preparations were made. 'No sooner was the appointed birthday with its simple festivities fairly over, than learning began in earnest. The day before the new pupil took his formal place in the schoolroom, "the house was set in order, every one's work appointed, and a charge given that no One should come into the room from nine till twelve, or from two till five." The allotted task of those hours was for the new scholar to acquire

a perfect mastery of the alphabet; and in every case, save two, the evening of the day saw Mrs. Wesley's children in full possession of the elements of all future learning.' [Kirk's *The Mother of the Wesleys*, p. 145.]

Morning and evening he joined in singing the Psalms with which the school was opened and closed; and, according to the rule of the house, one of his elder sisters, probably Kezzie, who was passionately fond of the little fellow, was told off to read to him the Psalms for the day, and a chapter in the Bible. Many have wondered how Mrs. Wesley could succeed in inculcating all these lessons. She taught hem. The children were not told what to do, and then whipped into the doing of it. She more than any one held the love of each child, and she gently and lovingly led each into the path of duty. The children learned to think with her of the importance and reasonableness of duty. We never in after years hear from any one of them a word of complaint, as against undue restriction, or of rebelliousness against the yoke borne in youth. In Wesley's most humble confessions he never names any approach to disobedience in his childhood; nay, he looked upon his earliest years as his best. Some features of this discipline will reappear when Wesley founds his school at Kingswood.

For some years matters went on very well. 'Never were children in better orders' wrote the happy mother, rejoicing in the success of her labours; 'never were children better disposed to piety, or in more subjection to their parents.' But the peaceful flow of this family history was destined to be most rudely checked. The fidelity of the Rector in rebuking the sins of his people, and his activity in promoting the election of an unpopular candidate for Parliament, perhaps added to their ignoble envy of a family so greatly exalted above themselves, excited the ire of his rude parishioners, and they set fire to his parsonage. John, by a merciful providence, escaped, 'A brand plucked from the fire,' as he afterwards wrote.

Mrs. Wesley, in a letter written soon after the event, says, '... When we were got into the hall, and were surrounded with flames, Mr. Wesley found he had left the keys of the doors above stairs. He ran up and recovered them a minute before the staircase took fire. When we opened the street door, the strong north-east wind drove the flames in with such violence, that none could stand against them. But some of our children got through the windows, the rest through a little door into the garden. I was not in a condition to climb up to the windows, neither could I get to the garden door. I endeavoured three times to force my passage through the street door, but was as often beat back by the fury of the flames. In this distress, I besought our blessed Saviour for help, and then waded through the fire, naked as I was, which did me no further harm than a little scorching my hands and my face. When Mr. Wesley had seen the other children safe, he heard the child in the nursery cry. He attempted to go up the stairs, but they were all on fire, and would not bear his weight. Finding it impossible to give any help, he kneeled clown in the hail, and recommended the soul of the child to God.'

Wesley, at a later period, supplemented this account. He says, 'I believe it was just at that time I awaked; for I did not cry, as they imagined, unless it was afterwards. I remember all the circumstances as distinctly as though it were but yesterday. Seeing the room was very light, I called to the maid to take me up. But none answering, I put my head out of the curtains, and saw streaks of fire on the top of the room. I got up and ran to the door, but could get no further, all the floor beyond it being in a blaze. I then climbed up on a chest which stood near the window. One in the yard saw me, and proposed running to fetch a ladder. Another [a Mr. Rhodes, {His grandson, a retired sea captain in Wellington, New Zealand, preserved the tradition of the name.}] answered, "There will not be time; but I have

thought of another expedient. Here, I will fix myself against the wall; lift a light man and set him on my shoulders." They did so, and he took me out of the window. Just then the whole roof fell in; but it fell inward, or we had all been crushed at once. When they brought me into the house, where my father was, he cried out, "Come, neighbours, let us kneel down I Let us give thanks to God I He has given me all my eight children; let the house go, I am rich enough." The next day, as he was walking in the garden and surveying the ruins of the house, he picked up part of a leaf of his polyglot Bible, on which just these words were legible, *Vade; yende omnia quae habes, et attolle crucem, et sequere Me.* "Go; sell all that thou hast; and take up thy cross, and follow Me." [Works, xiii. 475-6. | More recently another relic of the fire has been discovered. In the year 1832, the then Rector, wishing to alter the appearance of the garden, directed that a mound of earth standing in it should be removed. Beneath the soil was found a quantity of rubbish, an in it, at what appeared to be the foot of an old staircase, a small thick quarto bible was discovered, bound in strong pasteboards and covered with thick leather. It was much discoloured by water and singed by fire. The man who removed the soil was allowed to take the book away. It was afterwards sold by his son to a gentleman, who presented it to Didsbury College, where it is carefully preserved with the attesting documents.]

In giving an account of the fire to the Rev. Mr. Hoole, Mrs. Wesley thus writes, ' Though Mr. Wesley and I and seven small children were all naked and exposed to the inclemency of the air, in a night which was as severely cold as perhaps any one can remember, and though we had before our eyes the melancholy prospect of our house and goods consuming in the flames, nor knew we whither to wander nor what to do with our little ones that now cried out, as much with the cold and because the frost cut their naked feet, as they had just before done or fear of the fire, yet so deeply were our minds affected with the goodness of God in preserving ourselves and our children's lives, that for a while we made no reflection on the condition to which we were reduced, nor did the consideration of our having no house, money, food, or raiment, for the present, much affect us.'

Forty years after this event, Wesley writes, 'We had a comfortable watch-night at the chapel. About eleven o'clock it came into my mind. that this was the very day and hour in which, forty years ago, I was taken out of the flames. I stopped and gave a short account of that wonderful providence. The voice of praise and thanksgiving went up on high, and great was our rejoicing before the Lord.' [Journal, February 9, 1750.]

The dispersion of the children during the building of the new rectory unhappily left them at full liberty to converse with servants, which before they had been restrained from, and to run abroad and play with any children, good or bad. The effect was that 'that civil behavior which made them admired, when at home, by all who saw them, was, in great measure, lost, and a clownish accent and many rude ways were learned, which were not reformed without some difficulty.' So wrote the thoughtful mother; but she set herself resolutely to the task of correcting the injury.

John was but six years of age, and would therefore be less liable to suffer than some of the older ones. He was received into the house of a neighbouring clergyman, with whom he remained twelve months, during the rebuilding of the parsonage, and for this family he entertained a very strong affection. His mother's care was afterwards specially directed towards him. In a solemn meditation she wrote, 'I would offer Thee myself and all that Thou hast given me; and I would resolve - O give me grace to do it I- that the residue of my life shall be all devoted to Thy service. And I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have been; that I

may endeavour to instil into his mind the principles of Thy true religion and virtue. Lord, give grace to do it sincerely and prudently, and bless my attempts with good success!' [Moore, i. 116.] No one can, without renouncing the world in the most literal sense, observe my method,' she wrote, 'and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado - for that was my principal intention, however unskilfully managed.' [Letter of Mrs. Wesley —See Overton, John Wesley, p. 5.]

In addition to the teachings of the Schoolroom, each child in turn was, once a week, privately conversed with, when religious principles were more minutely instilled, and religious duties more closely pressed home. Jacky's day was Thursday, and years afterwards he wrote to his mother, 'If you can spare me only that little part of Thursday evening which you formerly bestowed upon me in another manner, I doubt not it would be as useful now for correcting my heart as it was then for forming my judgment.'

The conditions of life in that Lincolnshire rectory were highly favourable to the growth of goodness of character. Self-restraint, self-discipline, and self-denial were daily practised. Reverential regard for sacred things, with unswerving faith in the Divine word, and unwavering obedience to it, was habitually displayed. We hear little of high culture in the neighbourhood, but within those garden walls homely virtues flourished, and learning and joyfulness and love abounded. 'There would be few neighbours with whom the Wesleys could associate on terms of equality; they would therefore be left very much to their own resources. But, as all the family - father, mother, and all the brothers and sisters - were above the average in point of abilities and attainments, this would be no detriment to John Welsey's intellectual culture, while at the same time it would lay the foundation of that simplicity, guilelessness, and unworldliness which were his strongly marked characteristics all through life. His early home training also combined the double advantage of giving him the culture and refinement of a thorough gentleman, and the hardness and power to endure poverty. For, from circumstances into which it is not necessary to enter, the Wesleys were always poor, sometimes even to the verge of destitution.' [Overton.]

Amidst these favourable surroundings young Wesley grew up. Who, then, were his daily companions His brother Samuel left home when John was only one year old; Martha was but three years, and Charles but two, at the time of the fire. He was, therefore, thrown mainly into the company of his elder sisters. But what sisters! Emilia, at that time seventeen years of age, intellectual, studious, scholarly, beautiful in appearance, virtuous, and witty, having an exquisite taste for poetry and music, and passionately fond of John. Susanna, good-natured, facetious, and a little romantic, with a mind naturally strong and vivacious, and well-refined by a good education. Mary, somewhat deformed in body, but with a face that was exceedingly beautiful, a fair and legible index to a mind and disposition almost angelic, well-informed and naturally refined, humble, obliging, and amiable, she was the favourite and delight of the whole family. [Clarke.] Hetty, who had all the graces and gifts of her brothers and sisters, combined with great personal accomplishments and more than ordinary mental endowments. (She could read the Greek Testament when she was eight years of age.) Hetty was six years older than John; Anne ('Nancy') was seven years his senior. The latter inherited all the excellencies, social, moral, and spiritual, which characterized the family; it was her delight to sit in her mother's room, after school hours, to listen to her conversation, or her remarks on things and books. She also was passionately attached to John. This was the state of the household at the time of the fire, and John had five years more to spend in that home before he was removed to school.

'One pictures John Wesley at Epworth as a grave, sedate child, always wanting to know the reason of everything, one of a group of remarkable children, each of them with a strong individuality and a very high spirit, but all kept well in hand by their admirable mother; all precise and rather formal, after the fashion of the day, in their language and habits.' [Overton.] There are but few incidents of his home-life recorded. John thought deeply upon every subject, and felt himself answerable to his reason and conscience for everything he did; in none of them did passion or natural appetite seem to have any peculiar sway. 'Mr. Wesley has told me,' says Dr. Adam Clarke, [Memoirs of the Wesley Family.] 'that when he was a child, and was asked at any time, out of the common way of meals, to have, for instance, a piece of bread and butter, fruit, etc., he has replied, with cool unconcern, "I thank you, I will think of it."' He would neither touch nor do anything till he had reflected on its fitness and propriety. This subjection of his mind to deep reflection, which, to those who were not acquainted with him, might have appeared like hesitation, sometimes puzzled the family. In one instance his father said in a pet to Mrs. Wesley, 'I profess, sweetheart, I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature, unless he could give a reason for it.' 'Child,' said his father to him, when he was young, 'you think to carry everything by dint of argument; but you will find how very little is ever done in the world by close reason.' Wesley, recording this, adds, 'Very little indeed.' Attacked by small-pox when he was between eight and nine years of age, he bore the affliction with patience and fortitude. In a letter to her husband, Mrs. Wesley says, 'Jack has borne his disease bravely, like a man, and, indeed, like a Christian, without complaint.' With these few facts in view, it will hardly excite surprise that his conduct was such that his father admitted him to the Lord's table when he was only eight years of age. [Journal, May 27, 1728.]

Concerning himself at this time, he, some years afterwards, wrote, 'I believe till I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that washing of the Holy Ghost which was given me in baptism' - such were his views at the time - 'having been strictly educated and carefully taught that I could only be saved by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God; in the meaning of which I was diligently instructed. And those instructions, so far as they respected outward duties and sins, I gladly received, and often thought of.'