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## EPOCH MAKERS IN CHURCH HISTORY

### XII. John Wesley, Prophet of a New Era in Religion.

FREDERICK E. MALOTT

GEORGE DAWSON, in his "Biographical Lectures," says: "I can never think of Wesley without associating him with the four glorious Johns, of whom

England ought to be proud, John Wiclif, John Milton, John Bunyan and John Locke." Dawson thinks Wesley worthy to walk in the company of these four. Many English writers regard him as the greatest and most glorious of the five famous Johns, for, while he had not the genius of Milton or the luminous imagination of Bunyan, or the analytical intellect of Locke, he has left a deeper mark on English history than all the other Johns together.

It was not until the middle of the 19th century that Wesley's true greatness began to be recognized. For more than a generation after his death historians ignored him or scorned him as a fanatic. Literature refused to take him seriously. But half a century ago men suddenly awoke to the fact that he was a great man. And now the finest compliments paid him come, not from those who are known as his followers, but from men of other communions. Leslie Stephen, Lord Macaulay, Matthew Arnold, Southey, Buckle, Lecky, Augustine Birrel, John Richard Green, all join in a swelling chorus of praise of the man who did more for England in the 18th century than all her other great men combined. "You cannot cut him out of our national life," says Augustine Birrel; "no other man did such a life's work for England."

If we would understand the worth and the work of John Wesley we need only contrast the England of to-day with the England of the 18th century, and remember that to

him more than to any other man this difference is due. Poet and painter, philosopher and philanthropist, historian and novelist, all picture England in the 18th century in colors of the darkest shade. Gathering from many sources we may say of that century in brief: Its ideals were gross; its sports were brutal; its public life was corrupt; its vice was unashamed. Cruelty fermented in the pleasures of the crowd; foulness stained the general speech. Judges swore on the bench. Chaplains in the navy swore at the sailors to compel them to listen to their sermons. The King swore incessantly at the top of his voice, while ladies of quality were recognized by the glibness of their profanity. Ferocious laws still lingered on the statute books. Justice itself was cruel. It was the age of the pillory and the whipping-post, of gin-hells and debtors' prisons. Drunkenness and adultery were frightfully common. Religion had lost its vitality and had ceased to receive any attention whatever from the two classes at the extremes of the social scale. The clergy were no better than the laity. Their theology had degenerated into a shallow and confident Deism that was morally impotent, because, while it did not deny the existence of God, it banished Him from His own



From the painting by J. W. L. Forster.

#### JOHN WESLEY.

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