

VOLTAIRE AND JOHN WESLEY.*

BY THE LATE E. A. STAFFORD, D.D., LL.D.



EARLY in the year 1694 a boy was born into the family of an obscure notary in Paris. The philosophers tell us that a stone dropped into the sea sends a ripple round the whole world of waters, and that a whisper affects in some degree the whole body of the atmosphere. No man has ever followed these ripples to know where they stop; but many men have seen, not ripples merely, but great waves in the sea of human life, issuing from the point where this boy was dropped into it. The world of France, at the time totally ignorant that anything had happened, was soon to realize all the great meaning of his birth.

Men moved on in their habitual ways for nine years, when another boy was born, this time in the kingdom of Great Britain, at Epworth, in the rectory of a poor Lincolnshire clergyman.

The all-supporting, many-bearing earth has now two boys on her hands. Most mothers find enough to do with one at a time. This mother shall yet stand greatly astonished at the wonderful movements of these two boys of hers.

These boys heard the roar of Marlborough's artillery along the fields of Europe, as he was closing

his great career. They were witnesses of the opening scenes of two of the greatest revolutions of history, the American and the French. They saw experimental science growing into commanding importance, as represented by Sir Isaac Newton, whose honoured head, like some snow-crowned peak, towered aloft during the first quarter of their time; and by Benjamin Franklin, who was filling two continents with his fame. David Hume had loaded the atmosphere of England with the mists of doubt. Rousseau was labouring to do the same in France. Dr. Samuel Johnson was blazing in the splendour of his great intellect. Really no great spirit needed to be lonely at that time.

After birth, next comes the name. Generally the babe takes the name it gets, and never thinks of asking why he was not consulted in the matter. But this French boy was not one of that kind. As a babe he was so poor, weak, and pitiful that he could not be carried to church to receive baptism. The sacred rite was therefore administered in private; but at the end of nine months, as he had refused to die, but had improved somewhat in strength and promise, he was publicly baptized in one of the grand churches of Paris. Let us look calmly at the fact—a double Christian baptism as the initiation to his remarkable career!

At this time he received the name, which stood as registered, Francois Marie Arouet, being the same as that of his plain father, with the addition of Marie. But this young gentleman soon showed that he was not proud of his

* In connection with the Wesley Bicentenary we have pleasure in printing a striking contrast by the late Dr. Stafford between the careers of John Wesley and François Voltaire, the two men who more largely than any others influenced the world for good or evil during the eighteenth century. Their lives ran almost parallel in time, but with wonderfully different results!