

Newman on Darby.

A hostile criticism on Darby's career.

A "ministering of strife".

The letter here inserted was written to the compiler of this work early in 1887, and was in answer to an enquiry, as to later opinions of Mr Darby and his work. The following is a copy of the letter, made for easier reading.

"When you ask my general opinion of Mr Darby's career, I doubt whether in my position (which may seem hostile) I ought to say anything to the public, at the same time facts speak for themselves. Seriously, when I review the past before the Supreme Tribunal, I thank God for Mr Darby's harsh and wholly unexpected treatment of me. It was a shock that broke up my previous confidence. It made me doubt how others, to whom I had looked up, or, on whom I had leaned, would behave to me. It forced me to ask: Do I after all know rightly what Christianity is? It drove me into deeper and more leisurely enquiry; though never did I relax my earliest convictions that moral truth, and warm just sentiment, were the sacred care of any worthy religion — not theory or creed, wise or unwise. Mr Darby soon finished off with me. I saw with wonder his renunciation of the principles which had so won upon me, and I was able to keep quite out of his way. But in due time he fell foul of my old College friend Benjamin Newton, accusing him of "Irving's heresy"; i.e. in expounding the confessions in the Psalms called Messianic, he (like Irving) seemed to ascribe actual sin to the immaculate Jesus. From my present point of view I find it easy to believe that Newton was open to just attack on his own platform; but Newton frankly disowned the imputations. In spite of this Mr Darby not only split up his own brotherhood into two sections with impassable wall, but excommunicated Craik and Müller (renowned Baptist Ministers in Bristol) & all who frequented their ministry, barely because they had "received" ladies, who "came from Newton", — and declined to enter the controversy. Darby fought this battle for long years. My wife was a warm admirer of George Müller (of Bristol) and her sister was married to my old friend Dr Cronin, a supporter of Darby against Newton. In consequence when my wife went to visit her sister (most affectionate as they were) my wife was kept out of the Darby Eucharist, and treated as an outsider. The late Lord Congleton (my old friend of my Eastern journey, of old called John Parnell) tried to avoid the error alike of Newton & of Darby, but with the sole result of making 3 "Lord's Tables", instead of two; strange demonstration of Christian Union. Mr Darby was suddenly accused from within his own body of Newton's heresy. One of them sent me ample papers with Darby's own confession and retraction, yet this did not soften him towards Newton, but drove out some of his own friends with disgust. I have found Darby's

section everywhere called "the Exclusive Section"; jistly I suppose, though each in turn is exclusive. My last experience of Darby was in his conduct to his faithful, too loving, too admiring friend, Dr Cronin, who had gone all lengths of exclusiveness under his influence, and duly tutored his own children to it, as far as he could. One daughter was married to a Swede, who died early, leaving a family of 5 young children, in very low pecuniary straits. Cronin, visiting the Isle of Wight fell in with a question dividing some of Darby's connexion, and took a decisive part on one side. Darby, on learning it, flatly took the opposite. What measures in detail he pursued, no one cared to tell me, nor could I enquire; but the hostility was so awful that Cronin's daughter regarded her father as excommunicated and pronounced unclean, insomuch that in her deep poverty she refused her father's money, and renounced him with such harshness as virtually broke her mother's heart. Her mother was at once seized with a headache that never left her, in short, she declined, languished, and died; the father never lost the pang of heart, nor rallied from his wife's loss, and followed her to the grave, not instantly, but without ever recovering from the moral shock. At Oxford, an elder Evangelical whom I much respected (in 1829.?) to whom I tried to commend J. N. Darby, said to me briefly: "He has a peculiar power, but he stirs up unprofitable questions which cannot lead to Unity." I was not at all of the good man's opinion then; but looking back some 58 years, I see the career of J. N. Darby to have been chiefly a "ministering of strife".