

J. W. Newman and J. N. Darby.

The interesting story of their early and ardent friendship.

J. W. Newman, in his "Phases of Faith" published in 1850, gives the following account of his connection with J. N. Darby, and the great influence Darby gained over him. "My second period" says Newman "is characterized partly by the great ascendancy exercised over me by one powerful mind, partly by the vehement effort which throughout its duration urged me to long after the establishment of Christian Fellowship in a purely Biblical Church as the first great want of Christendom and of the world. I was already uneasy in the sense that I could not enter the ministry of the Church of England, and knew not what course of life to choose. I longed to become a missionary for Christ among the heathen, - a notion I had often fostered while reading the lives of missionaries.

15 Arundel Crescent
Weston super Mare
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To Mr H W Pontis

I at once reply that the best Photographs by far of me, as an old man past 80, are to be had of Messrs Elliot and Fry, Photographers, Becher Street London W. All are so approved by friends, that I cannot tell which of 4 or 5 is best. Some have a larger face and little but face. Tastes differ.

But my relation with J. N. Darby were in my early youth. A Daguerotype in glass, (excellent except something in one eye - perhaps from slight irregularity in the glass) was taken in 1851 when I was 46, though it looks much younger. It was afterwards photographed when Collodion was discovered, but the artist spoiled the Daguerotype! If you have a young looking of J. N. D., and desire a contrast, I think I could lend you this earlier one of myself.

On the other request, you must give me a little time.

I am regretful, almost indignant, at the description of my former friend, Sir Charles Boutton, by my brother in law Rev Thomas Mozley in his Reminiscences of Oxford.

Yours faithfully J. W. Newman

Autograph of
J. W. Newman.

The
"Rationalism of
Infidelity" is
J. N. D.'s reply to
J. W. Newman's
"Phases of Faith".

but again, I saw not how that was to be effected. After taking my degree, I became Fellow of Balliol College; and the next year I accepted an invitation to Ireland, and there became private tutor for fifteen months in the house of one now deceased, whose name I would gladly mention for honour and affection; - but I withhold my pen. While he repaid me munificently for my services, he behaved towards me as a father, or indeed as an elder brother, and instantly made me feel as a member of his family. His great talents, high professional standing, nobleness of heart and unfeigned piety, would have made him a most valuable counsellor to me; but he was too gentle, too unassuming, too modest; he looked to be taught by his juniors, and sat at the feet of one whom I proceed to describe.

This was a young relative of his - a most remarkable man, - who rapidly gained an immense sway over me. I shall henceforth call him "the Irish clergyman." His "bodily presence" was indeed "weak"! A fallen cheek, a blood-shot eye, crippled limbs resting on crutches, a seldom shaven beard, a shabby suit of clothes and a generally neglected person, drew at first pity, with wonder to see such a figure in a drawing room. It was currently reported that a person in Limerick offered him a halfpenny, mistaking him for a beggar; and if not true the story was yet well invented. This young man had taken high honours in Dublin University and had studied for the bar, where under the auspices of his eminent kinsman he had excellent prospects; but his conscience would not allow him to take a brief, lest he should be selling his talents to defeat justice. With keen logical powers, he had warm sympathies, solid judgment of character, thoughtful tenderness & total self-abandonment. He before long took Holy Orders, and became an indefatigable curate in the mountains of Wicklow. Every evening he sallied forth to teach in the cabins, and roving far and wide over mountain and amid bogs, was seldom home before midnight. By such exertions his strength was undermined, and he so suffered in his limbs that not lameness only, but yet more serious results were feared. He did not fast on purpose, but his long walks through wild country and indigent people inflicted on him much severe deprivation: moreover, as he ate whatever food was offered him, - food unpalatable and often indigestible to him, his whole frame might have died in emaciation with a monk of La Trappe. Such a phenomenon intensely excited the poor Romanists, who looked on him as a genuine "saint" of the ancient breed. The stamp of heaven seemed to them clear in a frame so wasted by austerity, so superior to worldly pomp, and so partaking in all their indigence. That a dozen such men would have done more to convert all Ireland to Protestantism, than the whole apparatus of the Church Establishment, was ere long my conviction; though I was at first offended by his apparent affection of a careless exterior. But I soon understood that in no other way could he gain equal access to the lowest orders, and that he was moved not by asceticism, nor by ostentation, but by a self-abandonment fruitful of consequences. He had practically given up all reading except that of the Bible; and no small part of his

movement towards me soon took the form of dissuasion from all other vol-
untary study. In fact I had myself more and more concentrated my re-
a cultivated mind. Against this, my new eccentric friend, (himself hav-
ing enjoyed no mean advantages of cultivation,) directed his keenest attacks.
I remember once saying to him in defence of worldly station, - "To desire
to be rich is unchristian and absurd; but if I were the father of children,
I should wish to be rich enough to secure them a good education." He
replied: "If I had children, I would as soon see them break stones on
the road, as do anything else, if only I could secure to them the Gospel
and the grace of God." I was unable to say Amen, but I admired his
unflinching consistency; - for now as always, all he said was based
on texts aptly quoted and logically enforced. He more and more made
me ashamed of Political Economy and Moral Philosophy, and all Science,
all of which ought to be "counted dross for the excellency of the knowledge
of Christ Jesus our Lord." For the first time in my life I saw a man earn-
estly turning into reality the principles which others confessed with
their lips only. That the words of the New Testament contained the high-
est truth accessible to man, - truth not to be taken from nor added to,
all, (as I thought) confessed; never before had I seen a man so resolved
that no word of it should be a dead letter to him. I once said: "But do
you really think that no part of the New Testament may have been
temporary in its object? for instance, what should we have lost, if
St. Paul had never written the verse, 'The cloak which I have left at Troas,
bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.'" He an-
swered with the greatest promptitude: "I should certainly have lost
something; for that is exactly the verse which alone saved me from sel-
silyling my little library. No! every word, depend upon it, is from the
Spirit, and is for eternal service."

A political question was just then exceedingly agitating Ireland, in
which nearly every body took a great interest; - it was the propriety of
admitting Romanist members of Parliament. . . . I looked with
amazement and sorrow at spiritual Christians who desired to exclude
the Romanists from full equality; and I was happy to enjoy as to this
the passive assent of the Irish clergyman; who, though "Orange" in his
connexions, and opposed to all political action, yet only so much the
more deprecated what he called "political Protestantism". In spite
of the strong revulsion of feeling which I felt against some of the pec-
uliarities of this remarkable man, I for the first time in my life found
myself under the dominion of a superior. When I remember, how even
those bowed down before him, who had been to him in the place of pa-
rents, - accomplished and experienced minds, - I cease to wonder in
the retrospect, that he revited me in such a bondage. Henceforth I
began to ask: what will he say to this and that? In his reply I al-
ways expected to find a higher portion of God's Spirit, than in any



J. W. Newman.

"An old man past 80."

Dr. Newman has for years been earnestly engaged in explaining away nearly everything of which the term Christianity is representative. And now he is finishing up by explaining away himself! No small injury was done to modern Christianity when the narrow dogmatism of John Nelson Darby withered the sympathies of his beloved and ardent friend, F. W. Newman, and drove him out of the camp of orthodoxy. Alas! this gifted writer rushed into the outer darkness of unbelief—not indeed gnashing his teeth like the furious declaimers of Atheism—but taking his place with the pitiful band of amiable spirits, who cling to cold and hopeless abstractions about some unknowable Theos, without ever a Theanthropos in whom God and man have met together.

Christian Commonwealth. 1884.

I could frame for myself. In order to learn divine truth it became a sure process to me to consult him, than to search for myself and to wait upon God; (gradually (as I afterwards discerned) my religious thought had merged in the mere process of developing fearlessly into results all his principles, without any deeper examining of my foundations. Indeed but for a few weaknesses which warned me he might err, I could have accepted him as an apostle commissioned to reveal the mind of God. In his after-course (which I may not indicate) this gentleman has everywhere displayed a wonderful power of bending other minds to his own, and even stamping upon them the tones of his voice, and all sorts of slavish imitation. Over the general results of his action I have long deeply mourned, as blunting his natural tenderness, and sacrificing his wisdom to the Letter, dwarfing men's understanding, contracting their hearts, crushing their moral sensibilities, and setting those at variance who ought to love: yet oh! how specious was it at the beginning! he only wanted men to submit their understandings to God; that is, to the Bible, that is, to his interpretation! From seeing his action and influence I have learnt, that if it be dangerous to a young

man (as assuredly it is) to have no superior mind to which he may look up with confiding reverence, it may be even more dangerous to think he has found such a mind," as F. W. N. considered to be the case with him in regard to J. N. D. Further on he says: the Irish Clergyman (as he continues to call Mr Darby); "pressed the authority of every Letter of the Scriptures with an unshrinking vehemence that I never saw surpassed; yet with a common inconsistency showed more than indifference towards learned historical and critical evidence on the side of Christianity; & indeed unmercifully exposed erudition to scorn, both by caustic reasoning, & by irrefragable quotation of texts. I constantly had occasion to admire the power with which he laid hold of the moral side of every controversy; whether he was reasoning against Romanism, against the High Church, against learned religion or philosophic scepticism; and in this matter his practical axiom was, that the advocate of truth had to address

himself to the conscience of the other party, and if possible, make him feel that there was a moral and a spiritual superiority against him. Such doctrine when joined with an inculcation of man's natural blindness and total depravity was anything but clearing to my intellectual perceptions; in fact I did not recover for some years from the dimness and confusion which he spread over me."

"When I had returned to Oxford I induced the Irish Clergyman to visit the University, and introduced him to many of my equals in age and juniors. Most striking was it to see how ^{instantaneously} he assumed the place of universal father-confessor, as if he had ^{known} and long-trusted friend. His insight into character, and tenderness pervading his austerity, so opened young men's hearts, that day after day there was no end of secret closetings with him."

[In June 1829, A. N. Groves had gone out to Bagdad by way of St. Petersburg and Moscow, having consecrated his all to the cause of God, and determined to become a missionary; and in Sept. of the following year a party was formed to go out to his assistance. The chief persons in this party were F. L. Newman, J. V. Parnell, (afterwards Baron Congleton) and Dr. Cronin.

Newman went afterwards, not at the first. (Sept. 1830)

Whilst at Bagdad, Newman appears to have imbibed doubts as to the Trinity, and become a believer, more or less in Arianism. John. 17. 3. and 1 Cor. i. 8. 5. 6. were the texts on which his belief in the Trinity suffered shipwreck. As the Scriptures, and especially John's Gospel appeared to him to teach the Arian idea; and as Mr. Darby had always insisted on belief in the strict Letter of the Word; his doubts increasing, he determined to come home to consult with Mr. Darby, whom he still revered as of old. News however came before him as to his change of views, and by many he was considered a heretic. He says on his arrival in England "the Irish Clergyman (J. N. D.)" "wasn't able to meet me, but wrote to me that he had heard that I had been endeavouring to sound the divine nature by the miserable plummet of human philosophy." I answered explaining the matter and desiring to be truly taught, and assuring him in 'all depth of affection that I felt how much fuller insight he had than I into all divine truth'. He answered in a letter of much tenderness that if I allowed the Spirit of God to be with him rather than with myself it was wonderful that I should set my single judgment against the mind of the Spirit and of the whole Church of God. The contents of this letter gave me a severe shock, but I again wrote him, for I still adored him, and could have given him my right hand, or my right eye - anything but my conscience. The Irish Clergyman answered 'he was exceedingly surprised at my recurring to mere ecclesiastical creeds, as though they could have the slightest weight, and he must insist on my acknowledging that the 'Father' meant the 'Trinity' if I desired to be in any way recognized as holding the truth! The Father meant the Trinity! For the first time I perceived that so vehement a champion of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, so staunch an opposer of Creeds and Churches, was wedded to an extra-scriptural creed of his own, by which he tested the spiritual state of his brethren. I was in despair and like a man thunderstruck. I had nothing more to say. Two more letters from the same hand I saw; the later

of which was to threaten some new acquaintances who were kind to me, & wholly unknown to him; that if they did not desist from sheltering me, and break off intercourse, they should, so far as his influence went, themselves everywhere be cut off from Christian communion and recognition. This will suffice to indicate the sort of social persecution, through which, after a succession of struggles I found myself separated from persons whom I had trustingly admired, and on whom I had most counted for union; with whom I had fondly believed myself bound up for eternity; of whom some were my previously intimate friends; while for others even on slight acquaintance I would have performed menial offices, and thought myself honoured; whom I still looked upon as the blessed and excellent of the earth, & the special favourites of heaven; whose company I would have chosen in preference to that of nobles; whom I loved solely because I thought them to love God, and of whom I asked nothing but that they would admit me as the meanest and most frail of disciples. My heart was ready to break; I wished for a woman's soul that I might weep in floods. Oh Dogma! Dogma! how dost thou hamper underfoot, love, truth, conscience, justice! Was ever a Moloch worse than thou? Burn me at the stake; then Christ will receive me, and saints beyond the grave will love me, though the saints here know me not. But now I am alone in the world, I can trust no one. ... I remembered a saying of the noble-hearted Groves, 'Talk of loving me while I agree with them, give me men that will love me when I differ from them and contradict them; those will be the men to build up a true Church.' ... After the excitement was passed, I learned many things from the events which have been named. I found that the class of Christians with whom I had been joined had exploded the old Creeds in favour of another of their own, which was never given me upon authority and yet was constantly slipping out. ... Mysterious aspersions were made even against my moral character, ~~and~~ and were alledged to me as additional reasons for refusing communion with me; and when I demanded a tribunal and that my accuser would meet me face to face, all inquiry was refused, on the plea that it was needless and undesirable. I had very much reason to believe that a very small number of persons had constituted themselves my judges, and used against me all the airs of the universal Church; the many lending themselves easily to swell the cry of heresy, when they have little personal acquaintance with the party attacked. ~~He~~ afterwards learned that some of those gentlemen esteemed boldness of thought "a lust of the mind", and as such, an immorality. This enables them to persuade themselves that they do not reject a "heretic" for a matter of opinion, but for that which they have a right to call immoral. What immorality was imputed to me I was not distinctly informed.

"And the end was not far off; for the vision of a pure Biblical Christianity had faded away from before his (Newman's) eyes, and nothing remained for him now but to go out all alone into the barren & doubtful and, at the same time when contrasted with his celebrated brother (Cardinal Newman) and with Darby himself, an illustration of those most pregnant words of the Master; I came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword" Prof. Stokes's Article on J.N.B. p. 37.