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A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby

Jonathan D. Burnham

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This addition to the important Paternoster series of ‘Studies in Evangelical History and Thought’ is valuable, not so much for its originality as for its depth. Based upon careful research and written in clear English, it probes more deeply than ever before into the sorry story of the conflict between two very able, very strong characters equally devoted to the Lord they professed to serve, but each possessed of personalities that were initially drawn to each other but soon came into violent conflict. The author rightly (in this reviewer’s view) asserts that most of their earlier differences arose ‘primarily out of a clash of personalities’ but is not so convincing when he comes to the conclusion that ‘the bitter conflict... seems *merely* [my emphasis] a contest between two strong personalities’. Darby and, probably, Newton saw the focal point of the conflict as the honour and glory of Christ—which may be why they failed to realise the extent of the psychological factor that was driving them.

The study is firmly rooted in the religious milieu out of which the two men emerged, sketches their family background—as far as this is possible—and outlines—once again!—the beginnings of the Brethren movement, making excellent use of the source material now available, and with constant reference to the secondary sources. The eschatological development of the two men during the short period 1830-36 is explored in considerable depth. One of the best chapters examines in almost minute detail the ‘deteriorating relationship’ of the two men between 1837 and 1845, giving due weight to Darby’s experiences in Switzerland, the personal factor mentioned above, and their diverging views of matters ecclesiastical as well as theological. A further chapter sensitively brings the conflict to its climax (1846-47). This is followed by a chapter headed ‘The Remaining Years’, which all too briefly outlines the course of the rest of the lives of the

two men. 'All too briefly', because, although the events and literary output of Darby are well known, critical evaluation remains sparse and, especially, the later life and writings of Newton are known only to those, like the Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony constituency, who revere his teaching. As Burnham rightly says, much work remains to be done.

Harold Rowdon