

Frederick Godet.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR GRETILLAT, NEUCHÂTEL.

II.

IN 1851 a new struggle, still more heated than the previous one, took place, occasioned by the displacement of Pastor Guillebert of Neuchâtel from the office which he claimed, while refusing to fulfil its duties. For the second time M. Godet had to brave the anger of the abstentionist party by accepting the candidature, offered to him from various quarters, for the post of pastor of the city. With a view to conciliate even unreasonable and violent susceptibilities, he had actually to abstain from inscribing himself in the department of worship and taking advantage of a liberty granted by the law to be presented in a parochial assembly once convoked; and there was found at Neuchâtel a minister, named Cruchaud, humble enough to offer to fill the part of a candidate of straw, rendering possible by his own inscription the official convocation of the electoral assembly, and thereupon the certain appointment of M. Godet. At the distance of forty years, I still recall the text chosen by the new pastor for his introductory sermon: "None of these things move me," in which he did not hide the inner and outward struggles he had had to sustain in order to mount that pulpit which he was to occupy till 1866.

Those fifteen years, during which M. Godet combined the functions of pastor of Neuchâtel and professor of theology, and when even the weight of material care was more than once added to that of manifold and incessant labour, were probably the fullest in all his career. As has often happened in the kingdom of God, the eminent services he rendered were, as much from circumstances as by the fault of men, remunerated in a ridiculous manner, very inadequate to free the father of a numerous family from care. His salary as professor commenced at £16, and rose to £24; and the radical administration of the town did not hesitate to cut off at a stroke £40, that is to say, the third part of his salary as pastor. More than once, too, M. Godet had to deny himself the only luxury that tempted him, and which must have seemed to him equal to a necessity—the purchase of books. He said to me one day: "I do not know how I lived at that time!" I

remember having heard him, in a sermon preached at the beginning of the severe weather, add to an appeal addressed to those of his parishioners whose provision for the morrow was not assured: "And why should not I share your anxieties?"

Those private trials in no way retarded the activity of M. Godet. It was given him to show himself equal to all parts of his task, and worthy of the confidence reposed in him. From that time, and long before his scientific reputation had passed the narrow limits of his country, the course of criticism and of exegesis of the New Testament which he gave to the seven or eight pupils assembled round his dining-room table, was unequalled for richness, lucidity, and exactitude of results; and when at the end of two years we quitted M. Godet to continue our studies with the most famous German professors of the time,—Tholuck, Julius Müller, Dorner, Beck,—we did not find it better, and sometimes much less than what we had received at Neuchâtel. It was at this time that, following the initiative of Gess, then Professor of Theology at the Mission House of Bâle, and author of a work entitled *Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, M. Godet embraced the doctrine of the *Kenosis*, or self-emptying of the Son of God, which was to correct, in his view, the docetism of the traditional Christology, and thenceforth brought to that cause all the resources of his exegetical science and of an ardent conviction.

But what was to be admired was that the activity of the pastor of Neuchâtel, whether in public or from house to house among the sick and the poor, in no way suffered from the claims of his professorship. His preaching, stripped of oratorical ornamentation, and meant to fall, so to say, with its own weight on the hearer's conscience, combined, with an ever thorough study which seemed to exhaust the substance of the text, the most various practical applications; and in important circumstances of our national or ecclesiastical existence, it laid hold of opponents, or the indifferent themselves, by the adaptation of Scripture to the contemporary and local conditions.

As teacher of religion in the College of Neuchâtel, he was unequalled for the exceptional interest which he could communicate to the matter in hand by his rich, lucid, and precise instruction, as well as by the exemplary discipline maintained merely by his voice or look, even in classes where others immediately before him had miserably failed.

Yet again, the faithful servant of his brethren was to be found in all the houses where his services were expected; and besides the assiduous care of souls exercised among the sick and the poor, he did not cease to visit in a cycle of six or seven years all the families of an extensive parish, thus escaping the reproach brought against pastors, especially in the towns, of never showing themselves except when invited to dinner.

Once more Neuchâtel owes to his initiative or co-operation several philanthropic institutions that still exist—a dispensary, erection of workmen's lodging-houses, institution of a rent fund as intermediary between proprietors and poor tenants, Society for Sabbath Observance, foundation of a free Normal School, etc.

This excessive labour, if further prolonged, would have exhausted his strength. In 1866 M. Godet resigned his pastoral charge, to devote himself exclusively to the teaching of theology and to literary labours.

The second part of M. Godet's career, comprising the last thirty years, would doubtless not have been so fruitful, had he not found in Mdlle. Caroline Alioth a new companion, who has shown herself from 1862 till now the devoted and able fellow-worker of her husband. Not content with sparing him by her activity and ability the material cares of existence, and permitting him, among other things, to exercise regarding strangers passing through Neuchâtel that large hospitality that does not distinguish between "angels" and simple mortals, Madame Godet can pass without an effort from the pen to the pen; and it is she who wrote to the dictation of her husband, those universally valued works, which in a good measure she has the right to call hers. She adds to these qualities the art, so precious in the working cabinet of a great man, of finding objects, books, or papers which the old pupil of Neander was liable to mislay. It is related that at the very moment when he was going to deliver in public a lecture he had just written (it was at the time of the contest with

M. Buisson, of which we are about to speak), M. Godet perceived with terror that the sheets which had just received the expression of his thought had disappeared from his desk. It might have made one believe in a new device of the invisible enemy of the kingdom of God. Madame Godet is called to help, and what does she find?—the sheets in a pile in the waste-paper basket, into which one after the other they had silently slipped as soon as they were filled!

The year 1869 produced a violent crisis in Neuchâtel. The National Church, reorganised in 1849, and almost the whole of whose pastors had remained faithful to evangelical doctrine, had excited against itself the hatred of the free-thinking party and the jealousy of the Government. M. Buisson, then Professor of Philosophy in the Academy of Neuchâtel, and at present Director of Primary Instruction in France, made himself the mouthpiece of that party, by attacking in a public lecture, entitled "An Urgent Reform," the use of the Old Testament in religious instruction. It was an affair of outposts, of which, however, no one failed to see the importance. M. Godet, who was not present at the lecture, was requested by several who were, and who communicated to him their notes, to reply to this unforeseen as well as clever attack; and he did so in a lecture that soon followed M. Buisson's, and which was published under the title of "The Sanctity of the Old Testament."

From that moment war was declared. The new religious party, which then called itself *Liberal Christianity*, continued its attack on the most essential points of Christian doctrine, revelation, miracle, the reality of Christ's resurrection; it brought its most famous champions from France, and extended its line of battle from Neuchâtel to Geneva. M. Godet remained in the first rank of the defenders of evangelical doctrine, who, however, appeared numerous and well armed, and the different lectures he gave on this occasion were collected under the title of *Apologetic Lectures*.

Liberal Christianity, vanquished as was felt in the domain of discussion, took its revenge in the ecclesiastical order, and in 1873 procured the passing of a law in the Canton of Neuchâtel, which opened the pulpits of the National Church to all doctrines, suppressed entirely the Synod's right of control regarding religious instruction, and united to the State Academy the Faculty of Theology,

which, till then, had depended exclusively on ecclesiastical authority, while entrusting to the Government the nomination of the future professors of theology.

The threatened interests were too grave to permit the theologian to remain shut up in his study. M. Godet threw himself with the defenders of the gospel into the conflict, first to repel the projected law by opposing to it a demand for the revision of the Cantonal Constitution, aiming at the suppression of the budget for worship. On 14th September 1873 the people of Neuchâtel rejected the revision by a nominal majority of 16 votes out of more than 14,000 voters, but sufficient to maintain the National Church. Besides the frauds proved in the distribution of the voting papers, the Government unduly confirmed 80 votes, which, properly viewed, would certainly have transformed into a minority that suspicious majority of 16 votes, and the Canton of Neuchâtel would have had the glory to be the first country on the Continent to have legally pronounced for the separation of Church and State.

Such a result was, as may be supposed, a great grief to M. Godet, and to all the friends of their country, which disappointed all their hopes, remained open to the utmost suspicion, and for which, for my own part, I am not yet consoled. M. Godet himself said to me that during the night following that mournful day, he thought he felt his heart burst; and I mention this to show the ardent interest he has not ceased to devote to the destinies of his little fatherland, and of the Church of Neuchâtel. But those who had asked the popular vote did not long rest under the blow of that undeserved defeat, and at once, following the resignations of the half of the pastors of Neuchâtel, sent in one after the other to the Government, the *Evangelical Church of Neuchâtel, independent of the State*, was founded.

M. de Pressensé once called it the Church of M. Godet. That name, so contrary to the principles of the man it was thought thus to exalt, is wrong, besides, as not agreeing with the actual facts. However important the part of M. Godet in all these events, it was neither decisive nor even preponderating; and the opinion of the members who founded the Church was sufficiently ripened to inspire their conduct, independently of all human authority, even that of the most venerated master.

The Faculty of Theology was likewise reconstituted, or rather maintained in the position of independence with regard to the Government, which it had enjoyed from the beginning, and was connected with the new Church, retaining at its head M. Godet and his former colleagues, M. Jacottet and M. Gretillat, while an official and rival Faculty was installed at the Academy of Neuchâtel by the Government.

This Independent Faculty did not escape the trials inseparable from a beginning. In the second year of its existence, despite the universal reputation of M. Godet, the number of pupils fell to the last possible minimum. For months the audience of this illustrious master was reduced to three pupils, and that of the author of this article to a single one. M. Godet, for his own part, never doubted the necessity for the Independent Church of Neuchâtel, and for every Church, to possess its own Faculty of Theology, and he always persistently rejected every combination which would have had the effect of diminishing that privilege of the new Church, or of relieving it of this responsibility. He even refused to entertain a proposition which arose then from different quarters, and which appeared more reasonable than the existing state of things, to unite into one the three Free Faculties of Geneva, Vaud, and Neuchâtel. But it is certain that, if the penury I have just mentioned had been prolonged, facts would have appealed against principles. Happily this distressing crisis did not last; and from the following year, recruits both from home and abroad gave to the modest institution its reason of existence in the opinion of the Church and in its own.

In consequence of a severe illness, which all but carried him off, M. Godet in 1887 gave in his resignation as Ordinary Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Criticism, a position in which he had the happiness to be succeeded by his son M. Georges Godet, then pastor of the independent parish of Neuchâtel city.

Since that time M. Godet, who continues to lecture gratuitously on the New Testament one hour to the pupils of the Independent Faculty of Neuchâtel, divides his time between his own Theological publications, assiduous and preponderant collaboration on the *Annotated Bible* and the presidency of the Neuchâtel Committee for the Evangelisation of France.

The publication of the *Annotated Bible*, which

has proceeded for fifteen years, and will take at least twenty, the work of evangelisation in France of the Neuchâtel Committee which began in 1871 in consequence of the interning in Switzerland of the *débris* of Bourbaki's army, are, in fact, both due to the initiative of M. Godet, and owe to him their continuance till now, proving in two ways and in two different directions the ever ready and ever prompt activity, the always lively and youthful solicitude characterising to the most advanced age this theologian, who seeks only to be the faithful and devoted minister of the Church.

In 1891 and 1892 M. Godet had to resume the sword of the Word and mount the breach for the defence of pure evangelical doctrine, which rightly seemed to him threatened in French-speaking countries by the pretension of the *New Evangelical School*, to substitute for the authority of the apostles, for that of Jesus Himself, the expressions of the conscience or the manifestations of subjective Christian experience. The principal representatives of this new school are MM. Lobstein, Professor at Strassburg, author of several articles and small works in French; Astié, Professor in the Free Faculty of Lausanne; Chapuis, *Emeritus* Professor of Exegesis in the National Faculty of Lausanne, and Editor of the Journal, *Évangile et Liberté*; Leop. Monod, Pastor of the Free Church of Lyons; Frank Puaux, Editor of the *Revue Chrétienne* of Paris; and at the extreme left of this group, M. Sabatier, Professor of Reformed Theology at Paris. In four articles published in 1891 in the *Chrétien Évangélique* of Lausanne on the present questions of revelation and authority, M. Godet keeps at equal distance from the exaggerations of M. Gausson, the author of *Theopneustia*, and from the conceptions that reduce all authority to that of the individual conscience. Attacked by M. Sabatier in the number of the *Revue Chrétienne* for January 1892, in an article, entitled "Does the New Testament contain Dogmas?" M. Godet replied in two articles (numbers of February and April of the same Review), which have made, it appears, a great sensation in France.

M. Godet has twice received the Diploma of Doctor of Divinity—in 1868 from the University of Basle, and in 1884 from that of Edinburgh.

We conclude by giving the list of his principal publications:—

Examination of Darbyite Views on the Holy Ministry, 1846.

History of the Reformation, and of the Refugees in Neuchâtel, 1858.

Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, 2 vols., 1863-65; third edition, 3 vols., 1881-85.

Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, 2 vols., 1871; third edition, 1888-89.

Apologetic Lectures, 1869.

Biblical Studies, 2 vols., first series, Old Testament, 1873; second series, New Testament, 1874, fourth edition, 1889.

Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 2 vols., 1879-80; second edition of the first volume, 1883, of the second volume, 1890.

Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 2 vols., 1886-87.

We have to add to M. Godet's literary activity, a great number of articles published in journals and reviews: *Espérance*, *Revue Chrétienne*, *Revue Théologique de Montauban*, *Chrétien Évangélique*, *Kirchenfreund of Basle*, *Journal Religieux de la Suisse Romande*,—then small polemical works, or of occasional interest; *National Multitudinism*, in reply to M. Monsell, pastor of the old dissenting church of Neuchâtel, 1858: Reports presented to different bodies: to the Swiss Pastoral Society; to the Ecumenical Assemblies of the Evangelical Alliance at Geneva, in 1861, on *The Lord's Day, and the best means of securing the sanctification of it* (which caused the foundation of an International Society for the Observance of the Sabbath); at Basle, in 1879, on *The Immutability of the Apostolic Testimony*; at Copenhagen, in 1884, on *The Bases of the Authority of the New Testament*. M. Godet has likewise contributed to German and English Theological Dictionaries, among others the *Calwer Bibellexicon*.

At present M. Godet is publishing a great work, an *Introduction to the New Testament*, long expected and desired, which, if God grant him the favour to finish it, will be the crown of his Theological career. The first volume, which has just appeared, treats of the Epistles of Paul.¹

¹ Professor Gretillat writes to say that Dr. Godet has discovered a slip of memory in last month's article. It was not Neander, but Hengstenberg, who gave Godet the *History of Zinzendorf* to read.—ED.