

A SWISS FÉNELON:

DR. GODET AND THE EMPEROR FREDERICK.¹

THE biography of Dr. Godet, the illustrious theologian of Neuchâtel, has a special interest for readers of the *EXPOSITOR*, in which so many of his most important articles appeared. The work has been carried out with filial devotion, exquisite tact and unfailing literary skill by his accomplished son, M. Philippe Godet. This is in the strictest sense a personal narrative, based on private correspondence and journals. The author modestly declines any attempt to estimate his father's position as scholar and divine. It is the man and the Christian who stands before us in life-like portraiture. The charm of his outward presence, which we realise from a series of remarkably fine illustrations, corresponded to the beauty of his mind and character.

Although by his writings Dr. Frédéric Godet influenced thousands of British readers, he visited our island only once in his long life of eighty-eight years. The occasion was the meeting of the first general Presbyterian Council at Edinburgh in 1877. In Scotland he felt himself "at home," and in London he joined with pleasure in Free Church worship. He confessed, however, that his visit was partly spoiled by his imperfect knowledge of our spoken language, and that in the meetings of the Council he suffered "the torment of Tantalus." On this brief holiday he laid the foundation of many friendships, and at his home in

¹ *Frédéric Godet* (1812-1900) d'après sa correspondance et d'autres documents inédits, par Philippe Godet (Paris, Fischbacher; Neuchâtel, Attinger Frères), 1913.

Neuchâtel he received from time to time English and American visitors. He was a Protestant without bigotry. One of his best friends and warmest admirers in later years was the brilliant Abbé Le Camus, afterwards Bishop of La Rochelle, who studied his expository writings and recommended them from the pulpit.

With Germany Dr. Godet had through life the closest associations. His mother, by the influence of her relatives of the Vautravers family, was appointed governess to the three-year old son of Prince William of Prussia, Frédéric Godet, who was at the time a student of theology in Berlin, was presented to the Princess Augusta and four years later was called to succeed his mother in the care of the child who was afterwards the Emperor Frederick. A considerable part of this large volume is occupied with letters that passed between the Prince and Dr. Godet. These contain hitherto unpublished material of unique interest. We propose in this article to tell the story of the long and happy relationship between the Swiss Fénelon and his royal pupil.

THE SUMMONS TO BERLIN.

In June, 1838, M. Godet, then aged twenty-six, was invited by Prince William of Prussia (afterwards the Emperor William I.), to accept the tutorship. When the message arrived, the young theologian wrote in his Journal : " What new prospects such a call opens before me ! How it puts me outside all my plans, all my tastes even, and all my wishes ! To give up preaching, to give up that sweet life of the manse, of the family, of close friendships, which I think of as my greatest happiness ! . . . And then mamma is coming home ! At her age, to leave her for ten, twelve years ! And why ? To live in a continual dependence— to make awkward blunders ;—with my character, which

is so ill-adapted to win the affection of children! . . . Then the constant struggle between my religious principles and my position! The deficiency of my knowledge in so many respects! What a list of reasons for refusing—if one can refuse!—But, on the other hand, if it is God who calls me, tastes, inclinations, friends, relatives, comforts, independence—ought they not all to be sacrificed? . . . My heart is like a stormy, restless sea; a thousand little feelings blow over it and disturb the calm in which alone it can reflect with purity the light divine. . . . How can I place myself before God in that silence of soul which will enable me to hear His answer? ” He recalled, as a possible indication of the will of Providence, the fact that he had that spring received Fénelon’s writings as a present, and added, “ Oh, if my soul could bear some resemblance, however distant, to that of Fénelon! If I might have something of that serenity, that affability, that charity, that gentleness combined with strength, that humility never separated from dignity! I do not speak of talents, intellect or grace. How can I think of them? Lord, pardon! Lord, forgive and bless me once more! Lord, enlighten, direct! Have pity on Thy poor child—so blind and full of pride.”

A week later his letter of acceptance had gone to Berlin, and he thanked God for help in composing it. In the calm summer evenings at Châtillon, amid the hay-fields and the flowers, he prepared himself for his responsible task by reading the Letters of Fénelon.

The following characteristic passage may be quoted from the letter on which he had spent so much thought and care: “. . . I shall not forget, and never shall be able to forget, that a prince, like every other human being, has for the future a soul to be saved and for the present a happiness to seek and find which those earthly blessings

so abundantly granted him by Providence are insufficient to secure. I shall therefore encourage the prince, your son, to regard all that outward splendour in the midst of which he is called to live, as an obligation, a duty, rather than as the source of his real pleasures. I shall try to show him that the spring of true joy rises, not beneath or beside him, but far above, by the throne of that Saviour God, who, although invisible, is everywhere, even in the midst of the world, inexpressibly near to our hearts. And in this way I think I shall have given him the knowledge of a blessing more real than all those with which his birth has surrounded him, and a sure haven against the storms which may perhaps disturb his earthly life."

THE PRINCE'S CHILDHOOD.

The Swiss tutor arrived at Babelsberg in September, 1838, when his royal pupil was seven years old. Frederick William had as his comrade Rudolf of Zastrow and both were confided entirely to M. Godet's charge.

"My bed," he wrote, "was placed between those of the children; the prince slept on my right, Rudolf on my left, and when I lay down to rest a few hours after them, I could touch their heads in blessing."

The prince was a merry, affectionate, rather mischievous boy, with a sense of humour. On the occasion of some court festivity, when he saw his tutor for the first time wearing his pulpit gown and bands, he remarked, "M. Godet, dare one laugh when dressed like that?"

Corporal punishment was forbidden, but once M. Godet found it necessary to break through this rule, as the Prince obstinately refused to go to his drill-master for a lesson. When the chastisement was over, the child threw himself into his friend's arms, saying, "You were right to whip me; I deserved it."

From the first, he regarded the son of his dearly-loved governess as a friend rather than a schoolmaster. M. Godet's charming manners pleased the relations of his pupil. A week after his arrival at Babelsberg, we find him writing to friends :—

“ I am gradually feeling my way in this new world. I think the little one is fond of me ; I am studying his character. A few days ago I had to spend the evening with the Prince and Princess Royal and other great personages, and I know they were not altogether dissatisfied with me. May I never forget the words of St. Paul : ‘ If I desired to please men,¹ I should not be the servant of Christ.’ I feel that I need the trust of these persons if I am to carry out my vocation successfully ; but how easy it is to seek to purchase that trust at a price which nothing could justify me in paying ! There lies the danger.”

Prince William recognised the lovable qualities of the scholar whom he had called to so anxious a position. At their first meeting M. Godet remarked that he felt the disadvantage of having neglected other departments of knowledge in order to specialise in theology. The Prince interrupted him with the remark, “ But is not that the most important branch of all ? ” After chatting pleasantly for a few minutes, he said, as he left the room, “ This is a first meeting which we shall both remember.” He valued especially the religious instruction which his son received. M. Godet knew how to make the Bible a living Book to children. After Easter, 1839, he wrote to Emile Perret : “ I am telling the two boys the story of the Old Testament. . . . We have got to Jacob. . . . That's the true food for children, I am more than ever sure of it. At Easter we read the story of the Passion. I could often see that the

¹ The French translation of Galatians i. 10 is “ Si je voulais plaire aux hommes.”

hearts of these two children were deeply stirred. The little prince's eyes were sometimes full of tears. . . . As a rule, everything that is beautiful—combining that word with all that is holy and true, finds a ready response in his heart. He is captivated by it and carried away. Thus, after we have read some Psalm in which there is a burst of feeling, and those brilliant sparkles of the life in God which flash from the heart of David, the little one cries out, ‘Oh, what a lovely Psalm! I must copy out that verse.’”

At the age of eight the Prince, who was kept in bed on account of a slight illness, asked for an exercise book and said, “May I write a Psalm like David?” “Certainly,” replied M. Godet. A little later, happening to open the note-book he found the following lines written by the child :

“*Psalm of Prince Frederick, June 2, 1839.*”

“Praise the Lord, for it is He that hath made us. He is the King of kings. Who can find a more glorious palace than His? Sing psalms unto the Lord. God is the Lord, the Eternal one. We are His children. He is the shepherd and we are His flock. Sing to His Name.”

A year later M. Godet wrote, “After a short address I gave them on the words ‘Watch and pray, lest’ . . . , the Prince said in a tone of earnest feeling which I shall never forget, ‘There is no man who can say such beautiful words as Jesus.’”

In 1843 Frédéric Godet became engaged to Caroline Vautravers, whose mother had been governess to the children of Prince Charles of Prussia. He left Berlin in the autumn of the following year, leaving to his successor, Curtius, the further care of the Prince's education. As a mark of gratitude, Prince William gave him a pension, and the title of royal chaplain at Neuchâtel. With the Princess (afterwards the Empress) Augusta, M. Godet

corresponded after his return to Switzerland, and he received many letters from his former pupil which are published for the first time in this volume.

LETTERS OF STUDENT DAYS.

At the age of seventeen Frederick William sent to his friend a letter covering fifteen pages, and along with it a "confession of faith." Dr. Godet kept these two documents among his most cherished private papers, and his biographer quotes only this one passage from the letter :

"You and your excellent mother," wrote the Prince, "cared for me in my early childhood, and my youth : to each of you I shall owe a debt of gratitude during all my life. I have never understood as clearly as I do now what I owe to you both . . . You developed within me the love and trust for the God who desires only our good. I thus possess for all my life a support which will never fail me. I think so often of you both, and should dearly love to see you again ! . . . Accept once more my sincerest thanks for all your kindness and all your excellent lessons, which I hope you will always continue to give me as my kind and faithful friend. May God reward you and bless you, along with all your family.

"Your ever faithful and grateful friend,

"FREDERICK WILLIAM."

When Godet's daughter was born in 1849 the Prince, at his own request, became her godfather.

From Bonn he wrote soon after attaining his majority : "There are so many moments when I long to have an intimate talk with you and to open my heart freely, for you are one of those who know me best. You understand me better than a thousand others ; you have seen me grow under your eyes and develop into a being who is attached to you as to very few besides."

From Dr. Godet's reply the following passage may be cited: ". . . You don't neglect private prayer, I trust, my dear Prince. For my own part I feel every day how the most intricate affairs are easily ordered, how irritable feelings grow calm, how difficulties are quickly smoothed away by the power of prayer. Can you believe that I talk with God even about a change of servant and similar matters, and that I find in my daily experience that He does not disdain to guide with His mighty divine hand these little things of ordinary life? The truth is, there are no little things. The smallest thing may have incalculable results. May not the choice of a servant influence the whole life of a family, and the life of a family react on the fate of a whole country? On the smallest hair of the head of the humblest beggar may hang the weight which will decide the fate of a country and therefore of the world. That is why the very hairs of our heads, those hairs which *we* do not number, are numbered, as Jesus says, by our heavenly Father. Sweet assurance! Let us see that we take it to ourselves and make joyful use of it by speaking to God about *everything* that pre-occupies and disturbs us. Nothing that fills our hearts is too small for Him. If the king said to you, 'At any hour, you may come to me without knocking; day and night my room is open to you, and all my power is at your service for everything that concerns you'—what a privilege! Is not an equal, nay, an even greater privilege contained in that magnificent permission; '*Pray without ceasing.*'"

In the autumn of 1850 the Prince, in passing through Switzerland, had a meeting at Zurich with M. Godet, his wife and his mother. After the interview the Neuchâtel pastor wrote to Bonnet: "I cannot tell you what a joy it was to me. To see him once more, and to see him *like that*, so well inclined, so modest, so straightforward and frank,

so much riper, so truly religious ; it was more than I could ever have dared to hope. He showed to my mother, who also went to Zurich, to my wife, who accompanied her, and to myself, a friendship, a confidence, a tenderness which were greater than I could tell you in words. There is already a true heart-relationship between him and his God—a relationship in which many things, which he learned from the mouth of man, had been taught him by God Himself.”

After his escape in a railway accident near Bielefeld in 1851, the Prince wrote to his friend : “ I regard that event as a sign that my life will be often threatened with dangers, but that the divine Hand will defend me from them.”

In the same year, Frederick William and his parents visited England for the great Exhibition. “ During May,” he wrote to M. Godet, “ I enjoyed a most delightful visit to the Queen of England and her charming family. My parents, my sister and I were received with open arms, and we felt as much at our ease as if we had always lived there. The immense Exhibition was majestic and imposing. What a fine country, and what interesting studies may be made in it ! ”

BETROTHAL TO PRINCESS VICTORIA.

In May, 1856, came the letter announcing the Prince's engagement to Queen Victoria's eldest daughter.

“ It does me good,” he wrote, “ to talk to you about my happiness, for I know with what feelings you will receive these lines—you, who were the guide of my childhood and youth. You know what full and perfect confidence I have in you, and my only wish is that my promised bride may soon make your acquaintance, so that she may understand, by judging you for herself, why it is that I love you so dearly.

“ If you only knew what a calm has entered my soul since I have known that I possess a heart upon earth who is willing, for love of me, to forsake her family and her native land to follow me and share the burden that Providence has laid upon me! I know now what it means to be happy, and the ardent love we feel in our hearts for a being on whom we would gladly pour forth all our own most precious possessions. If I have ever had cause to praise God for His goodness and His grace towards me, this time more than ever His hand has guided me towards happiness and the fulfilment of my desires.”

The marriage of the Princess Victoria, like that of her royal mother, was very evidently a love-match. The Prince promised to send her portrait to M. Godet and closed his letter as follows: “ Farewell, my dear friend; take your part, as you have always done, in my joy and happiness, and be sure that my affection, my attachment and my trust in you will endure to my latest breath.”

The beautiful letter sent from Neuchâtel in reply should be read in the original. M. Godet accepted a pressing invitation to visit the young couple at Berlin a few weeks after their marriage. He found in their home “ the most trustful affection, a true fear of God, and a domestic happiness which is still unclouded.”

BIRTH OF A SON AND HEIR.

From Windsor, in November, 1859, the Prince wrote about the recent birth of his eldest son. “ My wife bids me send you her affectionate good wishes. We very often speak of you, and recall with pleasure your visit to Berlin soon after my marriage. Now you have a new acquaintance to make, whose existence must sometimes appear to you almost inconceivable. Can I be a father—I, whom you knew almost at the same age as my boy! . . . I assure

you that sometimes I cannot look at this dear child without the tears coming into my eyes. For on the one hand I do not know how to make myself worthy of such a happiness sent me by the God who had already given me all I could desire in my home, thanks to that companion who is all in all to me on earth. On the other hand I cannot forget the keen anxiety I felt at the time of his birth. . . . And afterwards, the delight in my heart, the joy of my family and of the whole country! . . . These impressions cannot fade from my heart and my imagination. Since this event happened I have made many new discoveries in my inner life."

When the Prince Consort died, his son-in-law wrote to Godet :—

"My home life brings me every day an increase of happiness, if that were possible. All the troubles and worries of the outside life of action are left on the threshold of the door that leads to my *home*. . . . The sorrow caused us by the loss of my dear father-in-law, my wife's closest and tenderest friend and my own second father, came like a thunder-clap to disturb our tranquil life. We have lost the one who seemed destined to guide us during many, many years. . . . It will be my task now—a task laid upon me by the confidential relationship into which I have entered with my mother-in-law—to help my wife and her mother in the education of my young brothers and sisters and to try to act as a support to that sorely tried Queen who has never until now known more than the pictured image of sorrow. My children are growing on and prospering, thank God, and they afford us a joy beyond what words can tell. You know from your own rich experience what happiness rises in a father's heart as he sees these tiny creatures developing, especially at the age of my children, when every day brings a new discovery. The King and

Queen are as well as their high position allows. The fate and the life of those whom God has placed on thrones are never enviable, and no turning aside is possible, especially in our days, from the thorny path on which crowned sovereigns must walk."

MEETINGS WITH DR. GODET.

In 1862 the Prince again arranged to meet M. Godet as he passed with his wife through Switzerland in the holiday season. "He has become very much a man," wrote the pastor to Arnold Guyot. "The Princess likes serious, solid reading, and I am going to send her your *Earth and Man*, giving away my own copy, as I want to be useful to this charming pair."

Every reference in Dr. Godet's letters testifies to the true happiness of the Crown Prince's home life, and the perfect trust between husband and wife. As years passed on, the Prince wrote with the same entire satisfaction of household joys shared with his English consort and their children. The Royal pair met Dr. Godet from time to time in Switzerland. He was their guest at La Farraz in 1864, when the Princess was nursing her youngest son Sigismund. The party stayed rather late one afternoon in the woods, and the young mother exclaimed as she hurried towards the house, "Oh, won't nurse scold me!"

In 1867 M. Godet told the Prince that he was resigning his pastorate for a professor's chair in the University of Neuchâtel. In taking up a position which enabled him to carry on his literary work without interruption, he quoted the words, "*Deus nobis hæc otia fecit*," with the emphasis on the first word—surely an ideal motto for a professor of theology!

From a letter of M. Godet to the Prince, dated January 12, 1868, we take the lines:—

“ It is sometimes difficult even for an honest heart to understand clearly what is the Lord’s will. We need for that purpose a total absence of passion, and a deep inner calm. God does not cry aloud ; He speaks to us in our ear. If there is noise in the heart, His voice is drowned.”

We are reminded of Calvin’s words in his letter to Coligny, when the gallant soldier was a prisoner at Ghent : “ Comme s’il vouloit parler à vous privément en l’oreille.”¹

THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR.

In November, 1870, the Prince wrote to Dr. Godet from the German Headquarters at Versailles : “ What shall I say to you of this war ? I bow before the God who has hitherto guided and protected us, and who will watch over the welfare of our Germany which is at last re-united (as far as the peoples are concerned)—our country which has sacrificed so many noble patriots in these bloody battles. May He give us the peace for which all the world is longing. . . . I can assure you I have a genuine horror of war, and that I pray God with all my heart that this may be the last campaign in which I shall be compelled to join. Can we really be living in the nineteenth century, in which civilisation and morality have reached their summit ? What must heathen nations, whom we want to see partaking the blessings of our epoch, think of these two nations who are murdering each other, while they proclaim that their own cause alone deserves to be called holy and just ! We

¹ Calvin’s beautiful letter is quoted in full in Delaborde’s *Gaspard de Coligny*, vol. i. pp. 348, 349. The following words—written three centuries earlier, express the spirit of Dr. Godet’s oft-repeated counsels to his royal friend : “ Seulement je vous prieray de penser plus oultre, c’est que Dieu en vous envoyant ceste affliction, vous a voulu comme retirer à l’escart, pour estre mieulx escouté de luy. Car vous sçavez assez, monseigneur, combien il est difficile parmy les honneurs, richesses et forces du monde, de luy prester l’oreille pour ce qu’on est par trop distrait ça et là, et comme esvanouy, sinon qu’il use de tels moiens pour recueillir ceulx qui sont à soy.”

have good reason to bend our heads before the barbarians, who do neither more nor less than we do. But what is the alternative? If we are challenged, we are bound to defend ourselves till we can obtain guarantees for a lasting peace. My own personal ambition is to bring to our great German Fatherland the blessing of a stable and a fruitful peace. Never have I dreamed of creating for myself a name through streams of blood and heaps of corpses. Although the victories gained by my brave troops will have their glorious place in history, I shall never shake off the nightmare vision that I have had to sacrifice so many young lives."

The Emperor William I received Dr. Godet in Berlin at the close of the war, and after telling of his son's gallantry in the field, closed the interview with the remark, "You will meet Fritz to-morrow, and you will be pleased to see what you have done."

THE LAST YEARS.

The Crown Prince was only fifty-six when his life was threatened by the first symptoms of a malignant malady. Amidst the sorrows of his closing year (1887-88) he remained in constant touch with his friend. In 1885 he had written from Andermatt: "My eldest son [the present Emperor] the father of three fine boys, is leading a soldier's life at present. He loves that profession and is well fitted to adorn it. My other son, Henry, is devoted to the Navy, and is getting on capitally, so that I hope he will one day distinguish himself in that Service, which with us is only about twenty-five years old."

He added these striking words: "As life goes on, I feel myself growing older, and the conviction takes an ever firmer hold upon me that God's purposes are not ours and that our one duty is that of reverent submission to His holy will!"

For the writer of this letter less than three years remained. He had already accepted for himself those lines which Dr. Godet so frequently quoted in thinking of the past :

“Was ich gelebt, bedecke Du !
Was ich noch leb, regiere Du !”

In May, 1887, a month before Queen Victoria's first Jubilee, Dr. Godet wrote to a friend in Strasbourg, that a deep shadow had been hanging over the Prince's life, although the latest news was hopeful. “I lived as under a nightmare in thinking of that most fearful of all maladies with which the Prince seemed to be threatened.”

The last of the Prince's letters in this volume is dated from San Remo in November, 1887, and is full of solicitude for his beloved tutor, who had been obliged, at the age of seventy-five, to relinquish his professorship. As to his own condition the dying Prince wrote : “My state is certainly grave ; but as I feel no pain or weakness ; as I sleep well and have a very good appetite, while the prescribed remedies are evidently suiting me, we do not lose courage. I put myself wholly in the hands of God, who in His mercy will order my lot as it pleases Him. I have so often been exposed to perils and dangers from which His grace has preserved me that I can trust myself to Him now as in the past, and say, ‘Thy will be done.’ . . . My wife is nursing me like a true sister of mercy, and with wonderful calm and skill.”

In February, 1888, the Prince underwent the operation of tracheotomy ; in March he returned to Berlin to reign—and to die. The Empress kept Dr. Godet informed as to his state, and wrote to him in later years in language of the tenderest affection. In 1891 she received the aged theologian at Homburg and thanked him for his visit and for the “precious letters” he had brought. Her solicitude during his last illness is gratefully recalled by the biographer.

If any further proof were needed of the holy influence which this modern Fénelon exercised on the life of his royal pupil, we should find it in the closing words of the Crown Prince's last letter from San Remo :—

“ And now, my dear friend, farewell. Let me assure you, once again, that I bend as meekly before the Eternal One and resign myself as completely to His will as in the days when I was still a little child entrusted to your care.”

The last words of Dr. Godet to the sufferer were dated May 4, 1888, five weeks before the end :—

“ I have been reading over again in these days the story of your visit to the Mount of Olives. It was from that spot that He ascended. Unite yourself with Him that so you may rise together.”

JANE T. STODDART.

THE DIVINE NAMES IN GENESIS.

II. THE PERICOPE-HYPOTHESIS.

THE main thesis of Dahse's treatise cannot be more succinctly stated than in his own words (p. 99) : “ The divine names have nothing to do with this or that document, but are *variable elements of the text*.” His most original contribution to the investigation of the subject is an attempt to trace this variation through successive redactions of the text based upon the divisions of the Law in the lectionary of the Synagogue. The general idea that the distribution of the names for God is somehow influenced by the Synagogue reading is indeed not new ; but so far as I am aware Dahse is the first who has worked it out in elaborate detail, and constructed a theory by which the perplexing phenomena of the present text may be explained. It is this theory which I now proceed to expound and to criticise.