CHAPTER 7

An Intellectual in a Time of Revolution (1616–18)

Political and Scholarly Activities

Wherever the Contra-Remonstrants were numerous and the authorities favoured the Remonstrants, problems arose. Separatist movements soon multiplied in spite of the explicit prohibition of the States of Holland. Contra-Remonstrant preachers held their own communion services, supervised by separate church councils in buildings provisionally fitted out for worship. There were examples in Alkmaar and Hoorn, but smaller places such as Oudewater, Schoonhoven and Heusden were also split by the troubles, and there was even tension in The Hague. Meanwhile, Grotius had his work cut out to curb religious strife in the city of Rotterdam. (see illustration 43).

In the summer of 1616 he had to draft two measures for the city magistrates against separatist Calvinists in the village of Zevenhuizen, in the dijkgraafschap or seignory ('ambacht') of Schieland, which had been acquired by the city in 1576. The bailiff’s office was attached to that of dijkgraaf ('dyke-count'), and this allowed the magistrates to instruct their Pensionary to put a stop to illegal gatherings of worshippers in barns in the countryside. The Calvinists had separated from the Reformed Church because they disapproved of the Remonstrant preacher. The by-laws of 21 June and 26 July 1616 imposed heavy fines on separatists and above all on the owners of the barns where they worshipped. These were harsh measures, and certainly confirmed Grotius’ reputation as a party man. Later he would claim to have drafted them against his will, even though he knew very well that they were within the law.¹

It was a difficult time for the Pensionary, torn between hope and fear. On 26 June 1616 he still felt that peace was slowly returning to the Church. A few fanatical trouble-makers among the preachers had been punished. The great majority believed that the quarrel over predestination was not worth a schism.² Barely three weeks later Grotius wrote from Rotterdam to Benjamin Aubéry du Maurier that the conflicts were increasing rapidly. The wife of Jacques-Auguste de Thou had died, but he did not feel himself in a position to offer the

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² BW I, no. 460, to J. Overall, 26 June 1616: ‘… certe non esse ob tales controversias scindendum ecclesiam ferme inter omnes convenit’.
widower any real consolation, for in his depression he needed it himself. He wrote a brief mourning poem, but regarded it as little more than an unsatisfactory practice exercise to keep his hand in, which would certainly be surpassed by Heinsius. As usual in his letters to foreign dignitaries, Grotius wrote to Du Maurier in a rather rhetorical tone, but everything suggests that his pessimism was no mere pose. On 19 August 1616 he reported to Vossius that the coming assembly of the States of Holland would make it clear if there was still a chance for peace in the Church, or—God forbid—there would be an open schism.

Political tension was now at its height.

In his letters Grotius constantly complained of his busy schedule; he gave his brother Willem advice on his legal studies, even though he really could not spare the time. Without a private secretary he could not manage, certainly once the States assembled. His duties overwhelmed him, and he felt uneasy about the violent passions stirred up by the political situation. But among all this public business he nevertheless found time to prepare an edition of his Latin poems. Fortunately brother Willem and Vossius took much of the editorial work off his hands. The history of the publication of this edition, the *Poemata collecta* of 1617, the first entry in Ter Meulen and Diermanse’s bibliography, is easy to reconstruct from the correspondence and has already been described in detail by an expert, so that it can be briefly treated here. (see Illustration 44). The close collaboration between Willem, Vossius and Grotius produced a neat but certainly not faultless little book of more than 550 closely printed pages of Latin verses, which was to go into four reprints. There is no evidence that Heinsius had any direct involvement in the edition; by now the Leiden professor was outside Grotius’ circle of friends. Their correspondence had ceased in late 1614, and since then they had had hardly any personal contact, or at least none that has left a trace in the sources. When Heinsius married Ermgard Rutgers, a sister of the humanist and diplomat Janus Rutgersius, on 6 May 1617, Grotius wrote a rather short and not very eloquent poem for the occasion. When selecting the poems to appear in the *Poemata*...