Chapter 10

Exile (1625–31)

The Change of Power in 1625

Reports that the health of the Stadholder Maurice was deteriorating reached Paris early in the year 1625. Grotius looked forward to the end of his exile, for France offered him too little certainty. His prestige at court rose slightly, now that Maurice was known to be dying, but not enough to bring him much benefit: he had still only received part of the pension granted in 1623. He believed that the dedication of De iure belli ac pacis to Louis XIII ought to be worth a reward, but experience of France's financial needs had taught him not to hope for too much: ‘we shall see’.1 Even before Maurice died on 23 April 1625, Grotius wrote to congratulate Frederick Henry on his promotion to commander in chief.2 Willem de Groot was told to have talks with Joris de Bie, to see if the letter could be handed over to the addressee in person.3 (see Illustration 71).

Grotius wanted to strike while the iron was hot, and so he sent his brother-in-law Reigersberch a ‘jargon’ or list of code names to use in his letters, to conceal the identity of persons who were regularly mentioned. One which appears very frequently is ‘Constans’ for Maria van Reigersberch. Grotius himself was ‘Constans’s husband’. But for special messages a numerical cipher was preferable. Reigersberch was to use the edition of Stobaeus, choose a letter and indicate it using the numbers of the page, line and letter in the line. The name Jan, for example, became 90, 3, 2/168, 2, 8/200, 1, 2.4

Grotius made it clear to Reigersberch that he had not taken on any obligations in France, for he wished to be of service to Frederick Henry and his country, wherever he might do so. He boasted that he was in an excellent position to ‘understand the intentions of all those with whom we have most dealings’. Since he meant the French government, it looks as if he hoped to be

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1 BW II, no. 959, to N. van Reigersberch, 28 March [1625].
2 BW II, no. 962, 4 April 1625.
3 BW II, no. 961, 4 April 1625.
4 BW II, no. 963, [4 April 1625], from a manuscript in Amsterdam, UB, coll. Remonstrantse Kerk, K 73 g. Grotius was counting from the third book, ‘to wit, where the Florilegium begins’. A check revealed that the code given by Grotius, 90, 3, 2 was incorrect; on the other hand 90, 1, 2 or 90, 14, 2 do give an I or J.
named States’ ambassador in Paris.\(^5\) Reigersberch too was optimistic. Earlier he had urged Grotius to take a post in France and become a French citizen; he must let his personal interest outweigh the Remonstrant cause.\(^6\) At that time Reigersberch had painted a gloomy picture of the situation in Holland and Zeeland: ‘People here look at each other sadly and we consider that it is not we, but you, who are fortunate that you are there and have no part in the difficulties that threaten our country’.\(^7\) Later, on 14 April 1625, he said that he expected nothing but good from ‘Prince Henry’, although the Prince would have to work slowly and cautiously.\(^8\) Two days before the death of Maurice he wrote: ‘… humours are so softened that people speak almost with amazement of what has passed. Everything is very quiet throughout the whole of Holland, and everyone is patiently waiting for what God will dispose’.\(^9\)

Grotius was not so patient and had no time for such a cautious approach. Immediately after Maurice’s death he was eager to travel to Holland on a passport applied for by his friends, on the pretext of the great age of his mother Aeltje. Perhaps he might live privately in Amsterdam. The city’s Pensionary Adriaen Pauw would certainly oppose this, but luckily François van Aerssen was away in England on a diplomatic mission.\(^10\) It is incredible, but Grotius was speculating about his personal rehabilitation and the revision of the Dordrecht settlement as if this was realistic politics. He was blind to the power of the ruling caste, who would certainly vigorously oppose any reversal in policy after Maurice left the scene. On 1 May the news of Maurice’s death had reached Paris. Grotius seemed even more optimistic, because Richelieu himself had promised, in a private conversation, to intercede with Frederick Henry on his behalf.\(^11\) Indeed everything hinged on the Prince, but Reigersberch advised against putting too much pressure on him. He even doubted if it was yet the time to press for the release of Rombout Hogerbeets.\(^12\)

On 18 August 1625 Reigersberch and his brother Johan, the Treasurer of Zeeland, had a talk with Frederick Henry. Nicolaes acted on the instructions he had received in several letters from Paris. He told Frederick Henry that his brother-in-law had turned down advantageous offers, because he was counting

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5. BW II, no. 963 (p. 441 above).
6. BW II and XVII, no. 947, from N. van Reigersberch, 18 February 1625.
7. BW II and XVII, no. 954, 18 March 1625.
8. BW II and XVII, no. 966.
9. BW II and XVII, no. 969, 21 April 1625.
10. BW II, no. 971, to N. van Reigersberch, 25 April 1625.
11. BW II, no. 974, to N. van Reigersberch, 1 May 1625.
12. BW II and XVII, no. 978, 12 May 1625.