*Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft*¹

PIETER CORNELISZOOM HOOFT, the greatest man of letters that Holland has ever produced, the central figure of that brilliant period of intellectual activity which bears the name of the Golden Age of Dutch literature, was born at Amsterdam on 16 March 1581. The family from which he sprang was one of the most honourable and influential in that great commercial city. His father, Cornelis Pieterzoon Hooft, who had grown up to manhood during the stormy years of the rising against Spain, amidst the clash of arms and the discords of contending factions, was a man of singular discretion and moderation, respected and trusted for the wisdom, justice, and firmness displayed by him in the course of a long life passed in positions of dignity and responsibility. In the fateful and gloomy year when William of Orange fell by the hand of the assassin, as town councillor of Amsterdam, he made a vigorous stand in defence of the rights and privileges of the city, and won thereby so high a place in the affections and confidence of his fellow citizens, that he was afterwards appointed to fill the important office of burgomaster no less than thirteen times. The future poet and historian was the eldest of his three sons. From his childhood Pieter showed signs of being endowed with an unusually quick and vigorous understanding, and his father wisely resolved, by giving him an excellent education, to improve to the utmost his natural aptitudes and inclinations. His bent for literature early asserted itself. His first poems were written whilst he was still a boy, and were followed by a tragedy² which, though in itself of little merit, at once attracted attention, and secured the admission of the precocious dramatist, only as yet in his sixteenth year, to the most famous of the Chambers of Rhetoric, known by its motto '*in liefde bloeyende*' (blossoming in love), which for more than two generations had numbered among its members all the first literary men of Holland.

But the sagacious burgomaster did not long allow his promising son to remain in Amsterdam, to be spoilt by the premature

¹ This paper was read before the Royal Historical Society, 19 March 1891.

² *Achilles and Polyxena*.

flattery of narrow local coteries. On 11 June 1598 the youthful Hooft set out upon a prolonged tour. After passing some months at La Rochelle, and then visiting several of the principal towns of France, he sailed from Marseilles, and set foot on Italian soil at Genoa on 10 July 1599. In Italy he spent the greater part of two years,³ principally at Florence and Venice, and then in the spring of 1601 he crossed the Brenner, and journeying in leisurely fashion right across Germany, reached once more his native city on 14 May, having been absent from home about three years. The effect of such a journey upon the susceptible mind and many-sided genius of the young traveller was twofold. The music of the Italian speech and the cadence of the Italian verse possessed themselves of his soul, and stirred him to emulate their beauties in his mother-tongue, while on the other hand he felt an irresistible fascination to make himself familiar with the annals of that past whose memorials he had seen strewn so thickly around him. On his return to Holland he at once betook himself to the serious study of the classical writers, and more especially of the historians. These self-imposed tasks did not, however, absorb all his attention. His pen meanwhile was not idle. A number of love-songs and another tragedy⁴ bore evidence to the effect of his study of Italian models. Still full of faults, both of language and of style, and betraying constantly the evil influence of Marini and his school, in the frequent playing upon words and unnatural *con-cetti*, these first-fruits of his journey are still remarkable. For purity of diction and for softness and variety of rhythm they surpass all previous Dutch poetry, and give promise of the greater excellence which was to come.

About this period Hooft went to Leyden to attend lectures at the university, and especially to study jurisprudence. He appears to have thus spent two years (1606–1607).⁵ Of the details of his life at this time, and up to the year 1609, we have little or no information. In this year, however, occurred an event which was to mould the whole of his future career. Soon after the conclusion of the twelve years' truce with Spain he was appointed by the Stadtholder Maurice, in recognition of his father's distinguished services and his own well-known devotion to the House of Orange, to the important post of drost, or governor, of Muiden and bailiff of Gooiland. This office, which was eagerly sought after by great nobles, and which had been in earlier times frequently filled by younger sons of the counts of Holland, entailed upon its holder various judicial and executive, though by no means onerous, duties. It was an ideal

³ The dates and details of this tour are to be found in Hooft's own memoranda.

⁴ *Thesius and Ariadne*.

⁵ His biographer Brandt and other earlier writers upon Hooft place this residence before his Italian journey. Recent researches have shown that this was not the case.

position for the youthful poet.⁶ The 'High House of Muiden,' a stately and embattled feudal castle, with pleasant gardens and orchards, lying at the point where at no great distance from Amsterdam the river Vecht sleepily empties itself into the Zuyder Zee, became henceforth not merely his official residence, but the home of letters.

Hooft, as appears abundantly from his published correspondence, did not in any way neglect his duties as a magistrate. On the contrary he discharged them with sedulous zeal, care, and impartiality. But he withdrew himself from the turmoil of strife and discord, of religious hatreds and political ambitions which surged around him, and devoting his leisure to study and writing, free from all those cares and struggles which have embittered the lives of so many young authors, he for forty years made the castle of Muiden the chosen rendezvous of the literary celebrities of the day. He became the Maecenas of the Golden Age of Dutch literature, without ceasing to be its Virgil; a veritable *grand seigneur* of the world of letters, without in any way assuming to himself the airs of patronising superiority. Open-hearted, witty, and social, he loved to gather round him all who were distinguished for their talents, accomplishments, or learning, and such were the attractions that Muiden offered to its guests, that rarely were its hospitable chambers empty, and among these attractions in that period of Hooft's life which we are now considering, perhaps not the least was the charm of the young hostess. A year after his appointment as drost of Muiden, the poet had married Christina van Erp, still a girl in her nineteenth year, whose

Laughing eyes with merry flashes,
Azure-bright beneath the lashes,⁷

had won his heart, and who is described from personal knowledge by Brandt, the biographer, as being 'of surpassing capacity and intelligence, as beautiful, pleasing, affable, discreet, gentle, and gracious as such a man could desire to have.'⁸

With her by his side he passed for many years a life of unbroken serenity and happiness. The details, which may be gathered at first hand from Hooft's own letters,⁹ read like an idyll. At times they are alone, and the drost writes to his brother-in-law and most intimate and trusted friend, Joost Baek: 'Now we are living here, philosopher-like, as if the world were dead or at least were dying. The one day so much resembles another that our life is like a vessel without oars in a dead calm. Better, however, a calm than too strong breezes.' Such was not, however, the usual state

⁶ He was but 28 years of age.

⁷ Hooft's *Gedichten* (ed. Leendertz), i. 261.

⁸ Brandt's *Leven van Hooft*, p. 18.

⁹ Collected and published in 4 vols. by Van Vloten.

of things. Both Hooft and his wife loved society, and were alike gifted by nature with that most agreeable of all talents, the talent for entertaining. The number of guests was seldom large. 'As regards myself,' wrote Hooft in another letter to Baek, 'the greatest feasts do not produce the greatest pleasure. Vossius, Raëel, with yourself, are to me all the world. Under the number of the Graces, or above that of the Muses should no company consist.'¹⁰ Except, indeed, on such special occasions as official receptions or princely visits, the company at the drost's table never exceeded 'the five or six couple of friends,' whom he invited either for their musical gifts, their learning, or their conversational powers. Hooft was 'a passionate lover of music, though no performer,' and not a little of the charm of the fair Christina in his eyes lay in her excellent playing and singing. 'Conversation' he held 'to be the soul of visits, as it is the joy of feasts.' Among the guests none were more welcome than the beautiful Tesselschade Visscher, beneath the spell of whose singular fascination and accomplishments all her contemporaries seem to have bowed, and her rival as a songstress, Francisca Duarte; with these, to mention only the more distinguished, Constantine Huyghens, the private secretary of three princes of Orange, poet, linguist, and man of letters, as skilled in the execution as he was in the theory of music; Caspar Barlaeus, the well-known Latin scholar; the learned Vossius; Laurens Raëel, the Dutch Raleigh, soldier, sailor, and poet, and sometime governor of the Dutch East Indies; Sweelinck, the best organist of his day; Vos the tragedian; Dr. Coster, the founder of the Netherland Academy; and at times, though not on the same terms of close intimacy as many of the others, the great Vondel, as proud in his poverty as he was fearless in the expression of his opinions. Pressing were the invitations that were sent; genial the reception; overflowing the hospitality. Delicious fruit, choice wines, lovely music, witty converse were the fare that was freely proffered. The sense of obligation lay upon the host and not the guests. 'We hope,' he wrote on one occasion to Tesselschade, 'on Wednesday next to keep the anniversary of our wedding-day. What feast would be complete at which you were not present? Favour us then with your company if it be possible;' and again, 'that you will come is my most earnest desire. If you will but be our guest, then, I hope, you will cure all our ills.' At another time in a letter to Barlaeus, 'He who has no debt upon his conscience must hold himself ready for fresh obligations. Formerly I had only a passing promise, but now it is down in black and white, for your letter admits that you had promised to have a morning amongst our plums, and it behoves an honourable man to keep his

¹⁰ It is not necessary to give the references to the many quotations from Hooft's letters. They can all be found in Van Vloten's edition.

engagements. I, at least, have no intention of releasing you, for I am exacting in such matters, and have asked guests to meet you. To-morrow, or the day after, the Juffrouw Tesselschade will be at Muiden, the most famous woman in the land!—think you this is a haven to sail by?’

Nor was such the tone only of his letters to his friends. He speaks of them in precisely the same spirit of unaffected, generous appreciation. It is not they, but he that is the debtor. ‘I have been,’ he says in one of his many delightful epistles, ‘for some days entertained by the instructive conversation of Vossius. His table-talk has been a sufficient feast to last many months,’ while after a visit of Barlaeus he writes to a mutual acquaintance, ‘He (Barlaeus) has been not so much my guest as I his, for he has fed me with witty food, which has made my heart right glad.’

Frequently, as has already been said, music was one of the chief allurements which Muiden offered to its visitors, and gaiety the prevailing tone of its society, but at times the purpose of the gatherings was purely literary. Tesselschade comes ‘to help to translate Marini,’ or Vondel ‘to read over the fifth book’ of his epic on Constantine. ‘This,’ writes Barlaeus to Huyghens of one such meeting, ‘will be a provincial and not a national synod; only sedate and learned people out of Holland are invited; two from the Hague; the priestess (Tesselschade) from Alkmaar, from Amsterdam Vossius and I. There will be no chattering allowed over the expulsion of our traders from Japan, or any suchlike matters, but only discourse on subjects of study.’

Hooft was an indefatigable worker. All the time that he could spare from his official duties and the claims of social intercourse were rigorously devoted to those literary pursuits which were the absorbing interest of his life. There was a small hexagonal tower in the orchard at Muiden with a pleasant outlook upon the sea. Here he kept all his books and papers, and here, undisturbed by the slightest noise or interruption, he could work away, standing at his desk, as was his custom, for hours together. In the first years after his appointment to the drostship and his marriage, as before, his principal attention was directed to the drama. In 1612 appeared ‘Geeraard van Velzen,’ a tragedy of the orthodox classical type then in vogue, the scene of which is laid at the castle of Muiden itself, and which portrays one of the best-known episodes in the earlier history of Holland, the murder of Count Floris the Fifth by a band of disaffected nobles. He next turned his energies to comedy, and in 1616 he wrote, for the benefit of an orphanage, in the incredibly short space of nine days, a clever adaptation of Plautus’s ‘Aulularia,’ to which he gave the name of ‘Warenar.’ The piece was represented at the then newly founded Netherland Academy, and was for many years very popular. It is

written in Amsterdam patois, and deals trenchantly with the fashions and foibles of the day with a right witty zest, which shows that among his many gifts the author likewise possessed a genuine vein of humour. Two years afterwards another drama, the most ambitious of his five-act tragedies, 'Baeto, or the Origin of the Hollanders,' saw the light. It, too, like its predecessors, fell in with the taste of the time and was received with much popular favour, as well as highly praised by Hugo Grotius and other critics whose opinion the writer valued.

But the time at length arrived when Hooft was to discover his true vocation and to launch out in a wholly new path of literary effort. He had for some time cherished the idea of enshrining in a history the great events of the War of Independence. But before venturing upon a work of such magnitude and importance, he determined to try his hand on a smaller subject with the aim of testing his power and capacity of method and style.¹¹ Henry IV of France had been the favourite hero of his youth, and, for a specimen of his art as an historical writer in Dutch prose, about six years after the death of the great king, he set himself the task of recounting the events and achievements of his life. What infinite pains he took in giving finish and perfection to this little work may be gathered from the fact that although commenced in 1616 the life of Henry was not given to the world till eight years later. Other causes, no doubt, contributed to this delay. During this period the literary work of Hooft had suffered many interruptions. The even tenor of his tranquil life at Muiden had been saddened by many bereavements. In 1618 he lost his only daughter Gertrude, and two years later his second son Arnold; and then, in 1623 and 1624, in the short space of seventeen months the remorseless hand of death robbed him first of his eldest son Cornelis, a twelve-year-old boy of much promise, on whose training the poet had himself bestowed great pains; soon after of his last and youngest child, a second Arnold; and finally, at the early age of thirty-three, of his wife, the loving and dearly loved Christina.¹² To crown this terrible series of misfortunes, at this very same time a considerable sum of money, which he had invested in London, was engulfed in a bankruptcy.

Hooft for a time felt crushed by the overwhelming severity of the repeated blows which fell so rapidly upon him. His heart was filled with poignant sorrow. Above all he mourned the sweet young wife, whose lightsome presence had for fourteen, too short, years been the joy of his life, and had made his home radiant with happiness. Her untimely death put an end for a season to those

¹¹ *Vide* a letter to Grotius, Van Vloten's edition, i. 142.

¹² His father, to whom he was deeply attached, also died at this time.

bright social *réunions* wherein, to use the words of one¹³ who had himself experienced their charm,

She won the hearts of all,
To each one's needs it was her aim
To be the minister ; and no proud dame¹⁴
Of Muiden's lofty hall.

In a characteristic letter written, probably in answer to her condolences, to his friend Tesselschade Visscher, Hooft gives expression to his own feelings at this sad time: 'Philosophers bid us not to set our hearts on any perishable possession, but to bear up against losses without repining. To the keeping of the first of these injunctions I have ever had so little inclination, that it is but natural I should lack the power of following the second. How can he, who has always been searching for yet fresh clamps and rivets, wherewith to clinch the object of his love the more firmly to his heart, have it torn away without leaving an incurable rent? How can he, whose delight it was to depict in air-drawn fancy even the slightest of those graces and talents which he held so dear, and to immure the image in the very innermost sanctuary of his being, see himself without affliction deprived of that which, next to God, was his supreme solace? Although I do not believe that there is any virtue in sorrow, yet again and again have I obstinately refused every consolation. Too deeply ought I to reproach myself with my obduracy against the entreaties of those who, to the uttermost of their power, have so earnestly pressed upon me the duty of bracing up my spirits. But it is not I that seek sorrow, but sorrow that knows where to find me. Thousands and thousands of things bring my loss daily before me, and magnify it to the uttermost. . . . How would I honour the ingenious masters of the art of memory could they but teach us forgetfulness! Yet no. So precious to me is the consecration of the memory of her I have lost, that rather would I have wished to suffer more than with greater insensibility to be oblivious. How often through the death of fondly loved children I have been overwhelmed with grief, is well known to you, while the loss of property, though passing measure, did not, as you can testify, make my cheerfulness to quit the even tenor of its way. Forgive then the despondency of my mind, which is far from being provided, as heroes should, with strength of reason and the weapons of learning, and supplicate the merciful God to send me comfort.'¹⁵

But despite the depth of woe into which the death of his wife

¹³ Vondel's *Dichtwerken*, ed. Van Vloten, i. 169.

¹⁴ Hooft's *Brieven*, i. 244. Dated 6 July, 1624.

¹⁵ Drostin.

had plunged him, the drost was not the man to remain long a widower. His affections were centred in his home, and the charm of that home had been for him embodied in the winsome personality of her who by her feminine tact and grace and housewifely accomplishments had helped to invest the gatherings of Muiden with that nameless *entrainement* which all the intellectual gifts of the master of the house could not alone have supplied. Without his wife at his side he felt isolated and alone. He missed her so much that he felt he must perforce fill her place. He passed through, to use his own words, 'a dismal night of three miserable years,' and then light at length dawned upon him, in the summer of 1627, from the bright eyes of a clever and vivacious young widow. Heleonore Bartelotti (*née* Hellemans) was at this time about thirty years of age, and since her husband's death had resided with her two daughters at Zevenbergen. Hooft made her acquaintance when she was on a visit to some relations at Amsterdam, and at once fell deeply in love with her. He overwhelmed her with a perfect flood of poems and sonnets in her praise, and exerted all his powers of pleasing to win her hand. But his efforts for some time were in vain. The captivating widow did not reject his suit, but owing, it is said, chiefly to reports which had been made to her as to Hooft being a freethinker in matters of religion, she would not accept him for a husband, and finally, with a suddenness that savoured of flight, returned to her home without giving him an affirmative answer.

How earnestly Hooft pleaded his cause, and into what low spirits, for a time, his want of success threw him, can best be gathered from his correspondence during this period of suspense. In a letter written to Heleonore soon after her hasty departure from Amsterdam, he gives a most doleful account of the state of his health, which, according to his own report, was so bad that his life was endangered, and this despite of all his efforts to seek diversion and society; 'but,' he continues, 'all is in vain, and finding myself with death upon my lips, far from the ears which when near gave so little heed to their utterances, I have resolved, since I am no longer able without risk of my life to come to the place where you live, to pour out before you on paper my last entreaties.' He then reminds her of the parting days of their intercourse, and how after confessing her inclination towards him, and begging for twenty-four hours in which to make up her mind, she had when the twenty-four hours were over again deferred her decision, and this (to quote the writer's own words once more) 'not from lack of affection towards me, but from some other and entirely different cause. To prove that this is so, I am compelled to remind you, and beg you to pardon me for doing so, that you on Monday, 9th August last, were pleased to favour me with the name

of "sweetheart,"¹⁶ and this not on the impulse of the moment, as you thought it well to explain to me, but with mature deliberation. Because when I many times asked if I were indeed your "sweetheart," you rejoiced my heart by saying, "Indeed you are." Nay, you were pleased in a sudden outburst of affection to let your lovely eyes beam upon me with a kindlier light than ever before, yes, and to yield me your sweet lips and to press your soft cheek against mine with the words, "Ah, Mijnheer Hooft, I do love you so much!" And what is more, you went so far as to permit me to take the word "sweetheart," which you had uttered, as being the first letter of the little word *yes*, and represented to me, as the reason for not giving then and there your complete consent, that your mother had always held Monday for an unlucky day. And then you said with the most charming archness, "To-morrow will I accept or refuse." With a heart thus inflamed with love and filled full with hope I return the next day to find your mind more obdurate, your expression more estranged than ever in my life; and I must receive as the only reason for your rejection of my suit, not the dissimilarity of your own and my opinions in religion and politics, on which points you had long ago fished out my very innermost thoughts, but that my friends differed from you in their views; of which fact for a year and a day you had been perfectly well aware, and had never thought of insisting on so pitiful a reason as a bar to a happy marriage. Of want of inclination not a word. On Monday you cannot bring yourself to say *yes*, because of the unluckiness of the day, and on Tuesday you say *no* because my friends forsooth are not saints! I leave it to the judgment of all such impartial persons as you yourself may choose, whether, putting such reasons for my rejection side by side with the tenderness displayed by you on the ninth, it does not clearly enough appear that there was not in your case any lack of the necessary affection. . . . Who then, miserable lady, has cast such a spell upon you, that you have no longer any regard for the words you yourself have uttered? Oh, bethink yourself and take to heart these pleadings of mine, which are watered with my tears and signed with my blood.¹⁷ If you have any feeling of love and tenderness, I beg and beseech you by all that you cherish and hold dear, suffer not the kiss which I received from you to be a Judas-kiss to betray me to my death . . . but send me by this messenger the word of healing, which can fill me with fresh life.'

Probably at this time, and while awaiting the reply of his recalcitrant mistress, the poet, to relieve the tension of his mind, penned the following airy and half-playful lines—

¹⁶ *Liefste*.

¹⁷ This seventeenth-century love letter, charged as it is with genuine passion, was first discovered and published by Van Vloten about forty years ago (*Hooft's Brieven*, i. 313-317), who states in a foot-note that 'traces of tears as well as blood are still to be seen very clearly' (p. 317).

Light-o'-love, Heleonore ;
 Not to her that I adore
 Light-o'-love do I apply :
 'Tis her eyes I mean thereby.
 Not but that the words I choose
 Double truths perhaps disclose.
 On a certain eventide
 Two sweet lips to me confide,
 'Dearest, I do love thee so,'
 And the next night they say 'No.'
 Such caprices turn my brain,
 Fickle, as the fluttering vane,
 Which no plea for changing finds
 But the changes of the winds.

The tone of these verses would seem to indicate that hope was far from extinct in the heart of the writer, who no doubt trusted that his touching appeal might cause the fancy of the vacillating lady to veer round once more in his favour. Nor was he disappointed. Three months after her flight from Amsterdam the fair widow became Hooft's wife. The match was in all respects a most satisfactory one, and the new châtelaine of Muiden proved herself to be a worthy successor to Christina. The name of Heleonore Hellemans is indeed familiar as a household word to every reader of Dutch seventeenth-century literature, for the poems that after the fashion of the day were written in her honour would, if they were collected, form a considerable volume. More than any other woman in the Netherlands (always with the single exception of Tesselschade Visscher) have her high qualities been eulogised and permanently recorded by her contemporaries, but perhaps a single line penned by her husband has more significance than them all : 'Within this house one ever finds sunshine even when it rains without.'

The wedlock was blessed by the birth of two children, both of whom survived their father. On the occasion of the birth of the latter the poet testified his gratification by sending to the mother a little basket, containing the first ripe cherries of the season, covered by choice roses. Lying on the flowers was the following dainty little epistle in verse :—

In de bladen van een roosje
 Vindt gij, o mijn zoetste Troostje,
 Kleene gift. Waar' zij zoo groot
 Als de gunst, te klein een doosje
 Waar' de gansche wereldkloot.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Dutch diminutives are untranslatable, but the sense of the lines is fairly given in the following rendering :—

Nestling 'neath the flowers, that mask it,
 Lies, my darling, in this basket
 A small gift. Were it as great
 As my love, too small a casket
 Were the globe for such a freight.

The literary life of Hooft divides itself naturally into two periods. In his youth and during the lifetime of his first wife the drost was known to the world only as a poet and a dramatist. The publication of his first historical effort, the life of Henry IV, almost synchronises with the death of Christina. From that epoch up to his death he became, almost as exclusively, an historian.

The biography of the Bourbon king was, as has already been stated, written by Hooft as a *coup d'essai*. The result more than answered his expectations. The book was hailed with universal expressions of approbation, and Louis XIII himself was so pleased with it, that he sent the author a golden chain, made him a knight of St. Michael, and raised him and his descendants to noble rank. Thus encouraged, Hooft now set himself in earnest to the great task, the first conception of which probably dated from his return from his Italian tour. On 19 Aug. 1628 he commenced his 'Netherland Histories,' and from this time, until the very week before his last illness in 1647, he worked ceaselessly at the *magnum opus* which he had planned. Beginning with the abdication of Charles V, it had been his intention to carry on the story to the year 1609, the date of the conclusion of the twelve years' truce, but he did not live to bring it further than the end of the Leicester régime. Of the extraordinary pains that he took to give the utmost perfection to his narrative, there are abundant records.¹⁹ In order to form his style on the best classical model, he not only translated the whole of Tacitus's works into Dutch, but read them through, so it is said, no less than fifty-two times. He spared no trouble to obtain the most thorough and trustworthy information. He carefully compared together the accounts of all previous writers upon the subject in Italian, Spanish, French, and Latin, as well as Dutch. He ransacked archives and documents; he made inquiries from living eye-witnesses of events, and asked advice on many points from statesmen and lawyers. In that large portion of the work which described battles and sieges, he relied mainly upon the technical knowledge and intimate acquaintance with the military history of the war possessed by General Witz, whose work upon strategy was famous in its day, while for particular encounters he generally asked some one, who had actually taken part in the fighting, to write out for him his own experiences and impressions. Nor was he even satisfied with all this minute sifting of evidence and elaborate accumulation of materials. As each separate portion of the work was written, he despatched it to some friendly critic for correction and revision, among these most frequently to Huyghens, who in his

¹⁹ A whole series of Hooft's letters give full details of the progress and of the labours involved in this work. The facts are derived at first hand from this absolutely authentic source.

turn at times placed the manuscript in the hands of the Prince of Orange himself. It may readily be imagined that a work undertaken in such a spirit, and composed with such conscientious and scrupulous care, should have progressed but slowly. In the month of July 1684 the first eleven books were completed, but it was not until eight years later that that portion of the history which closes with the assassination of William the Silent, comprising in all twenty books, issued from the press.

In the progress of the second portion of his histories, Hooft was much hindered by the stress of official business, and through his own increasing infirmities. He suffered much from gout and gravel. He continued, however, to work on assiduously, though it is clear from his letters that he did not expect to live long enough to complete his entire task. On 12 March 1647 he wrote to an acquaintance at Louvain, 'I fear much that through want of health or of life I shall not succeed in bringing my work to an end. For the one oftentimes interrupts me, and the other whispers in my ear, *Tempus abire mihi.*' Though at the time very far from well, Hooft insisted on attending at the Hague, on May 10 of this year, the obsequies of Frederick Henry of Orange. He felt it to be a solemn duty, at whatever cost, to follow the mortal remains of his beloved prince and benefactor to their last resting-place. Directly afterwards he fell seriously ill, and in eleven days' time he died at the Hague in the house of a son-in-law of his wife. His body was removed to Amsterdam, and buried in the Nieuwe Kerk by the side of that of his father amidst general grief and accompanied by an immense concourse of friends and admirers.

His external traits have been sketched for us by his biographer Brandt, and we can ourselves see them depicted upon canvas on the walls of the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam. Tall and spare, with lustrous, lively brown eyes, abundant curly hair of auburn-brown with beard of somewhat lighter hue, his whole appearance is that of a man of thought and intelligence, at once dignified, refined, and pleasing. Although, as we have seen, he delighted in cheerful and congenial society, and was noted for his bright humour and high spirits when entertaining his friends, his natural disposition was serious and earnest, and few men have surpassed him in unremitting and ceaseless industry. One of the most remarkable features of his character was his spirit of tolerance and moderation. He was sufficiently liberal in his religious views to despise bigotry, and would not have any dealings with men of extreme and violent opinions, and was in consequence by such frequently described as a freethinker. In his judicial capacity, as a magistrate, he was inflexibly just and impartial, though always inclined to take into consideration all palliating circumstances, and to lend a ready ear to the appeals of the helpless and distressed.

Fond of patronage and approbation, he obtained and exercised throughout life, as has been said, a kind of acknowledged suzerainty in the realm of letters. Barlaeus laughingly calls him 'magnificus,' and speaks in a letter to Huyghens of 'feasting royally with the satrap' (*epulati sumus apud satrapam βασιλικῶς*). Yet Hooft withal, though his manners at times perhaps inclined to the grandiose, was not a vain man. All evidence on the contrary shows him to have been modest in his opinion of his own merits, simple in his personal habits, and an upholder in domestic life of time-honoured Dutch customs in an age when French modes and fashions were becoming all the vogue. He is known to have been a devoted husband and father, and it speaks volumes for the kindness of his disposition, that in the course of a long life he is said never to have made an enemy or alienated a friend.

Of Hooft's dramas and poems it is not my purpose to enter into any detailed criticism. It is sufficient to say that as a lyrical poet only can he appeal to the tastes of the nineteenth century, and that as a lyrical poet he was a master. At the close of the sixteenth century, Coornheert, Spieghele, and Roemer Viisscher, the literary triumvirate of the Dutch Renaissance, had already shown that the language of Holland was a fitting implement for the expression of poetical ideas. But their metrical productions, however creditable and even meritorious, were but tentative efforts. The language was still in a state of transition, and the verses themselves were always irregular, frequently halting, at times stiff and uncouth. The visit of Hooft to Italy enabled him to study the art of poetry in the land in which it had attained its greatest perfection, and he soon became an adept in the technicalities of metrical craft. Possessing refined taste and delicate sensibility of ear, he speedily overcame all the obstacles arising from want of exemplars, and the rugged crudeness of an unpolished northern tongue, and his very earliest attempts to reproduce in Batavian guise the sonnets and songs of the south are distinguished for the musical rhythm and ease of their movement, and already at the time of the publication of his '*Granida*'²⁰ he had attained to that smooth flexibility and airy lightness of touch which are the characteristics of his best style.

To say that Hooft was a great poet would be a mistake. He never indeed aspired to such a position. His poems, as he himself tells us, were mostly penned, not for public perusal but for the private gratification of his friends. 'Things that from time to time I have put into poetic shape for my own amusement, have to my vexation been made public,' he writes to Daniel Heinsius. 'I am too conscious of my own imperfection;' and we have the testimony of Van den Burg, who published the first collected edition of

²⁰ A pastoral play in imitation of the *Pastor Fido*, written in 1605.

Hooft's poems in his dedicating preface, 'that the greater part of these works were by him (Hooft) consigned to oblivion, and I had to use entreaties to prevent them being thrown into the flames.' That a poet should estimate lowly the value of his works is, however, no proof of their want of merit, but simply of his own modesty and of the lofty standard by which he gauged his attainments. Among the love-songs and sonnets of the drost are little gems which deserve to be more widely known, and this not merely for the polished perfection of the stanzas, but because the thoughts and ideas to which they give harmonious expression are themselves bright and pleasing.

When Hooft commenced his 'Netherland Histories' it was not with the intention of adding yet one more to the many excellent narratives of the war with Spain. The actual events of the struggle had already been told by chroniclers such as Bor, van Meteren, and van Reyn. The aim of Hooft was to match the style to the subject, and to raise such a literary monument to the memory of William the Silent and his heroic coadjutors as should worthily perpetuate their deeds to coming generations. His ambition was to be that which by the general consent of his contemporaries he was named, 'the Tacitus of the Netherlands.' That the great prose-epic, to which he consecrated twenty years of his life, realised his expectations, is to be found in the high praise bestowed upon it by Dutch critics and writers for more than two centuries and a half.

Of its worth as a record of facts we have already spoken. Indefatigable research, and an impartiality which was even more rare in those days than it is in our own, give to it, as a mere chronicle, quite exceptional value. Hooft avowed his principle to be 'never to conceal the truth, even were it to the injury of the fatherland,' and he endeavoured consistently to carry it out. The descriptions are throughout graphic and full of life, the terrible scenes of bloodshed and cruelty portrayed with dramatic force and vigour, the language is nervous and pithy, the sentences carefully balanced, the choice and ordering of the words studied. The pages are strewn with wise reflections and aphorisms, even the dullest passages are lit up with flashes of picturesque eloquence, the finest infused with something of poetic glow. To counterbalance such high merits we look for and we find correlative defects. The 'Histories' are undoubtedly marred by a pedantic purism, by a straining after effect, by unnatural constructions and obscure expressions, which result from a too close reproduction of the style of the Great Roman historian, whose works the writer had perused so many times, and which were the subject of his daily study. These are, however, but the inherent flaws which appear in every human creative effort, and in their despite the 'Nederlandsche Historien' ought justly to be ranked among the greater histories of all time.

But, as the preceding sketch of his life bears ample witness, Hooft has done something more than leave us a connected narrative of his country's history during the last decades of the sixteenth century; his collected letters give us an insight into the political, literary, social, and domestic life of Holland during the first half of the seventeenth century, which is of more value in many ways to those of after-times than the most minute and voluminous history, properly so called. These letters, indeed, whether we regard them as specimens of epistolary art, or as a storehouse of information, form the most valuable legacy which Hooft has bequeathed to posterity, and we may entirely assent to the judgment of one of the most accomplished of recent Dutch critics,²¹ 'that though it could not be asserted without exaggeration that they (Hooft's letters) throw into the shade the whole of the rest of Netherland literature, still the assertion would not be far beyond the mark.' The excerpts which have been given can afford the reader but little idea of the manifold charm and interest of these letters. They deal with every variety of subject, grave and gay, and are written in studied diversity of style, but always with point, spirit, and literary finish. The flavour of pedantry, so dear to the seventeenth century, pervades the whole, though chiefly the official and strictly literary correspondence. In the letters addressed to relatives and familiar friends the words, as Hooft himself confesses, 'run more trippingly from the pen,' and the manner is a reflection of the writer's own nature, bright, genial, and breezy, rippling over with kindly humour and buoyant gaiety of heart. In these intimate outpourings of his thoughts and feelings the dross stands self-revealed before us, with all his foibles and fancies, in his views on men and things, in the petty details of everyday existence, in his literary life and social relations.

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²¹ Busken Huët, *Land van Rembrandt*, iii. 175.