

Gisbertus Voetius
A.C. Duker
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Voetius occupies a place of high honor among the Dutch theologians of the seventeenth century. He was, perhaps, the ablest, the most learned and the most influential of all Calvinistic divines belonging to that period so rich in eminent names. Well-nigh every factor in the vigorous and multiform life of the Reformed Church of his days has found in him a classical and thoroughly Calvinistic expression. He was a scholastic of the first rank, who knew how to handle the weapons of his craft with great skill and subtlety; a mystic of a deeply pious vein; a writer of exceptional fertility; and a teacher of wide influence. His biography, when fully written, will reflect a piece of Church history covering the greater part of the seventeenth century and of absorbing interest for everybody who desires to study the development of Calvinism in Holland and elsewhere. There is hardly an event of importance in this period with which the name of Voetius has not been associated. He sat in the Synod of Dort, was one of the strongest opponents of Arminianism and Romanism, afterwards entered the lists against Cartesianism, warned against the extravagances of Labadism, and took a prominent share in the battle against Cocceianism—all this in addition to his endless warfare with the warlike Maresius.

A biography of Voetius has been wanting hitherto. Dr. Duker in preparing one is doing a most useful work. The part now before us constitutes the first half of the first volume, and deals with the youthful years of Voetius and his period of study spent in the university and the “State’s College” at Leiden. As was to be expected, Voetius is not so much the central figure here as he will be in the later parts of the work. Sometimes we even receive the impression that the author makes use of this opportunity to deposit for safe-keeping some results of his studies, interesting enough in themselves, but only remotely connected with the subject of the biography. Still we are grateful for many delightful bits of information. The author gives us an insight into the life of theological students at this time. Voetius spent seven years at Leiden. Among his teachers were both Gomarus and Arminius. Dr. Duker makes us witnesses of the first cropping out of the Arminian controversy in the university. Voetius strongly took to the side of Gomarus; and by his outspoken antipathy against Arminius and his views, even as a student, fell out with the regent of the State’s College, Petrus Bertius, in consequence of which he was removed from that institution. We are greatly impressed with the amount of labor required of those preparing for the ministry in those days, both in their propædeutical and in their theological course, and with the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the training of Voetius in particular. The learning, subsequently displayed by him becomes somewhat less miraculous if we take into account the wide range of his studies and the untiring zeal and devotion which he brought to them.

After the completion of his studies, Voetius became a minister of the church at Vlijmen, and afterwards of the church of his native place, Heusden. The second part of the first volume will contain the account of this ministry. The second volume will describe the life and work of Voetius as Professor of Theology at Utrecht. We shall look forward with great interest to the publication of this sequel to the present installment. Dr. Duker, though not a Calvinist, is evidently well qualified for his task. The part that lies before us bears witness on almost every page to his careful research and to his impartiality of treatment, the latter of which especially is a somewhat rare quality in our days when a Calvinist of the type of Voetius comes up for discussion.