Frans Van Schooten
(1615-1660)

PREFACE TO
GEOMETRIA A RENATO DESCARTES
(AMSTERDAM, 1649)

It is now twelve years, kind Reader, since that most noble and incomparable man, René Descartes, anonymously published his Geometry in French, together with certain others of his philosophical writings. From that time on a number of able scholars set themselves to a thorough reading of the work and became aware of the rare greatness of his learning; so highly did able critics value his writings, that he acquired an unrivalled reputation for his wonderfully acute intelligence and the incisiveness of his judgment. When the book began to be scarce, many who did not know French, expressed a strong desire to have it translated into Latin or another modern language. And when the Publisher sought to satisfy this desire and began thinking about another edition, he asked me to consider seriously whether I could undertake the task. This I did gladly, as I knew that this great geometry was of the greatest importance to mathematicians. I therefore set about turning it into Latin, a language in which the works mentioned above and his *Principia* appeared five years ago and in which the rest of his writings can be procured today. In my translation I have tried to express the Author's meaning as accurately as possible so that I kept the form of the words as closely as I could. For I am not unmindful that in this subject it is more important to keep the force and brevity of the words than to make some pretence of an elegant Latin style and thus depart completely from the author who knew what he was doing in adopting a certain order of exposition. Such behaviour would make the subject-matter less clear and cloak the truth in darkness. Further, since this Geometry can be understood by only a few because of its pithy and subtle treatment of its subject, and then only through assiduous work, (the author expects that the reader will already have studied other treatises of geometry; and thus thinks it a waste of time to repeat many of the things said elsewhere), I have not thought it out of place to explain the more difficult passages and annex easy examples. I think that this should be sufficient for those who have some acquaintance with Euclid, Apollonius, Pappus and conventional Algebra. For, if forearmed in this way, they should be able to go forward without stumbling into the higher reaches of the science. It would indeed have been desireable for the author to have explained these passages himself; for in this book he sets out only the most essential

rules of his method. But, because he was aware that the principle method of sharpening one's brain in this science was the careful work that the reader would have to put in in investigating other things and in proving those things he merely sketched out, he could not write the fully developed explanation himself, but left it for fuller treatment later. I knew that my learned and excellent colleague, Florimond de Beaune, Councillor of Blois, had written some notes in French on this geometry and had sent them to the author to ensure that they reflected his mind exactly. I thought it adviseable to translate them into Latin too, and, with his permission, I included them in this translation. Even though I can not be certain that he wrote these notes for publication, the long illness, which he is still fighting, has made it impossible to think of publication. But because I knew of his reputation as a specialist and believed that his notes would shed not a little light on Descartes, I have no doubt of the welcome these notes will receive. I have not thought it necessary to describe here the author's purpose since I have written a separate introduction for each section, and at the same time given an account of the geometrical doctrines of the Ancients, knowledge that is well worth having. And thus, I have managed to keep the assembly of original and commentary relatively brief. Although I expect that there will be some criticism of this work, I will be pleased if my work, or rather my attempt to be of service to the geometrical confraternity, reaches an expert and perceptive readership.

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