JACOBUS GERRITSEN STRYCKER (c. 1619–1687) AN ARTIST OF NEW AMSTERDAM

By Charles X. Harris

In the middle of the seventeenth century, when painting in Holland had arrived at its greatest period, there emigrated to New Amsterdam a Dutch portrait painter, Jacobus Gerritsen Strycker, who was without doubt the most capable artist of New Netherland of that century. His color was good; his touch rather refined than vigorous; his gradation of light and shade was fine. His mental grasp of the essentials requisite for painting a portrait reveal a genius, a genius thoroughly trained in the Dutch School, which stressed absolute fidelity to nature.

Nothing has been found in the Netherlands concerning Strycker's family, early life, or training as a painter. When he emigrated in 1651, he was accredited to the town of Rouinen, in the province of Drenthe, which probably never had an art school. The Guilds of St. Luke, in the different cities of the Netherlands, have no record of him, yet his work so distinctly shows the influence of the foremost great masters of the Dutch school, that he must have been a pupil of one of them. His talent was of a more refined order than the bold brushwork of Frans Hals, but that he may have studied with one of Rembrandt's pupils, Backer, Bol, or Flinck, seems quite possible from the character of his work.

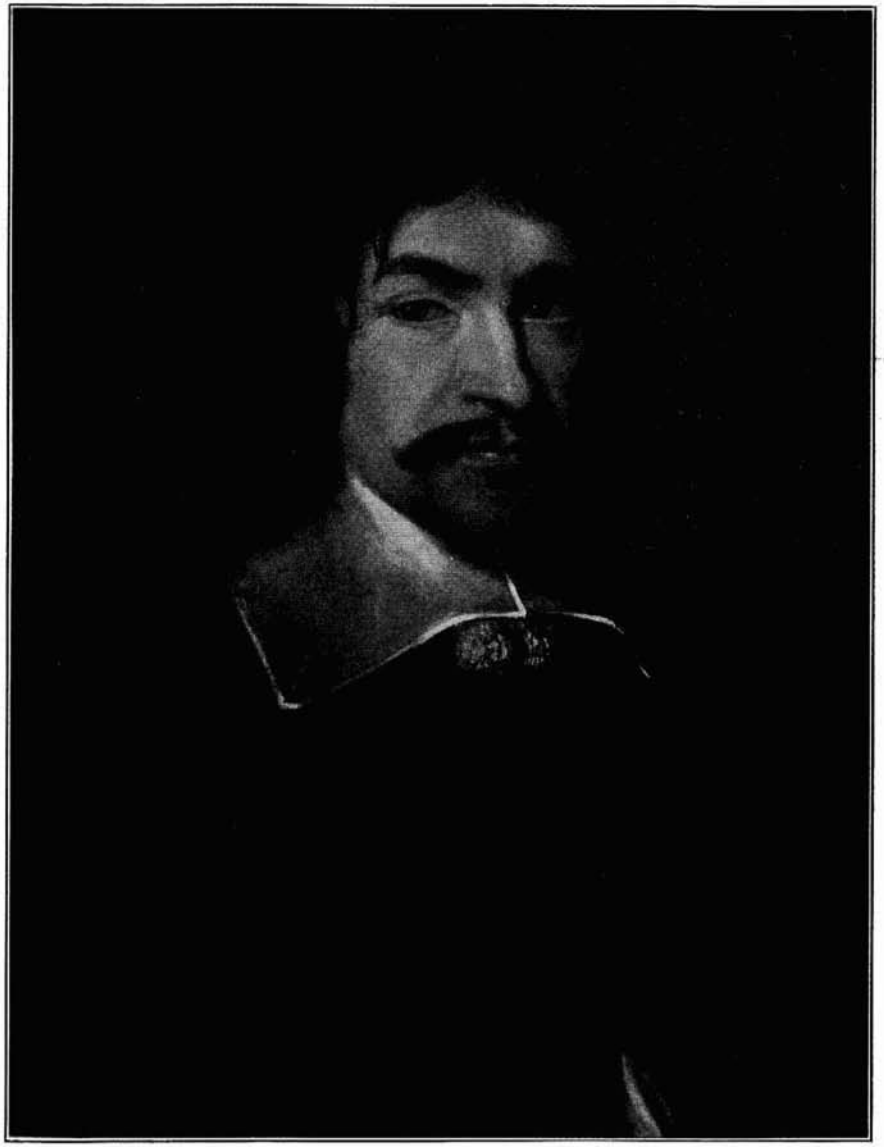
Jacobus Strycker's elder brother, Jan, was born in 1617, calculating from the inscription on his portrait, so the probabilities are that Jacobus was not born before 1619. In January, 1643, the two brothers received from the States General of the Netherlands a grant of land in the colony of New Netherland, upon condition that they transport thither twelve families, at their own expense. There is no evidence that they carried out the terms of the agreement, and it was eight years later, in 1651, that Jacobus Strycker arrived in New Amsterdam. Jan followed in 1652. According to the ship's passenger list, Jacobus was accompanied by his wife, Ytie (Ida) Huybrechts, and two children, Gerrit and Altje (Alida or Elsie). His wife may have been related to the lady

bearing the same family name, whose daughter, at about this period, married Titus van Rijn, son of the great Rembrandt. Jacobus Strycker was a gentleman of considerable means, of education, and of decided culture and ability, and after his arrival here he took his place in the young community as a responsible citizen and a trusted magistrate. Many facts, which will be stated later, may be gleaned about his office holding, but little is known about his painting, in which we are primarily interested.

There can be attributed to Strycker only four portraits, all painted in 1654 or 1655: his self-portrait, that of his brother, Jan, of Adriaen Van der Donck, New Amsterdam's first lawyer, and of Governor Peter Stuyvesant. Extensive search and one hundred and seventy-six letters to various members of the Strycker family have brought no others to light. But these four are sufficient to show the great ability of the artist and the high cultural development of the New Amsterdam in which he lived.

The portrait of Jacobus Gerritsen Strycker, by himself, is a bust, painted on an oak panel, made of two pieces of thin board glued together. It is covered with a very dark orange varnish, which gives it a Rembrandtesque effect. No attempt has been made to clean it, so dirt and varnish make it difficult to see how good it really is, and impossible to obtain a satisfactory photograph. The picture is in its original state, in its old black frame, with a gilded strip against the portrait. Unfortunately there is no inscription front or back, but the date 1655 has been assigned to it because of the magistrate's collar, to which he was entitled in that year, and because it was probably painted at the same time as his brother's portrait, which is definitely dated.

The self-portrait has always been owned by descendants of Jacobus Strycker. His son Gerrit, who came to New Amsterdam with him in 1651, married Wyntje Cornelise Boomgaert in December, 1673. He became sheriff of Kings County in 1688 and died in 1694. His wife died in 1700. They had nine children, the third of whom, Jacobus (1682–1748), probably inherited his grandfather's portrait. The next owner was Jacobus's son, Gerrit (1726–1775). He removed from Oyster Bay, L. I., in 1764, to Striker's Bay, on the North River at 52d Street, where the portrait remained until the family mansion was demolished. The present owners are Mrs. Elsworth L. Striker and her son Joseph, through whose courtesy



JAN STRYCKER, 1617–1697
Painted 1655, by Jacobus G. Strycker, died 1687

it is now on loan exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It makes a distinct and a most important contribution to early American portraiture.[1]

The portait of Jan Strycker (1617–1697) is signed on the face: "AETATIS 38—1655." It belonged to the artist's daughter, Altje, who married J. Abraham Stevense Van Voorhees, of Flatlands, L. I., whose nephew, Johannes Coerte Van Voorhees (1683–1757), was the next owner. He wrote on the back of the picture this inscription:

> Given to Altje by her father
> Jacobus Gerritsen Stricker
> who himself drew this likeness
> Of his brother Jan.
>
> J. C. Van Voorhees.

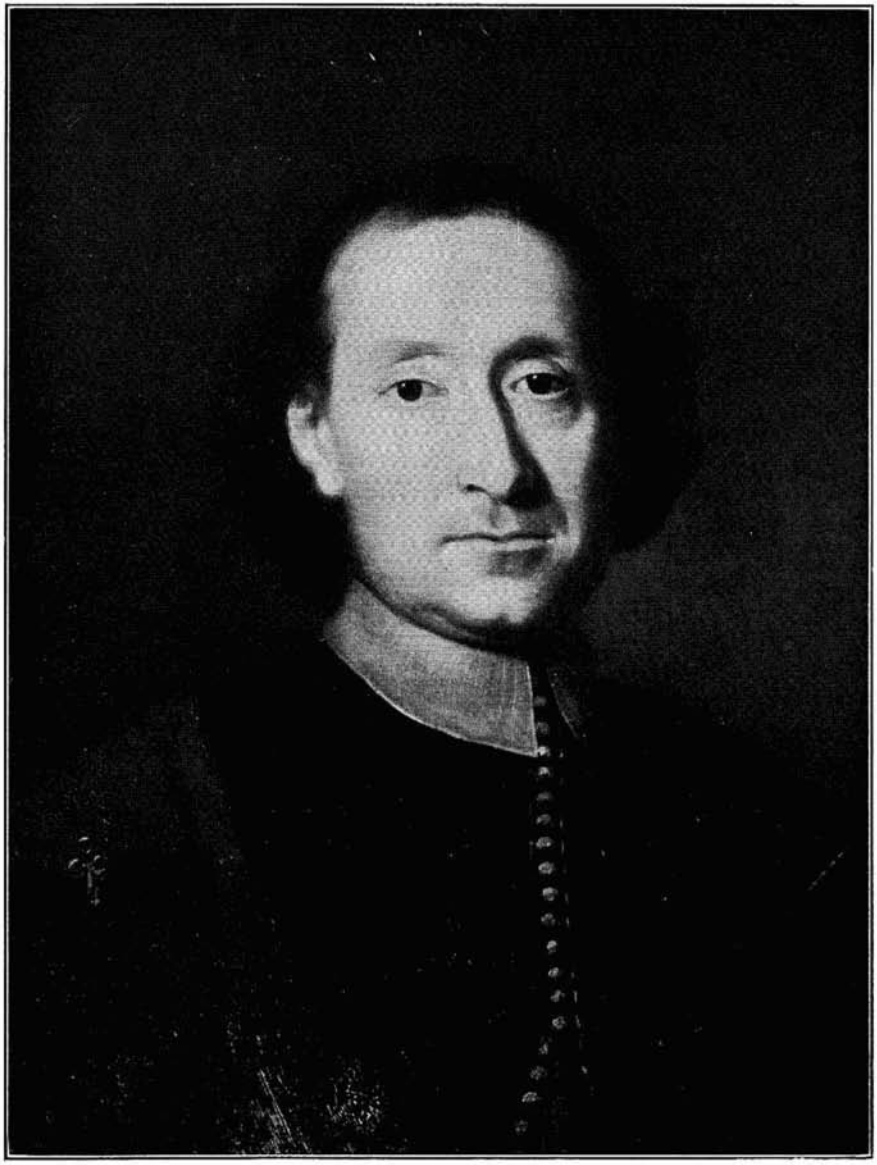
The portrait was inherited by his son, Cortland Van Voorhees (1706–1785), of Fishkill, Dutchess County, and of Flatlands, who left it to his daughter Catherine (1730–1797), who married Dr. Hendrick Van Beuren of Flatlands. Their son, Cortlandt Van Beuren, was the fifth owner. His son, Henry Van Beuren of Brooklyn (1805–1892) was the next owner, from whom it was inherited by his daughter, Catherine.

The ownership of the portrait of Adriaen Van der Donck has been the same as that of the Jan Strycker portrait. On the back is the following inscription:

> Jonkeer Adrian Van der Donck
> Given to Altje by her father
> Jacobus Gerritsen Stricker
> Who drew it with his own hand.
>
> Johannes Coerte Van Voorhees.

The picture is neither signed nor dated, but it must have been painted about 1654, as Van der Donck returned to New Amsterdam from Holland in 1653 and died in 1655. This is a very superior portrait. The modeling is very much like that of the Rembrandt portraits painted by Jacob Backer. One marvels that such a portrait could have been painted in this country at that early period, and one realizes that Jacobus Strycker, before he left Hol-

[1] The Society was unable to secure permission to reproduce this portrait in time for this issue of the Bulletin—It was reproduced in *Register of Pedigrees*, Volume I, facing page 56, (*Collections of the N. Y. Gen. & Biog. Society*, Vol. VI.)



ANDRIAN VAN DER DONCK, 1618–1655
By Jacobus G. Strycker, died 1687

land, must certainly have been in touch with the best of the great Dutch School. The head in this Van der Donck portrait, with a part of the surrounding canvas, was either cut out of a larger canvas, or it was painted on a small piece and then enlarged to its present size, with about two inches added at the top and sides, and five inches at the bottom. This, however, does not interfere with the head, which is in excellent condition.

The portrait of Governor Peter Stuyvesant, from a historical point of view, is the most valuable one in the galleries of The New-York Historical Society. It was presented to the Society by the late Robert Van Rensselaer Stuyvesant, in 1909, prior to which it had always been in the possession of the Governor's descendants. The portrait bears no inscription front or back. It is painted on an oak panel of two pieces of thin board glued together, so exactly like the panel on which Strycker's self-portrait is painted that both must have been made at the same time from the same board. This portrait has been attributed by some to Henri Couturier, because of the statement made by Couturier's wife, on June 12, 1663, that her husband had secured the burgher right by painting a portrait of Stuyvesant. In no place, however, can the handling or brushwork of Couturier be found.

The Stuyvesant painting is in bad condition. It was covered with a hard oil or coach varnish, and the attempt to clean it with a solvent has proved unsuccessful. The varnish has come off in spots, and in places some of the paint came with it. There are spaces still coated with the thick heavy varnish containing some dirt, which can be removed safely only with a scraper such as is used on a mezzotint plate, under a magnifying glass. Any other system would be dangerous. The spotty appearance of the picture, due to the patches of dirty varnish, make it impossible to obtain a good photograph.

These are the four portraits which establish the claim that Jacobus Strycker was the most able artist in New Amsterdam during the seventeenth century. In spite of his obvious training and capacity for portraiture, painting was not his profession, and he apparently did no painting at all after 1655, unless some other pictures come to light to prove the contrary. Instead, he devoted himself to office holding, trading, and farming. Once, in the records, he is called a tailor. Although a young man, not over thirty-

GOVERNOR PETER STUYVESANT
Painted by Jacobus G. Strycker
(Owned by The New-York Historical Society)