A DUTCHMAN AT CAMBRIDGE

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Sometime in November, 1628, a young Dutchman, not quite twenty-three, arrived in Cambridge for the first time, and was lodged in Peterhouse. His name was Jan de Vos, or in Latin, Joannes Vossius, and most of the letters he wrote during his subsequent Cambridge career to his father, back in Holland, have been preserved. They reveal some interesting aspects of Cambridge life in the seventeenth century from the unusual point of view of a foreign student. They also reveal much about their author, who comes across as a lively and likeable youth, lacking only one requirement for success at Cambridge: a desire to study.

It was, indeed, through no merit of his own that Jan de Vos came to occupy a place at Cambridge. The chain of events that brought him there began in 1621, with the arrival in England of his step-uncle, Francis Junius the younger (1589-1677), now remembered chiefly for his learned work on ancient art, *De Pictura Veterum*. Junius became librarian and tutor in the household of the Earl of Arundel, and began at once to cultivate connections on behalf of his brother-in-law, John's father, the already distinguished humanist Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577-1649), then Professor of Eloquence and Chronology at Leyden University. The first result appeared in 1624, when Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, announced his intention of founding a history lectureship at Cambridge, and, through the English embassy at The Hague, offered the post to Vossius. But, after some two years of negotiations, Vossius declined to leave Leyden, not least, it seems, because the curators there offered him a higher salary to stay. He eagerly picked up, however, a hint that foreigners might sometimes gain preferment in the English Church; and, by a thoughtful distribution of copies of his published works and in particular by a shrewdly aimed book dedication to the influential Duke of Buckingham, he continued to make contacts in England, among them Bishop Laud of Bath and Wells. This strategy did not fail to have its effect. In August 1628 Laud wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton, ambassador at The Hague, that there was good news for Vossius:

> My Lord Duke hath been very noble in his remembrance of him: and hath gotten of the King the next advowson of a prebend in Canterbury for him. ...My Lord hath likewise taken care by me to provide for that son of his which you mentioned to be made a fellow of one of the best Colleges for profit in Cambridge. So he may send his son when it shall seem best to himself.

Admittedly, there was a catch in the offer.

> He cannot be made a fellow the first year, so that it will be wholly at Vossius his charge. And for his entrance he must fit him with bedding and other necessaries. And after he is fellow some allowance must be made him from his father above the College. But if the son be careful and thrifty, the father's charge will not be much.

Vossius accepted gladly. To support one of his sons for a year was not too much, he wrote he would do more for his children, though as he had a large family, the sooner he was relieved of even part of the financial burden, the better. He was prepared to send his son within three weeks, "furnished with my good advice", to learn sound doctrine in England.

It was not, in fact, Jan whom Sir Dudley Carleton had had in mind for the place at Cambridge, but Vossius's second son, Franciscus. Franciscus afterwards became a successful lawyer, and we may suppose that he would have been a better choice. But the decision was made by paternal authority: Jan was more mature and more robust, and being the eldest son, ought to be the first to be provided for; therefore Jan must go.

Jan proceeded to Flushing in September, and there news of his first misfortune reached him, in the form of a rumour of an attack on the Duke of Buckingham. When in October, after a long and difficult crossing, he landed in England, the rumour proved only too true. The Duke had been assassinated and Jan's arrival could not have been worse timed. "I confess", wrote Laud to Carleton, "I had hoped he would not have come till the spring, because I supposed the barbarous attempt upon my Lord Duke would have made you easily conceave how unfit I am at this time to be troubled with additions to my business." But, now that Jan was there, Laud welcomed him, and would see him settled in Cambridge as soon as he could. Jan was met by his uncle Junius, dined with the Bishop, had a new outfit of clothes bought for him, and was sent on a sightseeing tour of some of the royal palaces, at Richmond, Windsor, and Hampton Court. He also received news of another misfortune: the assassination at the hands of a servant of Lord Brooke, his father's earlier prospective patron. In due course, Jan went up to Cambridge, and was placed, as a fellow-commoner at Peterhouse, under the care of the Master, Matthew Wren.

The prospects of a foreigner at Cambridge in those days were doubtful. In the sixteenth century, four distinguished Continental scholars employed there - Erasmus, Fagius, Bucer, and Baro had all, sooner or later, met with opposition which seems to have included, in each case, an element of xenophobia. Thomas Fuller recorded of Dr. Isaac Dorislaus (whom we shall meet again) that "because a foreigner, preferred to that place, his lectures were listened to with the more critical attention of Cambridge auditors." The few foreigners in Cambridge at this time were mostly Dutch, and a few of the Dutchmen who had studied there were quite distinguished - notably Franciscus

Gomarus and Janus Gruter; but the Dutch reactions to Cambridge, and to the reception they got there, were mixed. Francis Junius and George Retaller Doubleth (lawyer and diplomat, and an old pupil of the elder Vossius) thought that the Dutch were accepted there without too much difficulty. Franciscus Gomarus, who had studied at Magdalene College in the 1580s, sensed increasing hypocrisy in the University. "There are some good and sincere men there," he wrote, "I do not deny it; but few... and the inroads of the plague of adulation and the pestilence of envy are such, that even good men are scarcely immune." One of Vossius's brighter ex-pupils, the medical man Andreas Colvius, who visited Cambridge about this time, quoted the tag "Minuit praesentia famam".

> For these colleges [he reported], so much talked of at home, are indeed (not to give them less than their due) set up on a good plan; but, as everything tends to decline, it seems to me that the standards of learning and distinction are the result more of time than of erudition, which, unless sustained by the influence of previous generations, is as little esteemed here as anywhere else. Especially if it is found in a foreigner, whom the English like as a visitor and hate as a resident, because they are afraid that someday, backed up by the favour of some magnate, he will move in on their benefices. And in my opinion, any foreigner, if he thinks he is going to get any promotion without arousing great jealousy, is much deceived; since all men are on the lookout for their own good....

Matters were made worse for Jan de Vos by the fact that some men confused his father with Everardus Vorstius, and marvelled that such a notorious heretic should hold a position of honour in Holland. Nevertheless, the elder Vossius had some friends at Cambridge: Wren, the Master of Peterhouse and Vice-Chancellor; the Master of Pembroke, Jerome Beale, who as a theologian could be described in Dutch terms as "remonstrantissimus"; the Master of Sidney, Samuel Ward, whose acquaintance Vossius had made at the time of the Synod of Dort; and Robert Creighton, Professor of Greek, who would eventually become Bishop of Bath and Wells in the time of Charles II. To Beale and Ward, as well as to Dr. Richard Steward, a royal chaplain whom the elder Vossius had met in Holland, Jan had letters of introduction from his father. Though he would not have many fellow-Dutchmen to keep him company, and though he might encounter occasional anti-foreign prejudice, Jan de Vos had good contacts at Cambridge, and his troubles there seem mostly of his own making.

The first and most persistent of Jan's problems appears prominently in the first of his letters from Cambridge (18 december 1628): money. He gave a highly satisfactory account of how, in a crowded Senate-House, the Vice-Chancellor, dressed in his splendid robes, had admitted him *ad eundem* (Jan already held an L.L.B. from Leyden). He told how kindly he had been received by Dr. Wren and Dr. Beale, and how he dined every night on High Table with the Master and Fellows, although the Master, lately married, seldom came in. However, meals were going to cost him 250 florins a year, his room 40 florins, and other expenses (bedmaker, fire and so on) he could not estimate. Under the guidance of Bishop Laud, he had bought a new "toga" in London, and in Cambridge, where everything was dear, he had had to buy such necessaries as paper, pens and ink, chairs, candlestick, mirror, and chamberpot. He would soon have to think of buying a surplice and square cap. The list of expenses which he appended came to nearly 300 florins all told, and he pointed out that, at this rate, he would next term have no more money.

This letter produced the desired result: his father sent twenty pounds by the next post. Unfortunately the merchants by whom the money was sent proved unreliable, and after complaining that his clothes were practically worn out in Februry, in March he went to London, to visit his uncle and to see if the money had been held up. In April it arrived; fortunately, because although his kitchen bill was not going to be more than 230 florins, he had spent 12 florins more dining out on the nights when salt fish, quite indigestible, was served in college. Many others, he explained, did the same. In May we find him taking a trip to Bury St. Edmunds for the air; he had prospects of a fellowship which would bring in 600 florins a year. But, he warned his father, it was usual for fellows to buy the furniture of their predecessors, and this would take ten or twenty English pounds.

The prospects of a fellowship were not illusory. That same month a Royal Mandate was secured, and the Fellows, Master, and Visitor of Jesus College all received instructions to do their parts. Jesus, reported Jan, was the pleasantest, but not the richest, college. The size of his prospective income had to be scaled down considerably, to about 330 florins, including room, board, and 50 florins a year spending money. Jan was duly elected on 29 June, and admitted fellow of Jesus on 9 July.

The news that Jan was in line for a fellowship also produced a bonus from home: the elder Vossius promised him an extra twenty pounds. There came also, however, a paternal admonition to be thrifty. A rumour had reached home that Jan was spending heavily and on one occasion had been observed making his way home somewhat the worse for drink. His father suspected the story to be calumny, but penned a warning anyway. We have no further news of Jan until November, when his father visited England to be installed as Canon of Canterbury. The canonry would produce an income of twenty-five pounds a quarter, of which four were allotted for the maintenance of Jan.

Meanwhile, all was not well with Jan's studies. Some clues as to the nature of the difficulty may be gleaned from the description of his academic background at Leyden, which the elder Vossius transmitted in advance to Laud.

> It is now about eight years since he began to attend public lectures. With increasing age he has applied himself more and more to the study of history and philosophy, and especially to mathematics and natural sciences, under which I also include knowledge of botany and anatomy, in which he has made no mean progress. In addition to these he has applied his mind to the science of law, in which he now has the degree of bachelor, and many of his teachers were of the opinion that he could

> obtain his licentiate in a few months. Hoever, when he learnt of this chance to continue his studies in England, he decided to retrace his course a bit and fill in the gaps, and with renewed care to make up what was lacking in his knowledge of philosophy and other subjects. From then on he decided to bend every effort to the study of theology, but so as not to throw away what he had learned of legal science, but to increase it in his spare time, if inclination, opportunity, and circumstances permitted. Canon law, at least, would not take him far away from theology, since whatever is good in it is drawn from the fountain of Scripture and the streams of the Holy Fathers.

In a letter to Jan himself, however, his father observed that he had nothing beyond the average amount of learning. We should not suppose from his account of Jan's studies that the typical young Dutchman was a prodigy of versatility, but rather that Jan had bitten off more than he could chew.

Jan's first impression of Cambridge men was that they were very learned; often, he alleged, they used more Greek than Latin in their conversation, and he was going to have to work hard to keep up with them. In February 1629 he reported on his studies as follows:

> on Sundays I work at the theologians, on Mondays and Tuesdays at philosophers and mathematicians, on Wednesdays and Thursdays at mathematicians, and on Fridays and Saturdays at languages, especially Greek. Here men who don't know Latin learn Greek. Last week I kept an opponency in Law, but this week I shall have to defend the propositions, so that I am up to my ears in work to be ready for these two questions: "The heavens do not move with a diurnal motion" and "There are non-porous bodies". I hope I shall succeed easily.

But he followed this remark with a complaint about a lack of books, which is hardly credible in the college which four decades earlier had received the splendid benefaction of the library of Dr. Perne.

> I do not have any philosophers which I can consult, particularly Aristotle, whose opinions they swear by here, and take for axioms. Also I do not have a Latin lexicon, a *Corpus Juris,* Natalis Comes, Father's book dealing with the art of oratory, a chronologer, a cosmographer, the historians, an anatomist, my *Adages* of Erasmus and other books necessary for daily use which I cannot think of at the moment.

It appears that what Jan wanted was not just books, but books that he had read before, and which would therefore be easier to read again.

Concerning his teachers Jan gives us little information. At Peterhouse his tutor was the Master; at Jesus, a senior fellow, Stephen Hall. He reports that Creighton, the professor of Greek, always had audiences of more than a hundred; how often Jan was numbered among them we cannot tell. In April 1629 he wrote "Dr. Dorislaus recently gave an inaugural lecture", and our interest rises. This was not only the first, it was perhaps the most controversial history lecture ever given at Cambridge. Dr. Dorislaus was the Dutch scholar who had been chosen Lord Brooke's Professor when the elder Vossius had declined the post. His subject was Tacitus; and if he intended to give ancient history contemporary relevance, he succeeded only too well. As Thomas Fuller tells us, "his words were interpreted by high monarchical ears, as over-praising a state [i.e. a republic] in disgrace of a kingdom". As a result, Dr. Dorislaus was advised to leave the university, and, preferably, the country, though in fact he stayed on to become a Cromwellian diplomat.[1] We would gladly learn more about the Doctor's provocative performance; but Jan, regrettably, will not help us much. "Dr. Dorislaus recently gave an inaugural lecture, in which he made a most complimentary mention indeed of you, father."

Other dons that Jan met were Dr. Samuel Collins, the Provost of King's, who invited him to dinner, and "Dr. Charteltonus", that is to say Laurence Chaderton, the nonagenarian ex-master of Emmanuel. But, asked to send home copies of his latest books by any of these distinguished men, Jan found himself unable to discover that they had written anything, though he heard by the grapevine that Dr. Collins was writing against Cardinal Bellarmine, the champion controversialist of the Church of Rome.

By this time, April 1629, Jan was facing the hard facts of life for a foreigner in England. The study of theology, he wrote, would be useless to him here, except for his own salvation; foreigners were never promoted in the English church, because they could never master that language well enough to preach a convincing sermon. He would like to continue to study civil law, but it was useless in England, where common law prevailed; but if he studied common law, he would be compelled to spend the rest of his days in England, far from home and friends. Medicine was indeed highly esteemed, but his star was against his practising it, when he imagined to himself all the difficulties - he specified some difficulties he could imagine, adding that the constellations were certainly the cause of pestilences; perhaps it was just as well he did not take up the practice of medicine.

A year later, Jan's tutor, Stephen Hall, wrote directly to the elder Vossius, whom he had met when Vossius had made his two-day visit to Cambridge. Hall's letter allows us to judge that Jan's problem was genuine, but also that Jan had made no great strides toward solving it. Jan, said Hall, was dear to him for his father's sake, dearer still by reason of his own virtues and good conduct. But one thing was necessary, that he should apply himself to some one line of study that would be useful to him in England. Hall advised against law, pointed out the difficulties in the English legal situation. He recommended theology; that seemed to have been the intention of the royal mandate, and Jan had many influential friends who would see to his promotion, though he had to admit that suspicion of a Dutchman in England died hard. Jan despaired of learning English well enough to preach, and Hall admitted that English was a difficult tongue, repelling the rules of the grammarians, and only to be learnt by use. But Jan's English, he added, was not bad, and one could gain promotion in the church without ever preaching. What Hall did not say was that not all Anglicans were as satisfied as he seemed to be with the state of affairs.

The elder Vossius concurred with Hall's advice, and in letter after letter urged his son to settle down

to some subject or other, and stick to it; if it was theology, he should read the English Bible, and some other theological works in English; but if he wished to take up law or medicine instead, either of these professions would be satisfactory. Neither supervisory nor paternal advice prevailed; Jan never did decide what subject he wanted to study.

It must be added that he had suffered certain physical ailments since coming to Cambridge; in particular, an attack of blindness, brought on, so it was said, by too much horseback riding at the time he was elected fellow of Jesus. In April 1630 a more frightening menace appeared when the plague struck Cambridge. University lectures and sermons were suspended, and licence granted by the Vice-Chancellor and Senate for anyone to leave, which, according to Jan, about three thousand people, junior and senior members of the University and townsmen, did within six days. Those who remained mostly kept close within their colleges, though it was to the credit of Stephen Hall that he stayed to carry on his parochial work in the town.

On 10 June 1630 Jan's spirits reached their lowest point. The plague was intensifying, and the physicians themselves were afraid to attend its victims. Not a hundred students were left in the University. His medical expenses earlier in the year had left him with only 30 florins, and his shoes, hose, and other clothes were all so worn out that he was a laughing-stock.

> Oh, [he exclaimed] would that I had never set eyes on England! The East Indies would be better; I should not be here to be mocked, and to shed so many tears on account of my poverty. I wish the idea had never entered the heads of those who persuaded me [to come] ....Will this be all I can look forward to for the rest of my life? Shall I be forever content with the name of Fellow? It is impossible for me to live here; shall I then always be a burden to my parents, so that I shall ruin my brothers and sisters? By now I could have had a position at home; God be praised that he has given me enough talent that I could be numbered, if not among the middling, then among the least important advocates, and that would be enough to sustain life without misery. What more shall I say? The mountain I thought was gold is hardly even iron. Here in England neither office nor benefice is open to me, I have come too late, I am too old to learn the language, it will be long before I can go forth as a theologian. Meanwhile I pray God to prosper my studies, and to strengthen my soul, farewell, dear father....

When he wrote again in the next month he had recovered heart, though the plague was still on; 94 persons had died of the plague; at Trinity, St. John's, and King's, where there used to be 1500 men in residence, there were now only 60; and he could not go out to buy the books his father had requested. In September he himself fell ill, though not desperately. He asked again for his own books to be sent over. But, with the permission of Bishop Laud and the Master of Jesus, his father said he might come home in November and recover his health; and he did not return for a year.

Jan's letters during the second period of residence in Cambridge are shorter and less informative. Though his allowance from his father's prebend had been raised to five pounds a quarter, this still did not seem to be enough, and he and Meric Casaubon, who acted as his father's financial agent in Canterbury, got into trouble when Casaubon let him have more. Jan appears to have welcomed the change of masters at Jesus when Dr. Andrews, whose administration, Jan wrote had cost the college more than 150 florins in 1631-32, resigned under pressure, and was replaced by Dr. William Beale, the brother of the Master of Pembroke. He was a very learned man, wrote Jan, and - no doubt this was his outstanding merit - "regards you, dear father, with especial affection". Jan was now reading Hippocrates; apparently he had gone back to the idea of studying medicine and was starting at the beginning, though as he was also keeping up some theological reading and had begun to plant a small botanical garden, we may infer that the great decision about what subject to pursue had not yet been irrevocably made. Meanwhile, his father attempted to obtain for him a place in the administration of Ruremonde, in Upper Gelderland, the ancestral home of the Vossii, recently recaptured from the Spanish; but without success. It was, however, neither academic inadequacy nor the prospect of a better position elsewhere that brought the Cambridge stay of Jan de Vos to its conclusion.

At this point we may recall that, less than three years before, King Charles I, holding court at nearby Newmarket, had issued an interesting Royal injunction regarding Cambridge. It begins by stating "that of late years many students of that our University, not regarding their own birth, degree, and quality, have made diverse contracts of marriage with women of mean estate and of no good fame in that town, to their great disparagement, the discontentment of their friends and parents, and the dishonour of the government of that our University." Therefore, any "daughter or other woman" living in the house of any inhabitant of the town, who was visited by University men "to misspend their time, or otherwise misbehave themselves, or to engage themselves in marriage without the consent of those that have the guidance and tuition of them", might after investigation be banished from Cambridge by the Vice-Chancellor. "It is seldom thought worth while", as Dr. Venn remarks, "to forbid a practice until it has become tolerably frequent." We may assume, then, that there was nothing very unusual about the circumstances in which Jan de Vos appears to have placed himself.

From the correspondence it transpires that the woman in question in Jan's case was an innkeeper's daughter named, not too appropriately, Prudence Greene. She had helped to take care of Jan during his illness in the summer of 1629, and already, when visiting England, his father seems to have heard a rumour of a secret marriage. But Jan wrote to deny it hotly. Such a marriage would bring about his speedy ruin; he could easily make a more advantageous match in Holland. He banished all thoughts of women from his mind if it appeared that marriage with them must lead to destitution. This argument must certainly have satisfied his father, a

man keenly sensitive to economic and social status. But in January 1633 Laud wrote to Vossius in alarm. A report had reached him that his son was "not only lazy, but almost debauched"; that, in fact, Jan was seriously involved with the girl. The affair must be stopped before it went too far; "Societas enim, qua fruitur in Collegio Jesu, illa altera societate perditur." Vossius acted with speed, sending Junius to investigate. If it could be done without danger, Jan might be left to study medicine for another year; but otherwise, he should be sent home at once, before anything worse happened. The latter course was the one adopted.

In the event, Jan de Vos never came back. A year later, when there was talk of his doing so, Laud, now Archbishop fo Canterbury, warned that he should not even think of such a thing. The reports of Jan's marriage had become so circumstantial that the Master and Fellows of Jesus were thinking of electing someone else in his place; but as a search for documents failed to produce any evidence of such a marriage, the idea was abandoned. In view of Jan's long absence, however, a resignation from his fellowship was certainly in order.

The unsuccessful career of Jan de Vos at Cambridge can be used to illustrate one or two significant features of seventeenth-century society. There is the growing insularity of English academic life. No European country was closer, socially and culturally, to England than was the Netherlands; yet only in science or in pure scholarship could a Dutchman find a place in England; the church and the law were now exclusively national. Someone with gifts Jan de Vos lacked might have surmounted th problems this situation presented, but anyone in his position would have had to face them. Again, Jan's career exemplifies the hardships that could result from the stratification of seventeenth-century society. A pleasant young man, fond of familiar society though rather shy in strange company, Jan might well have been reasonably happy as a farmer or a shopkeeper or even, perhaps, as an innkeeper married to Prudence Greene. That the status of his family forced him into positions demanding an interest in ideas, as well as in people, was the misfortune of Jan de Vos's life and the indirect cause of his early death.

Vossius eventually managed to find his son a place as an advocate fiscal with the Dutch East India Company, and Jan was sent off to the Pacific. Meanwhile, Uncle Junius journeyed to Cambridge to investigate Jan's affairs; but after no fewer than three trips the only definite fact he could discover was that the Master and Fellows of Jesus would welcome the opportunity to conduct a free election. Sometime in 1635, therefore, the elder Vossius wrote to the Master and Fellows on behalf of his son, tendering undying thanks and Jan's resignation, and adding as a gift a copy of his latest grammatical textbook for the College, and another for the University. The reply of Dr. Sterne, for the College, was satisfactory, reporting that the money due to Jan from his fellowship would be applied to his debts, and that his furniture and effects would be sent to a Dutch merchant representing Vossius in England. The thanks of the Vice-Chancellor, Provost Collins, were less agreeable. Collins assured Vossius of continued affection for his son, but also alluded, in an obscure and convoluted passage, to a mother and her daughter who had applied to him for assistance, and whom Vossius had no reason to hate. Vossius understood the hint and was indignant. He refused to be let in for still more expense on account of his son's misconduct.

The story ends unhappily. Jan had once thought the East Indies preferable to Cambridge. They were not. After a short time, during which the reports on his conduct were favourable, Jan died; and the last reference we find to his affairs is in a letter from the representative of his creditors in the East, asking his father to consider his son's debts as if they were his own.

NOTES

[1]As Fuller concludes his account, "This is that Doctor Dorislaus, Cambridge Professor of History in his life, who himself was made an history at his death, slain in Holland, when first employed ambassador from the commonwealth unto the states of the United Provinces." - **History of the University of Cambridge**, p. 313.