

Letter 316
The Hague, c. August 21, 1883

Dear brother,

Your letter came today and comforted me in many ways. My thanks for speaking to C. M. – I will write to thank him myself, and send him a few studies, but for the rest – especially about the woman – nothing. One more thing, however. One of these days I shall write you a letter; I shall write it carefully and try to make it short, but say everything I think necessary. You might keep that letter then, so that in case you should meet somebody who might be induced to buy some of my studies, you could tell that man my own thoughts and intentions exactly. My thought in this being especially: one of my drawings taken separately will never give complete satisfaction in the long run, but a number of studies, however different in detail they may be, will nevertheless complement each other. In short, for the art lovers themselves it is in my opinion better to take a number of them than just a single one. As to the money, I would rather deal with an art lover who buys cheaply but regularly than with one who buys only once, even if he paid well then. Perhaps you might, either in your own words or in mine, propose to C. M. what we discussed last year; the result might be that because of my expressing myself more clearly, he might like the idea better.

Well, more about this later on.

Now I still have to tell you of a visit from Rappard, who saw the large drawings and spoke warmly of them. When I told him that I felt rather weak, and that I thought making the drawings might have had something to do with it, he did not seem to doubt the probability.

We spoke about Drenthe. He is going there again one of these days, and he will go even farther, namely to the fishing villages on Terschelling. Personally I should love to go to Drenthe, especially after that visit from Rappard. So much so that I have already inquired if it would be easy or difficult to move the furniture there.

The furniture can be sent by Van Gend & Loos, even the stove and the bed, by taking half a van; then few or no packing cases are needed.

Of course I am thinking of it because, though those things of mine are of little or no value, it would be very expensive to buy them all over again.

My plan would be to go with the woman and the children.

Of course there will be the moving and travelling expenses.

Once there, I think I would remain permanently in that country of heath and moorland, where more and more painters are settling down, so that perhaps, after a time, a kind of colony of painters might spring up. Life is so much cheaper there that I think I should economize at least 150 or 200 guilders a year, especially on rent.

And having paid my debts with the money from C. M., I think it might be good to act quickly.

In fact, I think it would be superfluous for me to go there first to gather information.

I have a small map of Drenthe before me. On it I can see a large white space devoid of any village names. It is crossed by the Hoogeveen canal, which suddenly comes to an end, and I see the words “peat moors” written right across the blank space on the map. Around that blank space, a number of small black dots with the names of villages and a red one for the little town of Hoogeveen.

Near the boundary, a lake – the Black Lake – a name to conjure with – I picture all sorts of workman dredging the banks. Some of the village names – such as Oosterheuvelen [Eastern Hills] and Erica, also exercise the imagination. Well, tell me your opinion about the possibility of a quick move to that region. If it happened, I should begin by acting on Rappard’s information based on his experiences there, then I would follow his advice to go more to that secluded part of which I told you how it looked on the map.

I am now trying to get a more detailed map of Drenthe, indicating the different terrains.

We should have an immediate cash outlay, but in the long run we should economise a lot, I think. But more important, I think, I should be staying in a country which would certainly stimulate me and make my mind receptive to all that is serious, so that my work can only improve by it.

What would the expenses be? I shall figure that out more exactly for you one of these days.

I suppose the whole family will be counted as 2 ½ persons, but they can demand the fare for three.

The railway expenses are not given in the timetable, but I suppose it will be under 10 guilders a head.

According to Van Gend & Loos, half a van to Assen is 20 guilders. But one would have to spend a few days in an inn, which would cost a guilder per person per day.

Here the rent especially, and the high cost of living, too, are murder. And the heaviest expense, the one for models, would be different over there: either I should have more and better models for the same money, or just as many for less money.

I suppose if I settled down there, Rappard would visit that same neighbourhood even more often than now, so that we could profit a little from each other's company. As I told you, it was especially since his visit and our talking about the work that my mind became fixed on Drenthe.

Of course if it must be, I can also look for a cheaper house here, and I think it beautiful here too, but yet – I should like to be alone with nature for a time – far away from the city.

I can hardly tell you how pleased I am with what you say about my work, I am glad you are of the opinion that it would be the wrong policy to undertake some outside job at the same time.

This leads to half measures, which make one half a man.

The most important thing is to get that “quelque chose de mâle” [something manly] more and more into my work.

I don't believe you will need to take back that you notice something of it already, especially if I regain my strength.

It is very troublesome that my stomach is upset by even the most ordinary food, and if I followed my inclination, I should only care to eat – sour apples. I don't indulge myself in this, but my stomach is weaker than it ought to be.

I expect another letter from Rappard about Drenthe. At all events I will write you again soon, also about another plan of staying quietly here, when I have had information from my landlord about the house at Voorburg, which he says I can perhaps get cheaply.

Adieu, again many thanks.

Yours sincerely, Vincent