

Letter 009a
London, 2 July 1873

[Letter to The Van Stockum – Haanebeek family; the envelope is addressed to W. J. van Stockum, Esq., Varkensmarkt, The Hague.]

Dear friends,

I should have liked to write sooner, and now I will not postpone it any longer. How are you? I heard that your house has been smartened up, and that all is well with you. I hope very much you will drop me a line when you have a moment to spare.

All is well with me. I see much that is new and beautiful, and have been fortunate in finding a good boardinghouse, so that on the whole I feel quite at home already. Yet I do not forget The Hague, and should very, very much like to spend an evening in the Poten, and look in on you, too.

The business here is only a stockroom, and our work is quite different from what it is in The Hague; but I shall probably get used to it. At six o'clock my work is already done for the day, so that I have a nice bit of time for myself, which I spend pleasantly – taking walks, reading and letter writing.

The neighbourhood where I live is quite beautiful, and so quiet and intimate that you almost forget you are in London. In front of every house there is a small garden with flowers or a few trees, and many houses are built very tastefully in a sort of Gothic style. Still, I have a good half-hour's walk to get to the country.

We have a piano in the sitting room, and there are also three Germans living here who are very fond of music, which is very pleasant.

One of the finest sights I have seen is Rotten Row in Hyde Park, where hundreds of ladies and gentlemen ride on horseback.

In all parts of the town there are beautiful parks with a wealth of flowers such as I have never seen anywhere else.

Enclosed I am sending you a copy of a poem by Van Beers, which you possibly do not know. Our Elisabeth copied it for me on my last evening in Helvoirt because she knew I thought so much of it. It is genuine Brabant: I thought you would read it with pleasure, and therefore I copied it for you.

It was very considerate of your sister Marie to send me the announcement. I long to hear something of the wedding, and I congratulate you all.

Will you kindly let me have a list of your birthdays some time? I did have one, but lost it.

And now good-by; remember me to everybody in the Poten, and good luck to you all. Excuse the bad handwriting; it is late and time to go to bed.

Sleep well.

Vincent

DE AVONDSTOND

Langzaam galmde 't gesamp der beelok over de velden,
Die, volzalig, in 't goud van de avondzonne zich baadden...

[Literal translation]

THE EVENING HOUR

The toll of the curfew calling to prayer resounded lazily across the fields,
Which blissfully lay bathed in the gold of the evening sun.

Right in front of him lay the village, with hills to the north and to the south,
between whose ridges the sun, sinking in the west with a crimson blush,
poured forth its whole wealth of colours and the magic of its rays.
Now the little bell in the grey steeple veiled in dark green
was silent. The brown sails of the mills, on yonder height,
hung motionless; the foliage was still; and over the cottages
little puffs of peat-smoke, tinged with blue, rose so straight
from the chimneys that they too seemed to hang motionless in the tingling air.
After the sun's good night kiss it was as if this hamlet, this field, these hills,

everything around, silent and grateful, once more recalled
the richness and peace they had enjoyed,
before wrapping themselves in the cloak of evening dew to sleep.

Farther on...but just beside the narrow footpath
followed by the Painter, the sudden loud peal of cheering met his ears.
Swaying to and fro, a wagon came rumbling toward him,
piled high with the harvest of buckwheat.
Horse and freight were decked with fluttering ribbons and flowering branches;
children, each with a wreath of flowers around his little flaxen head,
sat atop it, brandishing alder twigs,
or raining down a shower of leaves and flowers,
whilst below, around the wagon, a crowd of servant lads and lasses
leaped and sang, so as to startle the whole slumbering plain.
Behind the shrubs, the silently smiling Painter watched
the noisy throng wind its way along the bumpy road.
And thus, pondering the calm and deep delight the soul
savours in the country, or with his artist's mind reconstructing
in silent rapture the whole glorious scene of a short while ago,
he came, without perceiving it himself, sauntering into the hamlet.
In the west the purple and yellow had already faded to grey;
and in the east, quite close to the little church, the full copper-coloured
disk of the moon, lightly shrouded in the haze of the gloaming, had risen
when he entered "The Swan," the inn where he was lodging.
- Jan Van Beers, "The Pauper"