

Letter 11a
[Letter to the Van Stockum-Haanebeek family]
London, October 1873

Dear Carolien and Willem,

Many thanks for your letter of this morning, it was a delightful surprise. I am glad you are doing so well. Our Anna has passed her English and her needlework examinations; you can imagine how delighted she is, as are we all. Pa and Mother have proposed that she stay at school until next April, and then try French; but she doesn't have to if she doesn't want to. I should like so much to find something for her here; you know we have occasionally spoken about it.

You have already heard that Theo is going to The Hague. I believe it will be a change for the better, though he will find it hard to leave that beautiful, pleasant Brussels.

Some time ago I received a letter from your Pa, also, to which I have replied, and so you will probably have heard that all is still going well with me here, and some particulars about my new lodgings.

What you say about winter is quite right; I completely agree. For myself, I can hardly decide which season I like best; I believe I like them all equally. It is worth noting that the old painters hardly ever painted autumn, and that the modern ones have a predilection for it.

Enclosed are a few small photographs, which I hope you will like. Here you see hardly any albums like those in Holland, but so-called scrapbooks into which you put photographs like the ones in this letter (that is why we have the photographs unmounted here). The advantage is that you can arrange your photographs on the same page any way you like. I advise you to get a sort of copybook with white paper, and begin by putting these in it.

"A Baptism" is after Anker, a Swiss who has painted a variety of subjects, all equally intimate and delicate of feeling. "Puritans Going to Church" is after Boughton, one of the best painters here. An American, he likes Longfellow very much, and rightly so; I know three pictures by him inspired by *The Courtship of Miles Standish*. Seeing these pictures has induced me to read *Miles Standish* and *Evangeline* again; I don't know why, but I never realized these poems were so fine as I think them now.

"Le bon frère" is after Van Muyden, a Swiss painter, "encore plus de modestie que de talent" [more modesty than talent as yet]. Mr. Post in The Hague has this picture. If you should ever come to our shop, ask them to show you his (Van Muyden's) "Refectoire." There are no more than four or five copies of this photograph in existence, as the negative is broken. Show it to Mr. Tersteeg some time.

The "Lune de Miel" [The Honeymoon] is after Eugene Feyen, one of the few painters who pictures intimate modern life as it really is, and does not turn it into fashion plates.

I know the photograph "Der Wirthin Töchterlein" [The Landlady's Little Daughter], and I admire it very much. It is a good thing you appreciate Bourguereau. Not everybody is capable of perceiving the good and the beautiful as keenly as you do.

And now I am going to stop; I enclose another picture of autumn, this one by Michelet.

I hope you will be able to read this; I have written on without considering that one must take care a letter is intelligible. À Dieu; the best of luck to you all; many kind regards to all at the Poten, and any other friends you may meet.

Vincent

[Enclosure]

Je vois d'ici une dame, je la vois marcher pensive dans un jardin peu étendu, et défleuri de bonne heure, mais abrité, comme on en voit derrière nos falaises en France, ou les dunes de la Hollande. Les arbustes exotiques cont déjà rentrés dans la serre. Les feuilles tombées dévoilent quelques statues. Luxe d'art qui contraste un peu avec la très-simple toilette de la dame, modeste, grave, où la soie noire (ou grise) s'égayé à peine d'un simple ruban lilas...

Mais ne l'ai-je pas vue déjà aux musées d'Amsterdam ou de La Haye? Elle me rapelle une dame de Phillippe de Champagne (n.v. au Louvres) qui m'était entrée dans le coeur, si candide, si honnête, suffisamment intelligente, si simple pourtant, sans finesse pour se démêler des ruses du monde. Cette femme m'est restée trente années, me revenant obstinément, m'inquiétant, me faisant dire "Mais comment se nommait elle? Qui lui est-il arrivé? A-t-elle eu un peu de bonheur? Et comment se nommait s'est elle tirée de la vie?"

[From here I see a lady, I see her walk pensively in a not very large garden, bereft of its flowers early in the season, but sheltered, as you see them behind our cliffs in France or the dunes of Holland. The exotic shrubs have already been put back in the conservatory. The fallen leaves reveal a number of statues. An

artistic luxury which contrasts with the lady's very simple, modest, dignified dress, of which the black (or grey) silk is almost imperceptibly brightened by a lilac ribbon.

But haven't I seen her already in the museums of Amsterdam or The Hague? She reminds me of the lady by Philippe de Champagne (N.B. in the Louvre), who took my heart, so candid, so honest, sufficiently intelligent, yet simple, without the cunning to extricate herself from the ruses of the world. This woman has remained in my mind for thirty years, persistently coming back to me, making me say: "But what was she called? What has happened to her? Has she known some happiness? And how has she overcome the difficulties of the world?"]

- JULES MICHELET, "Les aspirations de l'automne"