

Letter 042  
Paris, 11 October 1875

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter I received this morning. This time, I would like to write you in a way I seldom do. I propose in particular to tell you in detail how I live here.

As you know, I live in Montmartre. In the same building a young Englishman has his lodging, he is also employed at the store. He is 18 years old; he is the son of a London dealer of paintings. He had never left his paternal home before he came here, and he was very rough-hewn during the first weeks of his stay. He eats six to eight sous worth of bread morning noon and night (N.B. bread sold in Paris is very good) and supplements his meals with several pounds of apples or pears. He is as skinny as a toothpick, he has two rows of solid teeth, big red lips, twinkling eyes, a pair of big ears which stick out from his head, a razor-cut pate (black hair), etc. At first everybody laughed at this young chap, even I. But bit by bit I grew to like him, and I assure you that at the moment I am glad to have his company in the evenings.

He has a naïve and unspoiled heart and he is very good at his work at the store. Every evening, we go home together, we eat a little in my room, and then I read aloud, every evening, mostly from the Bible. We would like to read it from one end to the other. In the mornings, usually between five and six, he comes to wake me up, we have breakfast together in my room, and we leave about 8 for the store.

Lately, he is eating a bit more reasonably and he is now collecting prints, which I am helping him to do.

Yesterday we went to Luxembourg together, and I showed him the pictures that I like the most. In truth, the simple people know things better than the intelligent ones.

Breton	Alone, Benediction of the Harvest, Recall of the Gleaners
Brion	The Pilgrims of St. Odille, Noah
Bernier	Fields in winter
Cabat	Pond, and Autumn Evening
Émile Breton	Winter Evening
Bodmer	Fontainebleau
Millet	Church at Gréville
Daubigny	Spring and Autumn
François	The End of Winter, The Churchyard
Gleyre	Lost Illusions
Hébert	Christ in the Garden of Olives, and Malaria
Rosa Bonheur	Ploughing, etc.

Also the picture (I cannot recall the name) of a convent where the monks receive a stranger and suddenly perceive that it is Jesus. On the wall of the convent is written, "Man proposes and God disposes," "He that receiveth you receiveth me, he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."

At the store, I do all the work that is given into my hands. Old son, we do this work all our lives, give me the power to consecrate my strength.

Did you do what I advised you to do, get rid of the works of Michelet, Renan, etc.? I think this would give you peace of mind. However, do not forget the piece by Michelet about the woman's portrait by Ph. De Champaigne; similarly, do not forget Renan. But throw away their works. "If you have found honey, mind that you do not eat too much, and become disgusted", you read in the book of Proverbs, or somewhere like that. Do you know Erckmann-Chatrian: Le Conscrit, Waterloo, and most of all L'Ami Fritz and Madame Thérèse? Read these works, if you can find them. A change of diet stimulates the appetite (provided that we take care to look for a plain food, because it is not written for nothing: Give us this day our daily bread), and the bow cannot always be kept bent.

I hope you will pardon my telling you these things. I know you are intelligent enough to find them out for yourself. Don't find everything all right. Learn to distinguish for yourself between what is relatively good and evil, and let that feeling show you the way under God's guidance, for boy, we need God's guidance so much. Look for light and freedom, and do not ponder too deeply over the evils of the world.

Write again soon and in a little more detail. My compliments to everybody, especially to Mr. Tersteeg and family, and be as happy as you can. À Dieu, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent