

Letter 069
Welwyn, 17 June 1876

Dear Theo,

On Monday last, I travelled from Ramsgate to London. That is quite a stroll, the moment that I started on my way, it became very hot, and the same heat waited for me on my arrival at Canterbury. That evening, I pushed on a little bit too long; finally I halted in a place where there were many beech trees and some elms at the edge of a pond; there I rested for a while. The following morning at half past three, when the birds started singing to salute the first light of dawn, I started off again. Ah! That was a good walk!

At midday I had made Chatham, where one can see in the distance, in the middle of partial flooding of low-lying meadows, the Thames where the boats go; I thought the weather was always grey in these parts.

It was there that I met a cart, which took me a few miles further, but then the driver went into an inn, and as I supposed I would have to wait a long time, I continued on my way. I arrived at the fall of night in the familiar suburbs of London and I wound my way through the town by long, long 'roads'. I stayed two days in London, I walked many times from one place to another in the city to make certain visits, particularly to a pastor to whom I had already written. I have enclosed a copy of this letter, I sent it to you to let you know that I started to write with the sentiment of "Father, I am not worthy" and "Father, have pity on me".

If I find work it will tend towards a position between clergyman and missionary in the suburbs of London, mainly to the working class population.

Don't breathe a word to anyone about this new idea, Theo. My salary at Mr. Stokes's is probably very small, just enough for room and board, then a few hours of freedom to give particular lessons; if there is no free time to spare, I earn all in all eight pounds per year.

I continue with my story. I stayed one night with Mr. Reid, the following night with Mr. Gladwell, where they showed great gentleness toward me. Mr. Gladwell kissed me goodnight that evening and it did me good; may it be given to me in the future to prove my friendship for his son now and then. I wanted to go on to Welwyn that very evening, but they kept me back literally by force because of the pouring rain.

However, when it began to let up a little about four o'clock in the morning, I set off for Welwyn.

First a long walk from one end of the city to the other, about ten miles (twenty minutes walking each mile).

I arrived at five o'clock in the afternoon at our sister's house, I was happy to see her. She looks well, and her room has Good Friday, Christ in the Garden of Olives, Mater Dolorosa, etc. not framed, but surrounded by ivy, surely very pleasing.

My boy, you will think on reading my letter to the pastor: "He is not so bad, he's good!" But I am sure he is. Whatever he may be, think of him once in a while. A firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

[Enclosed letter.]

Reverend Sir,

A clergyman's son who, because he has to work for his living, has neither the time nor the money to keep up studies at King's College, and is in any case already a few years older than is usual for those who go there and has not yet even started the preliminary studies in Latin and Greek, would, all this notwithstanding, be very glad to find a position connected with the church, albeit the position of a university-educated clergyman is beyond his reach.

My father is a clergyman in a village in Holland. I went to school when I was 11, staying on until I was 16. I then had to choose a profession and did not know which to choose. Through the kind offices of one of my uncles, a partner in the firm of Goupil & Cie, art dealers and publishers of engravings, I obtained a position in his business in The Hague. I was employed in this business for 3 years. From there I went to London to learn English and, after 2 years, moved on to Paris. Various circumstances have, however, compelled me to leave Messrs. G. & Cie., and for the past two months I have been teaching at Mr. Stokes's school in Ramsgate. But since my aim is a position in connection with the church, I must look elsewhere.

Although I have not been trained for the church, perhaps my past experience of travels, of living in different countries, of associations with various people, poor and rich, religious and irreligious, of work of various kinds, days of manual labour followed by days of office work, &c., perhaps also my ability to speak various languages, may in part make up for my not having been to a university.

But the reason I would much sooner give for commending myself to you is my innate love of the church and everything to do with the church, which may lie dormant from time to time but always reawakens; and, if I may say so, although with a sense of great inadequacy and imperfection: the Love of God and of man.

And also, when I think of my past life and of my father's house in the village in Holland, a sense of:
'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son: make me as one of thy hired servants. Be merciful to me a sinner.'

When I lived in London I often attended your church and have not forgotten you. Now I would ask for your recommendation as I look for a position, and also that you keep your fatherly eye on me should I find such a position. I have been left a good deal to myself, and I believe your fatherly eye will do me good, now that:

The early dew of morning
has passed away at noon.

Thanking you in anticipation for what you may feel able to do for me...