

Letter 081  
Isleworth, 17-18 November 1876

Dear Father and Mother,

Thank God that Theo has almost recovered, and bravo that he has already walked with Father in the snow to the Heike [a hamlet near Etten]; how I wish I could have been together with you both. It is already late, and early tomorrow morning I must go to London and Lewisham, for Mr. Jones. I hope to visit the Gladwells, and it will be late in the evening when I come back.

Where do Mr. Jones and others get their incomes? Yes, I have often thought about it myself. A saying here is: God takes care of those who work for Him. I am longing to speak and consult with you about this question.

And then you asked me if I still teach the boys; generally I do so until one o'clock in the afternoon, and then after one o'clock I go out for Mr. Jones, or sometimes give lessons to Mr. Jones's children or to a few boys in town. And then in the evening and between times I write in my sermon book.

Last Sunday I was at Turnham Green early to teach at Sunday school – it was a real English rainy day. In the morning Mr. Jones preached about the woman of Samaria and then there was Sunday school again. I have to teach it on weekdays too; there are children enough, but the difficulty is to get them together regularly. Mr. Jones and his boys and I went in the afternoon to take tea with the sexton, a shoemaker who lives in one of the suburbs. The view from the windows there reminded me of Holland; a grass field almost turned into a swamp by the pouring rain, around it rows of little red houses with their gardens and the glow of the lighted lamps. In the evening Mr. Jones preached a very beautiful sermon about Naarman the Syrian, and then came the walk home.

Last Thursday Mr. Jones made me take his turn, and my text was: "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and together such as I am, except these bonds."

Next Sunday evening I have to go to a Methodist church in Petersham. Petersham is a village on the Thames, twenty minutes beyond Richmond. I do not know what text I shall take, The Prodigal Son or Psalm 42:1. In the morning and afternoon there is Sunday school at Turnham Green.

And so the weeks go by and we are approaching winter and a merry Christmas. Tomorrow I must be in the two remotest parts of London: in Whitechapel – that very poor part which you have read about in Dickens; and then across the Thames in a little steamer and from there to Lewisham. Mr. Jones's children have recovered, but now three of the boys have got measles.

This week I had to go with one of the boys to Acton Green for Mr. Jones – that grass plot which I saw from the sexton's window. It was very muddy there, but it was lovely when darkness fell and the fog began to rise and one saw the light of a little church in the middle of the plain. To our left were the railway tracks on a rather high embankment; a train passed by and the red glow of the engine and the rows of lights in the carriages were a beautiful sight in the twilight. To our right a few horses were grazing in a meadow surrounded by a hedge of hawthorn and dotted with blackberry bushes.

While I sit writing to you in my little room and it is so very, very quiet, I look at your portraits and the prints on the wall – "Christus Consolator," "Good Friday," "Women Visiting the Tomb," "The Old Huguenot," "The Prodigal Son" by Ary Scheffer, "A Little Boat on a Stormy Sea," and an etching, "An Autumn Landscape," a view of a heath that Harry Gladwell gave me on my birthday. And when I think of you all and of everything here, of Turnham Green, Richmond and Petersham, then I feel, Hear, O Lord, the prayer that my mother said for me when I left my parent's roof, "Father, I pray thee not that thou shouldest take him out of the world but that thou shouldest keep him from the evil," and "O Lord, make me my father's brother, a Christian and a Christian labourer. Finish Thy work in me that Thou hast begun and unite us, O Lord, firmly together and may the love for Thee strengthen that bond more and more."

And now good night to you both and to Theo and Willemien and Cor. I am looking forward to hearing from you again. Good night, I must start early tomorrow morning, a handshake from

Your most affectionate Vincent

[Written underneath in pencil]

From the other end of London.

Goodbye, everyone! I started this morning at four o'clock, now it is two. I have just passed through the old cabbage fields – now for Lewisham. One sometimes asks, how shall I ever reach my destination? À Dieu.