

Dear Theo,

You remember that night at Dordrecht when we walked together through the town, around the Great Church and through so many streets, and along the canals – in which the old houses and the lights from the windows were reflected? You spoke then about the description of a day in London by Théophile Gautier, the coachman for a wedding party in front of the door of a church on a stormy foggy day: I saw it all before me. If that struck you, you will also appreciate the pages I enclose. [Lamartine's Cromwell. Vincent copied three full pages, part of which is added to this letter.] I read them on a very stormy day last week: it was in the evening, and the sunset threw a ruddy glow on the gray evening clouds, against which the masts of the ships and the row of old houses and trees stood out; and everything was reflected in the water, and the sky threw a strange light on the black earth, on the green grass with daisies and buttercups, and on the hushes of white and purple lilacs, and on the elderberry bushes of the garden in the yard.

In London I had read that book of Lamartine's, and I was very much struck by it; the last pages especially made a deep impression on me again. Tell me what you think of it. These places mentioned in it – Hampton Court with its avenues of linden trees full of rookeries; Whitehall overgrown with ivy at the back; and the square bordering St. James's Park where one can see Westminster Abbey – they are all before me, and the weather and the gloomy atmosphere: cela m'empêche de dormir. [It keeps me from sleeping.]

Were you in Etten Sunday? I certainly hope so, and that you had a pleasant day. I gathered this from a sentence in the last letter from Etten, "We expect Theo probably next Sunday."

This evening I have to go to Uncle Stricker's. Went to early service yesterday morning, heard a sermon on the text: "Do you want to be healthy?" – how they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. After that I heard Uncle Stricker in the well-known Amstel Church on II Cor. 4: I 8: For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Toward the end there was a passage in which he spoke with much rapture and exclaimed, "But love remains"; how we are tied together by God with bonds that are in His hand, and in them lies our strength, for they are old and do not easily break.

I am very busy, so à Dieu; perhaps I will continue this letter tonight, a handshake from

Your loving brother,

Vincent

Today when I passed the flower market on the Singel, I saw something very pretty. A peasant was standing selling a whole bunch of pots with all kinds of flowers and plants; ivy was behind it, and his little girl was sitting between it all, such a child as Maris would have painted, so simple in her little black bonnet, and with a pair of bright, smiling eyes. She was knitting; the man praised his ware – and if I could have spared the money I should have liked only too well to buy some – and he said, pointing unintentionally at his little daughter also, "Doesn't it look pretty?"

5 June

Yesterday evening I was at Stricker's. M. M., who is engaged to Paul, was also there; she reminds me of Ellen in The Wide, Wide World. Her father was a very clever clergyman, an extraordinary man, an intimate friend of Uncle Stricker's. We walked along the Buitenkant and the embankment near the East railway. I cannot describe to you how beautiful it was there in the twilight. Rembrandt, Michel and others have sometimes painted it: the ground dark, the sky still lit by the glow of the setting sun, the row of houses and steeples against it, lights in the windows everywhere, and the whole mirrored in the water. And the people and the carriages like little black figures, such as one sees sometimes in a Rembrandt. We were so struck by the beauty of it that we began to talk about many things. I sat up writing late last night and was up again early this morning, it was such beautiful weather. At night there is also a beautiful view of the yard; everything is dead quiet then, and the lamps are burning and the starlit sky is over it all.

"When all sounds cease, God's voice is heard under the stars."

Write me soon and tell me if that part about Cromwell isn't taken from the very heart of London.

Youth of Cromwell [Quoted in French]

The family soon lost its wealth. He retired to a small estate he possessed amidst the marshes of Huntingdon. The barren, rough and morose character of this shore district, the monotonous horizon, the muddy river, the clouded skies, the meager trees, the infrequent cottages, the rude habits of the inhabitants, were such as to make the young man's nature concentrated and gloomy. The soul of a land seems to enter into that of man. Often a lively, ardent and

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profound faith seems to emanate from a poor and dismal country; like country, like man. The soul is a mirror before it becomes a home.

One domestic grief overtook Cromwell, touching him deeply in this period of growing ascendancy in his life; one is astonished to see tears in the eyes of a man who had watched, dry-eyed, the unfortunate Charles I being torn from the arms of his children to die. He lost his ninety-four-year-old mother...