

Letter 102  
Amsterdam, Sunday 15 July 1877

Dear Theo,

I am eager to write you again – you will also let me hear from you soon, I hope?

This morning I went to the early service, the text was Ephesians 5:14, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” It was raining as I left the house, and also when the service was over; but during the sermon the sun was shining brightly through the windows.

Father had an early-morning service today at Etten, and after that he had to go to Zundert. Later on I heard good Uncle Stricker in the Oudezijds Chapel on the text, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” – namely, a warning against attaching too much importance to outward forms and ceremonies without true and sincere religious feeling in the heart and, on the other hand, life without belief in anything more than material things. There were very few people in church, except the boys and girls from the orphanage in their red and black clothes; they filled a great part of the little old church.

When you come here again, I hope to take you there someday. The Oudezijds Chapel is on a very narrow street called the Old Teertuinen, and also the Warmoes Straat. It is a very curious part of town, and reminds one of the heart of London – Bookseller’s Row, for instance.

May it be given to me in time to preach as well as many I have heard in the past and hear now. I am trying my utmost to prepare myself for it. I am very busy making a summary of the Reformation; the history of those days is quite stimulating and intriguing.

Last week I spent an evening with the old Reverend Mr. Meyes and met his son, the Reverend Mr. Jeremie Meyes, with his wife, a daughter of Professor Tilanus, and two of their sons; one is here at the gymnasium, and the other is studying to be an engineer. The latter has helped to build those sheds here in the yard (in which they build the ships, like we saw with Uncle that afternoon when you were here) and also he has helped to build that new Kattenburg bridge. It was a pleasant evening and we spoke about many things abroad. He [the Reverend Mr. Jeremie Meyes] is a very gifted man, and has great talent and great faith. I heard him in the West Church. I watched him leave the pulpit and pass through the church after the sermon; that tall, noble figure, that pale, tired face and the noble head, and the hair already mixed with grey, made a deep impression upon me. It seems to me a blessing to be tired from your work in that way.

Perhaps you will go to Scheveningen today. I hope you will have a pleasant Sunday – how I should like to be with you in your little room. I heard from home that you will probably soon visit Mauve’s house in the dunes and stay there overnight. In my mind’s eye I can see you sitting there, and also know what you two will be taking about.

Mendes told me last week about a very interesting part of the city – namely, the outskirts extending from the Leidsche Poort, near the Vondel Park, to the Dutch Railway Station. It is full of windmills and sawmills, workmen’s cottages with little gardens, also old houses, everything; it is very populous, and the quarter is cut up by many small canals and waterways full of boats and all kinds of picturesque bridges, etc. It must be splendid to be a clergyman in such a quarter.

The study is very difficult, boy, but I must keep on.

If you see Mauve and Jet one of these days, give them my best regards. Have a good time there and say hello to the dunes and the sea for me. And tell Mauve that the photograph of his drawing, “The Plough in the Field,” is hanging in my little room, and reminds me of him every day.

Are you reading a nice book? There are so many books I should like to read, but I must not. If you can get John Halifax, read it again. Although it’s depressing to read, we must not say, “This is not for me,” for it is good to keep your faith in everything that is good and noble. I heard that the man whose life and character inspired the author of this book died not long ago; his name was Harper, and he was the head of a large publishing firm in London.

Once I met the painter Millais on the street in London, just after I had been lucky enough to see several of his paintings. And that noble figure reminded me of John Halifax. Millais once painted “The Lost Mite,” a young woman who early in the morning, at dawn, is looking for the mite she has lost (there is also an engraving of “The Lost Mite”), and not the least beautiful of his paintings is an autumn landscape, “Chill October.”

À Dieu, boy, a firm handshake in thought and believe me, with kind regards to the family,

Your loving brother, Vincent

The room in the Trippenhuys where Rembrandt’s “Drapers’ syndicate” is hung is open again. Coming from church, I went inside for a moment; right next to the Rembrandt hangs a portrait by Van der Helst.