

Dear Theo,

Enclosed is a short note for A. and I.; please add a word and send them in time for Mother's birthday. (I must tell you that I am sending them to you because I'm afraid of having no stamps by that time, except for a letter home. If you should write later, these can also wait.)

Uncle Jan left for Helvoirt on Saturday and intends to stay away until September 10. It is very quiet here in the house now, but still the days go by rapidly, as I have lessons daily and must prepare for them. I wish the days were longer so I could accomplish more, for it is not always easy work, and even continuous plodding gives but meager satisfaction. Well, I am convinced that what is difficult is right, even though one sees no results.

I am also copying the whole of the Imitation of Christ from a French edition which I borrowed from Uncle Cor; the book is sublime, and he who wrote it must have been a man after God's own heart. A few days ago such an irresistible longing for that book came over me – perhaps because I so often look at the lithograph after Ruyperez – that I asked Uncle Cor to lend it to me; now I am copying it in the evening: it means much work, but I have finished most of it, and I know no better way to study it. I also bought Bossuet's Oraisons Funebres once more, for 40 cents. I feel it is necessary to work as hard as I can. I often think of that phrase, "The days are full of evil"; one must arm oneself and try to be filled with as much goodness as possible in order to be prepared and be able to resist. As you know, it is no small undertaking, and we do not know the result; but at all events I will try to fight the good fight. Thomas a Kempis' book is peculiar; in it are words so profound and serious that one cannot read them without emotion, almost fear – at least if one reads with a sincere desire for light and truth – the language has an eloquence which wins the heart because it comes from the heart. You have a copy, haven't you?

There is something I cannot resist telling you, Theo – you, from whom I have no secrets – there is much, much that is good and beautiful in Uncle Jan's, Uncle Cor's and Uncle Vincent's lives, but still something is lacking. Don't you think that when the first two sit together, as often happens of an evening, in that lovely, restful room which you also know, it is a sight which warms the heart, especially if one looks at them with love, as I do? And yet "The Men of Emmaus" by Rembrandt is even more beautiful, and it might have been the same. Now it is almost so, but not quite. Father possesses what they lack, "It is good to be a Christian, to try to be one, to be one entirely, for that is Eternal Life." Now I will even go further and say, What they lack, their homes and families also lack. Perhaps you will think or speak of the man who saw the mote in his brother's eye and did not see the beam in his own, and then I will answer, That may be so, but this at least is true, "It is good to be a Christian, to try to be one, to be one entirely." A few days ago I spent an evening in the study of the Reverend Mr. Meyes, not the old clergyman, but the one whose appearance in church struck me so. It was a pleasant evening; he asked me a few questions about London which I could answer well, and he told me of his work and the blessing which apparently had fallen to his share. In the room hung a very good charcoal drawing representing a religious meeting he used to hold in his home on winter evenings; it was very well done – Israëls would have liked it. Those who attended were workmen and their wives. You also find these kinds of subjects in Doré's book on London.

I also spent an evening at Stricker's, and last Sunday I heard Uncle preach on I Corinthians 3 : 14, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." It often seems to me that I already feel a blessing and a change in my life.

How I should love to show you several things here in the Jewish quarter, and also in other places. I often think of De Groux: there are interiors with woodchoppers, carpenters, grocery stores, forges, chemists, etc., etc., which would have delighted him. This morning I saw a big dark wine cellar and warehouse, with the doors standing open; for a moment I had an awful vision in my mind's eye – you know what I mean – men with lights were running back and forth in the dark vault. It is true you can see this daily, but there are moments when the common everyday things make an extraordinary impression and have a deep significance and a different aspect. De Groux knew so well how to put it in his pictures and especially in his lithographs.

Your letter arrived just as I was writing this. Many thanks. I was greatly surprised to read that Gladwell was at The Hague; give him my best love. Oh! how I should like to see him here; I immediately sent him a postcard asking him to try his very best to come to Amsterdam – do try to persuade him also. You know yourself how interesting it is for a foreigner to see the city, the yard and this quarter, too – and how I should like to show him around as much as I can. I long to see the brown eyes that could sparkle so when we looked at pictures by Michel and others, and talked about "many things." Yes, it would be fine if he came and stayed as long as possible, and I think that we should feel that our former friendship was sincere and not superficial; as time goes by one does not always continue to feel it so strongly, "but it is not dead, but it sleepeth," and it would be good to see each other again to wake and bring it to life

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again. Enclosed is a little note for him; I don't think he should leave Holland without seeing the Trippenhuis and Van der Hoop's; try your best to make him come, at least if it is possible and he would like to.

I must sit up as long as I can keep my eyes open tonight, so I will close this, but if I have any time left, I will fill up the page later.

I hope your acquaintance with Gladwell will deepen and leave some good behind; it is a long time since I saw him last.

Á Dieu, a handshake in thought, have a good time, greet Gladwell for me, and believe me always,

Your loving brother,

Vincent