

Dear Theo,

One sentence in your letter of November 6 requires a separate answer.

You say, "In the present case I should not lose courage if I were you, but I would let the thing rest with regard to people whom it does not concern. I think this attitude will astonish those who now interfere, and it will disarm them." It would have been new to me if I had not already tried these tactics more than once before and found them one of the best weapons. Now, however, I can only say, Yes, I knew as much, but now, after that, what more do you know? For you must not forget that there are cases where it is not always sufficient to be on the defensive, especially when the strategy of the enemy is based on the somewhat rash supposition that at the most I certainly cannot go any further than wait in a defensive attitude.

Theo, if you were in love with the same sort of love as mine – and, boy, why should you ever have another kind of love? – then you would discover something quite new in yourself. Such as you and I, who generally associate with men and who attend to business of some kind – you, in a large way and I, in a small – well, we are used to doing most of our work with our brains – with a certain diplomacy, with a certain sharp calculation. But now fall in love, and look, you will perceive to your astonishment that there is still another force that urges us on to action – and that is the heart.

We are sometimes rather inclined to ridicule it, but the truth cannot be denied; especially when in love, one says, I do not go to my head to ask my duty in this case, I go to my heart.

Now, I cannot believe that you would expect me to consider either my parents or her parents as persons "who have nothing to do with it," etc. On the contrary, I cannot suppose that it would be superfluous to talk it over with them now and then. Especially when, as is now really the case, their attitude is neither positive nor negative; that is to say, they do nothing openly, for or against. I do not understand how they can bear this, it is like being neither cold nor warm, and that is always a miserable thing.

Oh, how much precious time is perhaps lost in this way? If you would rather be counted among the persons "whom it does not concern and with whom I should let the thing rest," then I would still talk to you about it now and then, even against your will – in exactly the same way as I do now with Father and Mother and Uncle and Aunt Stricker. When I spoke of it to Father this summer, he interrupted me with an anecdote about somebody who had eaten too much and another who had eaten too little. It was quite inappropriate, and it was a story with no beginning or end, so that I thought, What's wrong with Father?

It was perhaps from nervousness, as he had not expected it, yet it was under his very eyes, so to speak, that she and I had walked together and spoken together for days and weeks. Now, in this mood, are those eyes clear seeing? I think not. If I were hesitant, doubtful, halting between two opinions, I might agree with Father's and Mother's attitude. But now it is quite different. This, my love, has made me resolute, and I feel energy – new, healthy energy in me. Just the way everybody else who really loves feels. So what I want to say, brother, is no more nor less than that I firmly believe that any man is unconscious of some peculiar great hidden force, deeply hidden in him, until sooner or later he is awakened by meeting someone of whom one says, "She, and no other."

If a man has more ambition and thirst for money than love, in my opinion there is something wrong with him. If a man only has love and does not know how to earn money, there is something wrong with him, also. Within us ambition and greed are partners in their hostility to love. The germs of the two forces are inside all of us from the beginning; they develop later on in life, generally in unequal proportions; one is love, the other, ambition and greed!

But at our age we, you and I, can do something to keep the things within us orderly.

My opinion is that when it develops, when it comes to its full development, love produces better characters than the opposite passion: Ambition & Co.

But just because love is so strong, generally in our youth (I mean at 17, 18, or 20 years) we are not strong enough to keep it going straight! The passions are the little ship's sails, you know. And he who gives way entirely to his feelings in his twentieth year catches too much wind and his boat takes in too much water and – and he sinks – or comes to the surface again after all.

On the contrary, he who hoists the Ambition & Co. sail and no other on his mast, sails through life on a straight course without accidents, without wavering until – until at last, at last, circumstances arise which make him think, I haven't enough sail. Then he says, I would give everything I possess for another square of sail, and I have not got it. He is in despair.

But now he remembers that he possesses another power which he can use; he thinks of the sail which he has despised until now, which he had put away with the ballast. And it is this sail that saves him. Love's sail must save him; without hoisting it, he cannot arrive.

The first case – that of the man whose little boat capsized when he was twenty years old, and sank, did it not? ...no, recently it came to the surface again – is really that of your brother Vincent, who writes to you as “one who has been down, yet came up again.”

What kind of love was it that I felt when I was twenty? It is difficult to define – my physical passions were very weak then, perhaps because of a few years of great poverty and hard work. But my intellectual passions were strong, meaning that without asking anything in return, without wanting any pity, I wanted only to give, but not to receive. Foolish, wrong, exaggerated, proud, rash – for in love one must not only give, but also take; and, reversing it, one must not only take but also give. Whoever deviates either to the right or to the left falls, there is no help for it. So I fell, but it was a wonder that I got up again. What helped me recover my balance more than anything else was reading practical books on physical and moral diseases. I got a deeper insight into my own heart and also into that of others. Gradually I began to love my fellow men again, myself included, and more and more my heart and soul – which for a time had been withered, blighted and stricken through all kinds of great misery – revived. And the more I turned to reality, and mingled with people, the more I felt new life reviving in me, until at last I met her.

It is written, Love thy neighbour as thyself. One can deviate to the right or to the left, but both are bad. I think all in exchange for all is the real true thing – that is it. And now the two extremes; first, to ask everything without giving, second, to ask nothing but give everything. Two equally fatal, bad things, both damned bad.

Of course there are people who advocate one or the other of these extremes: the first produces those members of society which we call rascals, thieves, and usurers, etc., etc.; the second produces Jesuits and Pharisees, male and female – also rascals, you know!

If you tell me, “Take care that you do not get too fond of that ‘never, no, never,’ and you mean by that, take care that you do not give all without taking anything, then you are quite right. My answer is, I made that mistake once: I gave up a girl and she married another, and I went away, far from her, but kept her in my thoughts. Fatal.

But now, grown wiser by experience, I say, I must try if, far from resigning myself, I cannot by strong, patient energy achieve the result which will give me more satisfaction. I will use all my powers to thaw that “never, no, never.”

Theo, in order to prove to you that I can reason quite calmly, though I am in love, I say to you:

If she and I were sentimental and soft-hearted, then we could have married already and great misery would have come of it – poverty, hunger, cold, illness, etc., but, oh, it would still be better for us to be together than not to be together.

If violent passion ruled me and she yielded to it, that passion would cool down – my lendemain de fête [morning after the party] would be desolation and hers, a broken heart.

If she were a coquette and played with a man's heart, and the man did not see through her game, that man would be a fool, but a sublime fool – if a fool can be sublime.

If I wanted her for other motives – money, for instance, or sensuality – and if I thought, She cannot escape me for this or that reason, I would be the damndest of all Jesuits and Pharisees (may I tell you “meanwhile” that it is not so between us two).

If we played at brother and sister, we would be acting like children, and it would be quite out of place.

If she never returned my love, I should probably stay a bachelor always.

If I saw that she loved another man, I should go far, far away. If I saw that she took a man she did not love for his money, I should plead guilty to short-sightedness on my part, and I would say, I have mistaken a picture by Brochart for one by Jules Goupil, a fashion print for a figure by Boughton, Millais or Tissot. Am I as shortsighted as that???

But my eye is like yours, well trained and steady.

But if she and I rise to a new life with renewed energy, then the future is no longer dark.

If she with her lady's hand and I with my draughtsman's fist are willing to work, the daily bread will not be wanting for us, nor for her boy.

If I had had other motives when I proposed to her, she would have despised me, and now she does not despise me.

But my third page is almost full and I still have something to ask. Boy, I must see her face again and speak to her once more; if I do not do it soon, something will happen at the silver wedding which would perhaps

do me great harm. Don't ask me to go into it. If you were in love too, you would understand; because you are not in love, I should not be able to make it clear to you.

Theo, I want money for the trip to Amsterdam; if I have but just enough, I will go. Father and Mother have promised not to oppose this if only I leave them out of the matter, as it were.

Brother, if you send it to me, I will make lots of drawings for you of the Heike, and whatever you want. And they would not get worse if the "never, no, never" began to thaw. For aimer encore is also the best recipe for dessiner encore.

Could you help me with the money, boy? If it is only 20 fr., Father will perhaps give me another 10 (leaving him out of it, "pretending not to know") et alors je décampe plus vite que ça. As-tu compris, mon cher! [and then I'll rush off at a tremendous speed. You understand, old chap!] Crois-moi toujours,
Yours sincerely, Vincent