

Dear Brother,

I have just received your letter. Thanks for your sympathy, thanks for the money "for the ticket." Thanks for your opinion about my drawings, though it is more favourable than I deserve. Continue writing me about my work. Do not fear your remarks will hurt me; I will take such criticism as proofs of sympathy, worth a thousand times more than flattery. You tell me practical things, from you I must learn to become practical; so preach me many a sermon, for I do not refuse to be converted and I am greatly in need of conversion.

I do not think I ever received money more gratefully than those ten guilders from you, for the thought that, if I had to go, I should be unable to, was so unbearable to me; now I have at least one string to my bow. I should have gone long ago if I had only had the ten guilders. However, I must be sure of her being at home when I go. Now I am corresponding continually with our sister Willemien, who is on the lookout and will warn me, for she is going to Haarlem; I shall hear from W. when she goes back to Amsterdam.

Oh, Theo, there is so much depth in her character, but one does not see it at once. She, you and I, we all have an outer bark of lightheartedness, but inside is a trunk of firmer wood, and hers is of a fine grain! Well, we shall see how things go.

If you too should perhaps have a love story, tell me all about it, and trust my discretion. If I were not "one who has been down," but on the contrary one who has always stood firm, I should be worse than useless to you, but as I have been in that mysterious deep well of misery of the heart, there is a shadow of a chance that I may be able to give you some practical advice in some affair of the heart. I go to you for help with my drawings and practical affairs, who knows whether I for my part cannot be of some use to you in relation to some difficulties in love.

For myself I learn much from father Michelet. Be sure to read L'Amour et la Femme, and if you can get it, My Wife and I, and Our Neighbors by Beecher Stowe, or Jane Eyre and Shirley by Curren Bell. Those people can tell you more and better things than I can.

The men and women who may be considered to stand at the head of modern civilization – for instance Michelet and Beecher Stowe, Carlyle and George Eliot and so many others – they call to you:

"Oh, man, whoever you are, with a heart in your bosom, help us to found something real, eternal, true; limit yourself to one profession and love one woman only. Let your profession be a modern one and may you help your wife to attain a modern soul, deliver her from the terrible prejudices which shackle her. Have no doubt of God's help if you do what God wants you to do, and God wants us in these days to reform the world by reforming morals, by renewing the light and the fire of eternal love. By these means you will succeed and at the same time have a good influence on those around you, be the number large or small, according to your circumstances."

In my opinion these are the words that Michelet says to us in general. We are full-grown men now and are standing like soldiers in the rank and file of our generation. We do not belong to the same one as Father and Mother and Uncle Stricker; we must be more faithful to the modern than to the old one – to look back toward the old one is fatal. If the older people do not understand us, it must not upset us, and we must go our own way against their will; later on they will say of their own accord, Yes, you were right after all.

Though perhaps you will now think me rather well informed in some things, in many others, you will find me very stupid and ignorant – alas, in this feverish and hurried modern life we become so one-sided. But should you or I doubt our right to propose to a girl, and should we be doubtful of our success in the end?

No doubt it is presumptuous to be sure of oneself, but one certainly may believe, My soul's anguish will not have been in vain, and I will fight my battle notwithstanding all my own weaknesses and faults; I will fight as well as I can.

Though I fall ninety-nine times, the hundredth time I shall stand. And what are they talking about means of subsistence for, as if I had none! What artist has not struggled and toiled, and what other way is there but struggling and toiling to gain a foothold. And since when has a draughtsman no chance of earning his living?

I began to draw a man busy digging potatoes in a field again. And I put in a little more of the surroundings. Some bushes in the background, and a streak of sky. I cannot tell you, boy, how beautiful that field is! When I have earned a little more money and am able to spend more on models, I tell you I shall make quite different things still.

But it is hard work for the models too, I can tell you. The more so because those I have are not professional models, and perhaps that much better for it. If you ever have a chance to get somebody interested in my work, I think you can now begin to speak about me with some assurance. But in order to do better work, I shall have to spend more on models. Now I spend 20, 25 or 30 cents a day, but I cannot do that every day, and it really is not enough; by

© Copyright 2001 R. G. Harrison

spending a little more, I could make more rapid progress.

Well, this winter I shall not be able to work in the open air with a model, but I can work indoors, and that is beautiful too. Once more, thanks for the money, boy! It is very kind of you and very humane! A warm handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent