

Letter R08  
Sunday evening, 28 May 1882  
138 Schenkweg, The Hague

Amice Rappard,

Thanks<sup>1</sup>. I have just now put my drawings into the package for Amsterdam. There are seven in all. The big one of the two "charity courts" has become quite flat, because I used Bristol board, and the lines have greatly gained in quickness. Then there is the "Florist's Garden"; this I changed the way you suggested, i.e. I studied the side of the ditch more carefully, as well as the water in the foreground, and only now it shows to its full advantage, I think, and expresses "Spring" and a gentle silence.

And then the "Carpenter's Shed" [F 939, JH 150] – taken from the window of my studio – by working on it with pen and ink I have brought a new kind of black into it, and now "the sun is shining," because the lights show up more strongly. Today I was at it quite early, for I wanted to make another one like it, and went to the dunes to draw a fish-drying barn, also seen from a height like the carpenter's shed [F 938, JH 152], and now it is nearly one o'clock in the night, but, thank God, everything is finished, and I can look my redoubtable landlord in the face without fear. And so "ça ira encore" – –

I am so glad to have seen you again, and what you told me of your work interested me very much indeed, I assure you. I should so much like to take a few walks with you in this neighbourhood some time. For undoubtedly you would find a lot of subject matter in those fish-drying barns at Scheveningen for instance. They are enormously Ruysdael-like (I mean that picture of the bleaching fields at Overveen). But perhaps you know The Hague and Scheveningen better than I do. But in case you do not know the "Geest," the "Mud's End," etc., that is to say the Whitechapel of The Hague with all its alleys and courts, I offer to accompany you there, whenever you come to The Hague again.

I have found two more wood engravings for you, one by Mrs. Edwards and the other by Green. The latter one is especially beautiful, an artist painting a signboard with people looking on; time: Louis XVI. And I think I also have an extra copy of a fine Rochussen.

It seems to me that, if you wanted to, you could have a much finer collection than I have, but perhaps you have it already. I have never seen your complete collection, only the small Dürers and Holbeins and Du Mauriers and some others. If you should find something interesting in this line, please let me know.

Do you know "The Wayfarers" by Fred Walker? It is a large etching of a blind old man led by a boy along a frozen gravel road, with the ditch along with there is copse-wood covered with glazed frost, on a winter evening. It certainly is one of the most sublime creations in this style, with a very peculiar, modern sentiment, perhaps less powerful than Dürer in his "Knight, Death and Devil," but perhaps even more intimate, and certainly as original and sincere.

It is a pity that the artists here know so little of their English colleagues. Mauve, for instance, was quite thrilled when he saw Millais' landscape "Chill October," but for all that they don't believe in English art, and they look upon it in too superficial a manner, I think. Over and over again Mauve says, "This is literary art," but all the while he forgets that English writers like Dickens and Eliot and Currer Bell, and of the French, for instance, Balzac, are so astonishingly "plastic," if I may use the expression, that their work is just as powerful as, for instance, a drawing by Herkomer or Fildes or Israëls.

Speaking for myself, I hate skepticism just as much as sentimentality; I do not want to suggest that the artists here are skeptics or cynics, but sometimes they seem to be, and take on a certain air of it, whereas confronted with nature they are as serious and devout as can be. However, I often catch myself making the same mistake, after which I lapse into sentimentality on the rebound, more than I ever intend to, so that I have hardly a right to criticize them.

How much that is beautiful – in the sense of picturesque – is disappearing these days! The other day I read something by the son of Charles Dickens; he said, "If my father were to come back, he would find little of the London he described, the 'old' London is disappearing – is being 'sanified.'" And in our country it is just the same – those nice little courts – they are being replaced by rows of houses, in the highest degree unpicturesque, unless they are still being built, for then they are, what with the sheds and scaffolding and workmen, very pleasant to look at. For instance, there is a quarter behind Bazar Street and Laan [Avenue] van Meerdervoort where I have seen beautiful things: building plots being dug up or levelled, sheds, wooden huts, hoardings, etc., etc., whatever you like.

Rather interesting too are the public soup kitchens and under all circumstances the third-class waiting rooms. If I did not have to make city views for a living, I would do nothing but figure drawings these days, but I have not found anybody who would buy them, and regularly I have to pay for models, though now and then I can get people to pose for nothing.

I am very much pleased with the model I have; I mean that woman who was in my studio when you were here, for she is learning more every day, and understands me. For instance, when something goes wrong and I fly into a rage and get up and say, "Damn it, it's all wrong!" or something even worse than that, she does not take it as a personal affront, as of course most others would, but lets me calm down and start all over again. And she undergoes the tedious work of finding the right light and the right pose patiently. So I think her a honey. If I want to ascertain the height of a figure out-of-doors or to fix the right position of a little figure on a drawing I am working on in the open air, as, for instance, the way a figure stands out against the background of a fishing boat on the beach, and where the light touches it, I have only to say, "Be there at such and such a time," and she is there.

Oh, there is gossip enough, because I am always in her company, but why should that bother me? – I never had such a good assistant as this ugly (???), faded woman. In my eyes she is beautiful, and I find in her exactly what I want; her life has been rough, and sorrow and adversity have put their marks upon her – now I can do something with her.

When the earth is not ploughed, you can get no harvest from it. She has been ploughed – and so I find more in her than in a crowd of unploughed ones.

I hope you will write me soon again, and if you agree, I should like to correspond regularly, as far as our respective tasks permit, provided we warn each other as soon as our "practical talk" lapses into unpracticality, and without getting angry at such a warning, as was the case with Mr. Tersteeg, as I told you.

Tomorrow I hope to go into the dunes, to the same fish-drying barns. The other day I read that big book about Millet, written by his friend Sensier; it is very interesting, and if you have not read it, I strongly recommend it. There is much in it that only Sensier could know, because he was Millet's intimate friend; one finds absolutely new things in it, at least it was this way with me, though I have read quite a number of things about Millet.

Well, goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

1. See letter 202 to Theo. "I have received 2.50 guilders from him (Rappard), because he saw a tear in one of the drawings and said, You must have that repaired."