

Letter R09
The Hague, 4 or 5 June 1882

Amice Rappard,

Herewith I am returning the 2.50 guilders you were so kind as to lend me. I got a letter about my drawings, but received even less than I expected, although I did not expect more than 30 guilders for the seven sheets. I received 20 guilders with a scolding in the bargain: did I happen to think that such drawings had the slightest commercial value?

I think you will admit that times are not easy, and such experiences (and there are so many worse things – compared with other kinds of treatment, this may be called generous) – and such experiences, I say, are not exactly very encouraging.

Art is jealous, and demands our whole strength; and then, when one devotes all one's powers to it, to be looked upon as a kind of unpractical fellow and all kinds of other things – yes, that leaves a bitter taste in one's mouth.

Oh well, we must try to carry on.

I answered him that I did not pretend to be acquainted with the commercial value of things – that since he as a merchant told me there was no commercial value in them, I did not want to contradict him or to deny it – that I personally attached more importance to the artistic value, and preferred to interest myself in nature instead of calculating prices and fixing commercial values – that if, after all, I spoke to him about the price, and could not give my things gratis for nothing, this was because, like all other human beings, I have my human needs, wanting food and a roof over my head, and so on, and that I considered it my duty to adjust these relatively insignificant matters. But I told him that I did not want to impose my work upon him against his wishes, and that I was willing to send him new drawings, but that I was equally willing to reconcile myself to losing his custom. But I am practically sure that what will happen is that this behaviour of mine will be considered ungrateful, rude and impertinent. And that as soon as the subject is raised, I shall be reproached in this way “Your uncle in Amsterdam, who meant so well by you, and was so kind to you, and gave you such help ... in consequence of your pretentiousness and obstinacy... you treated him so ungratefully that it is your own fault, etc., etc.”

My friend Rappard, in point of fact I don't know whether I ought to laugh or cry over such an incident. I think it so characteristic. Of course – those rich merchants are the decent, honest, righteous, loyal, sensitive fellows, and we, poor devils, who sit and draw, in the country, or in the street, or in the studio, at times very early in the morning, at other times in the dead of night, at times in the blazing sun, at other times in the snow, we are the fellows without finer feelings, without practical minds, and above all, without “distinguished manners.” All right, so be it!

This uncle of mine in Amsterdam also told me with great aplomb that De Groux was really “a bad man.” You will understand how much this altered my opinion of father De Groux. The only thing I said – and to which he has not made an answer up till now, this noble merchant – was this: “Cependant il me semble qu'il s'agit bien moins de gagner que de mériter.” [And yet it seems to me that it is much less a question of earning than of deserving.]

Oh well – I only mention it to open the safety valve of the engine a bit, so to speak. Otherwise I might go on bearing a grudge because of the whole affair, whereas there is nothing I wish more than to stop thinking about it and to forget it altogether – but these fellows always begin by being so nice; at first they are so charming that, when it comes to the point, one is all the more flabbergasted.

Adieu; once more: many thanks, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent