

Letter 229
The Hague, 9 September 1882

Dear Theo,

A few words to congratulate you on September 10 [their Mother's birthday]. I do not know if I have already told you that I have had a letter from Willemien, who describes the country around Nuenen very prettily.

It seems to be very beautiful there.

I have asked her for some particulars about the weavers, who interest me very much. I saw them when I was in the Pas-de-Calais – it was indescribably beautiful. However, I need not paint weavers yet, though I certainly hope to sooner or later.

It is autumn now in the woods, it quite absorbs me.

There are two things in autumn which particularly appeal to me.

There is sometimes a soft melancholy in the falling leaves, in the tempered light, in the haziness of things, in the elegance of the slender stems.

But I also love the other, more sturdy and rugged, side – those strong light effects, for instance, on a man who stands digging and perspiring in the midday sun. Enclosed a few sketches I made this week.

I was thinking again about those workmen on Montmartre whom you described in your last letter. I knew there was somebody who had made those things remarkably well.

I mean A. Lançon. I looked over his wood engravings in my collection – how clever that man is. Among them I found “Gathering of Ragpickers,” “Soup Distribution,” “Snow-Clearing Gang,” which I think are splendid. He is so very productive that they seem simply to drop out of his sleeve.

Speaking of wood engravings, this week I found some beautiful new ones in L'Illustration. It is a series by Paul Renouard: “Les prisons de Paris”; what beautiful things are among them!

At night when I cannot sleep, which often happens, I always look at the wood engravings with renewed pleasure.

Another famous draughtsman is G. Mahoney, who illustrated the Household Edition of Dickens.

I think that painting will teach me to interpret the light better, which should bring a great change in my drawings, too.

How many difficulties have to be overcome before one can express something, but those very difficulties are the stimulus.

Enclosed is another sketch of the woods. I made a large study of it [F 008, JH 182].

I feel such creative power in myself that I know for sure that the time will arrive when, so to speak, I shall regularly make something good every day.

But very rarely a day passes that I do not make something, though it is not yet the real thing I want to make.

Well, sometimes it seems to me that I might soon become productive. I would not be at all surprised if it should happen someday.

I feel that at all events painting will indirectly rouse other things in me too.

Look, for instance, at this little sketch of the potato market on the North Wall [F1091, JH 252]. That bustling of the workmen and the women, with the baskets being loaded from the barge, is very intriguing to look at. Those are the things I should want to draw and paint vigorously – the life and movement in such a scene, and the types of people. But I am not surprised that I cannot do it at once, and that up to now I have often failed when I tried. By painting I shall certainly become more proficient with the colours and better able to take on such a subject.

Well, to have patience and to work on, that is the question. I am sending you the little sketch – I make a lot of them in this way – just to tell you that indeed, things like that scene of the workmen on Montmartre, for instance, preoccupy me too. A general knowledge of the figure is needed for it, which I try to acquire by drawing large figure studies. And I firmly believe that if I continue doing this, I shall learn to express the bustle of labourers in the streets or in the fields.

That potato market is such a curious place. All the poor people from the Geest, from the Ledig Erf, and all those places in the neighborhood, come running out. There are always such scenes – one time it is a barge full of peat, then one with fish, then one with coal or something or other. I have a great many sketches of Ireland by English artists. I think the quarter I'm writing you about must be very much like an Irish town. I always try my best to put all my energy into my work, for my greatest desire is to make beautiful things. But making beautiful things costs trouble and disappointment and perseverance.

I enclose another view of the wood in the evening after the rain. I cannot tell you how splendid that effect was in nature, with the green turned to bronze, and here and there the fallen leaves. I wish you could walk here some evening in this splendid autumn wood. What I bring back from it this year will be just a scanty harvest. However, I hope to bring a few things, and in time it will grow more and more.

In the meantime all my paint has been used up. I sincerely hope that you yourself are not hard up. But at all events I hope you will send the usual allowance around September 10. This afternoon I must go to the potato market again. It is impossible to paint there because of the people; they already give me trouble enough. I wish one could have free access to the houses and sit down by the windows without ceremony. Well, it is Saturday night, and so there will certainly be something characteristic going on worth looking at. I wish you all good luck, know that I think of you daily. Adieu, with a handshake,
Yours sincerely, Vincent