

The Hague, c. 12 – 18 December 1882

Dear Theo,

Though I have nothing particular to tell you, I want to write you again. In contrast to what I wrote you – that I often feel heavy-hearted about many things, that I cannot consider everything progress, etc. – what I said on another occasion is still true, too – that there are things which are worth doing one's utmost for, because whether people like them or not, they have in themselves a *raison d'être*. Blessed is he who has found his work, says Carlyle, and that is decidedly true.

As for myself, when I say I want to make types of the people for the people, of course the state of affairs influences me only indirectly, in so far as to make my work harder or easier, but making the drawings themselves is what preoccupies me the most. And so, in contrast to a feeling of depression, there is the delightful sense of working at something which becomes more and more interesting the deeper one gets into it.

When I told you in my last letter that I sometimes feel as if I were in some kind of prison, I meant only that I cannot do many things which I should like to do – which would only be possible if I had the money – but I certainly did not mean to say that I do not appreciate the present or that I am discontented, far from it. It is just by doing what is within our reach that we have a chance of making progress, so be assured that whenever you find work for me on the magazines yonder, I shall gladly try my best.

Although you write, I do not think the illustrated magazines take a straight road, it needn't be a reason for my being unwilling to work for them. I am only afraid that they wouldn't like my work: if this were because of real faults, I should try to correct them; but if it were because of the conception or sentiment in general, I could do very little to change that.

You will have received the drawing on a smaller scale, and I repeat once more, If you wish it, I will make a series in that size, just as a trial.

I have two new drawings now, one of a man reading his Bible [F 1001, JH 278], and the other of a man saying grace before his dinner, which is on the table [F 1002, JH 281]. Both are certainly done in what you may call an old-fashioned sentiment – they are figures like the little old man with his head in his hands. The “*Bénédicté*” [Grace] is, I think, the best, but they complement each other. In one there is a view of the snowy fields through the window. My intention in these two, and in the first little old man, is one and the same, namely to express the peculiar sentiment of Christmas and New Years Eve. Both in Holland and England this is always more or less religious, in fact, it is that way everywhere, at least in Brittany, and in the Alsace, too. Now one need not agree exactly with the form of that religious sentiment, but if it is sincere, it is a feeling one must respect. And personally, I can fully share it and even need it, at least to a certain extent, just the way I have a feeling for such a little old man and a belief in *quelque chose là-haut*, even though I am not exactly sure how or what it may be. I think it a splendid saying of Victor Hugo's, “*les religions passent, mais Dieu demeure*” [religions pass away, but God remains]; and another beautiful saying of Gavarni's is “*il s'agit de saisir ce qui ne passe pas, dans ce qui passe*” [what matters is to grasp what does not pass away in what passes away.]

One of the things “*qui ne passeront pas*” is the *quelque chose là-haut*” [something on high] and the belief in God, too, though the forms may change – a change which is just as necessary as the renewal of the leaves in spring. But you understand from this that it was not my intention to pay homage to the form in this drawing, but to show that I highly respect the Christmas and New Year's sentiment.

And if it has any sentiment or expression, it is because I feel it myself.

The one thing which is increasingly difficult to decide on is the best working method. There is so much beauty on one side as well as on the other – and at the same time so many things wrong – that sometimes one doesn't know which path to choose. But at all events, one must work on. But I myself do not think I cannot make mistakes – I am too conscious of my many errors to be able to say this or that is the right manner and this or that, the wrong one. That goes without saying. But I am not indifferent, I think it wrong to be so. I think it one's duty to try to do the right thing, even knowing that one cannot go through life without making mistakes, without regret or sorrow. Somewhere I read, Some good must come by clinging to the right.

How can I know whether I shall reach some goal – how can I know beforehand whether the difficulties will or will not be overcome?

One must go on working silently, leaving the result to the future. If one prospect is closed, perhaps another will open itself – there must be some prospect, and a future too, even if we do not know its geography.

Conscience is a man's compass, and though the needle sometimes deviates, though one often perceives irregularities when directing one's course by it, one must still try to follow its direction. I just want to copy for you something which I had in mind when drawing that little old man, though it is not literally applicable to it – for instance, it is not night in the drawing.

THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS

Oft in the stilly night  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
Fond memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.  
The smiles, the tears,  
Of boyhood's years,  
The words of love then spoken;  
The eyes that shone,  
Now dimm'd and gone,  
The cheerful hearts now broken!  
Thus in the stilly night  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
Sad memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.

When I remember all  
The friends, so link'd together,  
I've seen around me fall,  
Like leaves in wintry weather,  
I feel like one  
Who treads alone  
Some banquet hall deserted,  
Whose lights are fled  
Whose garlands dead,  
And all but he departed!  
Then in the stilly night  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me  
Sad memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.

THOMAS MOORE

Well, I hope you will enjoy nature somewhat these days, either in the aspect of the short wintry days, or of the wintry figures. What different people one sees on the streets in winter than in summer. I read your information about Buhot's paper which you sent. If you think it advisable for me to work on it, I should have several sheets, and I think they are made in the right size, so that I could adjust my work to them. I cannot get that paper here, otherwise I should have tried it already. Having read your information, the question also remains, If one takes a photograph of the drawing, which photograph is later transferred to zinc, are only those drawings which have been made on the paper in question suitable for it – can't one reproduce all drawings in black and white, even though they are made on ordinary paper? Further, Can the photographer reduce the size, in case the drawing is too large for the page? I should infer the latter from some American reproductions in Scribner's Magazine. Well, adieu, I hope you will write by the twentieth. With a handshake in thought,  
Yours sincerely, Vincent