

Dear Theo,

Many warm thanks for your letter and the enclosure. I was glad to hear some more details about your patient, the more so as the news seemed to be very favourable.

What you write about her influence on other people is very charming. I believe such things are true, the influence exerted by a good person is sometimes far reaching. Curiously enough, it has been compared to leaven. Two good people – man and woman combined – with the same intentions and object in life, actuated by the same serious purpose, what couldn't they accomplish!

I have often thought of that.

For, by co-operating, the power of goodness is not just doubled, but multiplied many times, as by involution, to use a mathematical term.

Well – your description of the house and its surroundings, the cabstand, is very good; it has a more characteristic setting than your other descriptions of the city; the cabstand is excellent, can I have that personage with the red nose pose for me someday?

I am glad you saw our friend Wisselingh again. So he has come back to Paris – is he still with the firm of Cottier? Will you give him my best regards sometime? If he comes to Holland, a visit from him would give me great pleasure – indeed, he has already promised as much. I wish you could remind him, so that he won't forget. I should like to ask him several things about London. Did he happen to see my lithographs? I should like to renew his acquaintance – I always found much that was attractive in him, and he knows many things, and has original and correct sentiments in things of art; in short, he is a man of character.

The enclosed scratch is from a drawing which I started early this morning, and I worked on it the whole day. Perhaps it is the best one I've made up till now, at least in light and shadow. I am sending you the little sketch because I think you will see from it how much I gained by the change of light in the studio. But it is impossible to work on this paper so that it gets the same values; the sketch hasn't the right proportions, and the drawing has more foreground. This figure is posed against the light, and to render it, one needs more than an outline because, as the light falls from a single window, the modelling becomes stronger, and the values become harmonious and related to each other. From this conception results first, the difficulty of rendering what one has before one's eyes, and second, something else which is rather difficult – that is, the problem of posing a figure and letting the light fall so that it renders the character most completely and strongly. The light in what one sees outside or inside must be analyzed so that one can find the same effect again.

I'm very glad to hear you found the crayon. It didn't arrive in today's mail, however, though you wrote you had sent it. If you have forgotten it, I remind you of it again, and if you have already sent it, it will certainly arrive soon. I have a new stock of lithographic crayon, and am going to combine it with drawing crayon, which I think must give good results.

This week I was very busy drawing wheelbarrows; a little fellow viewed from the back came out quite well, I think. Van der Weele came to see me, and we had a private exhibition of wood engravings, seated cosily on a wheelbarrow, for I was just working with a model. He will begin to collect them too, and will try to get some from the collection of the late Stam, the wood engraver.

I didn't tell you yet that I have almost the whole Graphic complete now, from the very beginning in 1870. Of course, not everything, there is too much chaff – but the best things from it. When one sees, for instance, Herkomer's work, arranged together instead of scattered among many insignificant things, it is, in the first place, easier and pleasanter to look at, but in addition, one learns to distinguish the characteristics of the various masters, and the great difference between the draughtsmen.

How I should love to see something of Lhermitte's.

I can't tell you enough how happy I am with the changes in the studio, and how full I am of all kinds of figures I want to make.

Among the things Van der Weele saw were this winter's studies of heads. I am sure they will be of use to me later on, the same as the other studies. Do you know what pleased me this winter? You remember Van der Weele came to see me months ago, when I was doing studies of diggers, one of which I tried to make a lithograph of. He saw them at the time, but they didn't seem to interest him, definitely not. Now, recently, for the picture on which he's working, he has either had diggers pose for him or has observed them while they were at work – in fact he has studied diggers closely from nature.

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Now, in looking over my studies, when we came to the diggers, he spoke quite differently of them than he did last winter; at least, he wasn't so quick to say, "This or that isn't right." I myself didn't mention them at all this time. But more and more I begin to notice in myself, as well as in others, how often one is mistaken in thinking this or that "isn't so," or "that's not correct" – how often one says it when it doesn't apply, I myself no less than others. One thinks one knows something for sure, and yet if one wants to be honest, one must take it back later.

Your description of the cabstand and the ancient urinal with the posters on it is really very good – it's a real pity you don't draw it.

Speaking of posters, the places where they are pasted up are sometimes a queer parody on the posters themselves, or the reverse.

For instance, to quote one of many, over the entrance of the pawnshop, I saw a poster advertising in large characters

"Prospectus
Hearth and Home"

N.B. – *Hearth and Home* is a magazine, as you perhaps know. I thought it rather good; if one paid more attention, one might find even better ones.

Gavarni once made something of it – it was the entrance to a house, over which was written, "On prend des enfants en sevrage" [Here children are minded]. Standing on the steps were a woman of very unfavorable appearance and a fellow with a cutty in his mouth, obviously the owners of the institution. Against the wall was stuck a poster: "Perdu un enfant, tel et tel" [Lost such and such a child].

Another one is, "Au rendezvous de la fraternité" [At the meeting place of brotherliness], the sign at an inn where a few tipsy fellows are scuffling.

Rappard is going to send a large picture to the Amsterdam exhibition. It represents four tile painters around a table. Indirectly I've heard much good about it. Now, though it's not my intention to do large pictures for exhibitions, still I wouldn't like to do work inferior to Rappard's, for instance.

I even find something animating in the thought that one works in one direction, the other in another, yet there is still mutual sympathy. Competition, when it proceeds from jealousy, is quite a different thing from trying one's best to make the work as good as possible, out of mutual respect. "Les extrêmes se touchent." I do not see any good in jealousy, but I would despise a friendship which did not call for some exertion on both sides to maintain the same level.

The thing I begin to long very much for is to work with more models at a time. To do somewhat more complicated drawings. But the longing for it is not too intense, I have enough to do as it is.

At Van der Weele's I saw the studies for his large picture. Those studies were excellent – conscientiously done, but one who understands a little how studies from nature are made, and knows the difference between these and the picture or ultimate composition, naturally doesn't expect to find the picture in the studies.

No wonder the greatness and unity of the picture isn't in the studies; the studies are made for the figures – either horses or men, it doesn't matter – and the surroundings are neglected; for instance, there isn't enough background or foreground, etc. They do not stand out and are not in their right places as they are in the picture. Does everybody understand this when they look at studies? I hope you will keep it in mind when you see mine, especially when, sooner or later, you see the ones I still have here. This week, for fun, I sketched a few in different proportions, in such a way that I can make them into a whole. The thing which I would call picturesqueness came by itself, simply by stressing a few lines, and washing in a few flat tones with sepia. What I want to say is, don't think that with respect to space I look at nature with a different eye than, for instance, Van der Weele.

Adieu. Write soon again, best wishes,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

In this little sketch you see something which I spoke about at the end of this letter. Now there is no foreground here at all, though in the real study there is a little more of it; but if I combined this study, for instance, with one of the diggers, let's say the one in the lithograph, then a large patch of ground would belong in front, and, for instance, a woody stretch behind, with a bit of sky visible quite high up, just to indicate where the light comes from. So that it would perhaps become a wide composition, and then the figure would be in its surroundings and in its place.

If I put all this into the study itself, the figure would become so small that it would be of no use to me as a serious study of the figure. Believe me, the aspect is not the hardest thing; if my studies are good, I am quite confident of the rest.

Space, atmosphere, and broadness are things which you mustn't think I neglect, but one mustn't begin with them; first the foundation, then the roof follows in time.