

Amice Rappard,

I feel strongly impelled to tell you again how much your visit has stimulated me.¹ I intend to start a number of larger compositions; in fact I've already started one of them. It is a composition of "Peat Cutters in the Dunes." Do you remember I told you that there was such a beautiful subject there in the dunes? It is something like putting up a barricade. I started it as soon as I came back from you, for it was already about ripe in my mind. In the same way I have thought a lot about some other compositions, for which I also have the studies. But if I hadn't had the money you gave me, I should not have been able to do it right now.

I had a wooden passe-partout made, something like yours but without a frame. I am thinking of giving this as yet unpainted passe-partout a walnut colour, the same colour as your frame. The work gets on nicely when the drawing is shut off; and as soon as I saw your drawings I decided to get such a passe-partout too.

I saw an illustration in Harper's Weekly by Reinhardt – by far the best thing I have seen of his so far – "Washed Ashore." A corpse has been washed ashore, a man is kneeling beside it to see who it is, a number of fishermen and women are giving information about the shipwrecked man to a gendarme. So it somewhat resembles "Une Épreuve" [A Questioning], which you have, but there is something of, say, Régamey in this drawing by Reinhardt; it is a very beautiful sheet.

How much beauty one can find, can't one? I have now sketched the Peat Cutters with charcoal, "black mountain crayon" and autographic ink [F 1031, JH 363]. I have not yet used the strong effects of printer's ink in it, so its aspect is not as vigorous as I imagine it may become. My only objection against charcoal is that it gets effaced so easily, which, unless one is very careful, causes one to lose things one has found. And there is something in my make-up that does not want to be too careful.

I have some plans for large drawings which, my dear friend, will perhaps arouse your sympathy.

I wish you had read *Les Misérables* – then it would be easier for me to speak to you about it, for you might be struck by the same things that are continually coming back to my mind – this would not surprise me. I already knew the book, but since I've reread it, many things in it keep returning to my thoughts again and again.

You and I were taught something like history at school, but, if your experience was the same as mine, that was not enough; it was too dry and too conventional. Well, speaking for myself, I should like particularly to have a clear survey of the period from for instance 1770 to the present. The French Revolution is the very greatest modern event, and everything in our own time hinges on it too.

When I read something like *Paris and London* [A Tale of Two Cities] by Dickens, and think it over, then I come to the conclusion that one can get such splendid subjects for drawings out of that revolutionary period – not bearing directly on history proper, but rather incidents of everyday life and the appearance of things as they used to be then. Take that drawing by Howard Pyle and the other one by Abbey, both of which I showed you some time ago – "Christmas in old New York" and "Christmas in Old Virginia."

Well, letting one's thoughts dwell on the period beginning in those days and up to the present, one surveys an era in which everything has changed. And several moments are especially interesting. And in various French and English books you find them described so impressively and with so much ability that it becomes possible to get a clear image of those past things.

Dickens, who usually wrote about his own time, could not resist writing the *Tale of Two Cities*, and every now and then we see descriptions of the old days inserted in his work – a description of the London streets before there were street lamps, for instance.

Now the question is, could one find Dutch subjects, taken, for instance, from the time when the first street lamps were put up, or before they existed? Just imagine a church pew or a funeral scene around 1815; a house-moving, a public promenade, a street on a winter's day of the same period or somewhat later.

In *Les Misérables*, although it treats of a later era, I find what I have been looking for – aspects of the past that induce me to remember how everything looked in my great-grandfather's day, or even no longer ago than my grandfather's time.

Hugo's *Quatre-vingt-treize* was something that was illustrated by all the artists of the *Graphic* in a body.

And how impressively Caldecott does it!

I should like to see what kind of impression that *Quatre-vingt-treize* and *Les Misérables* would make on you. It's certain that you will think them beautiful. When I visited you, I saw some nooks of the town which my imagination enlivened with figures of the old days. Well, we shall probably have some more talks about drawings from a past period. I hope it will happen that you come here again this summer, as you said you would. It is not impossible that my brother in Paris will call on you this summer too; I want him to see your work again, and so, when he is here, I should like the two of us to go and see you.

With a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

1. See letter 286 to Theo.