

Dear Theo,

Today I received a letter from home, and though Father does not mention you in it, I want to speak to you about it because just now you would perhaps like to know something more about their frame of mind than what they write to you directly. And it is my impression that for the present you need not worry about it.

The said letter is Father's first since his visit here, and it is very kind and cordial, and was accompanied by a parcel containing a woman's coat, a hat, a packet of cigars, a cake, a money order. In the letter was a draft of a sermon, of which I liked the text by far the best, and which touched me less than a simple word about a funeral from a farmhand did afterward.

I tell you this in such detail so that you may see there is nothing abnormal or any definite overexcitement; but I did get the impression that Father was in a rather passive or submissive mood, more inclined toward a friendly, melancholy view of things than might be supposed from the expressions of disapproval you passed on to me. I suppose those words were intended more as advice or warning – but not as a sign of direct opposition to your firm decision.

Because in my previous letter I disapproved so strongly of what Father had said – and I still disapprove of it, as I am most decidedly of the opposite opinion, and consider it irrelevant to raise difficulties and financial and religious objections in this case – I should like to soften my words to this extent that I think we are concerned with an error (at least number one is an error) [i.e. the financial objections] which exists more in his words than in his heart or his frame of mind. And I cannot help reminding you that Father is an old man, and so fondly attached to you, and I am sure you will find that he will give in to you if it must be so, even though it be contrary to his own opinion, but that it would be impossible for him to live estranged from you or on less friendly terms. Well, I suppose I know Father somewhat, and I think I notice signs of a little melancholy.

And looking at it from a human point of view I withdraw my opinion that “by talking the way they did they have shown themselves unworthy of your confidence, and therefore I think you need not consult them any longer” or something of the kind, for I do not remember exactly what I wrote. But please understand what I mean not because I disapprove less of what they said, but because I have the impression that in this case you need not resent it so much, and that there is no urgent need to start hostilities as long as they confine themselves to words. Better forestall unpleasantness by saying, for instance: “You take rather a somber view of the future,” or, “But you cannot demand of me that I act as if the clock were going to strike the hour of the world's end,” which I think would be more sensible than attaching too much weight to their words.

I have the impression Father is somewhat melancholy, and that perhaps he is worrying over you, and imagining gloomy things – but I repeat, Father did not write one syllable about the matter itself, and did not say a word about it on the occasion of his visit, though this avoidance of mentioning it is somewhat abnormal too.

If you want to remedy this, write somewhat cheerfully and lightly, and write about your visit this summer as if it were certain that you would see them soon (even if you do not know yourself how you can fix the time of your coming).

For perhaps, perhaps Father himself is conscious of having gone a little too far, or perhaps he is anxious about how you will take it, and is afraid you will not come.

Of course I do not know it for sure and can only guess; but what I think is, Father is an old man and deserves to be cheered up if possible.

That it is my opinion that you ought to be faithful to the woman, you know well enough; there is no question of saying anything less about it than I did; you must act as you think right, but don't be angry with Father if he is mistaken.

That is what I wanted to say. Don't even mention that he is mistaken unless he continues to press the point; perhaps he will change his mind of his own accord.

Now again about the work: today I asked permission to make sketches in the old people's asylum, that is, of the men's ward, of the women's ward and of the garden.

I was there today. From the window I sketched an old gardener near a twisted apple tree, and the carpenter's shop of the asylum, where I had tea with two old almshouse men. In the men's ward I can come as a visitor: it was very striking, indescribably striking.

One little fellow, for instance, with a long thin neck, in a wheel chair, was splendid. That carpenter's shop with those two old men and a view of the cool green garden was just the thing, like Bingham's photograph of that little picture by Meissonier, those two priests sitting at the table drinking. Perhaps you know what I mean.

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But it is not quite certain that I shall get the permission, and the application must be made to the deacon in charge. I have done so, and must come back for the answer.

Meanwhile, I am making sketches for the drawing of the refuse dump. I wrote you, I hoped to get a Scheveningen cape; well, I have got it, and an old bonnet into the bargain; the latter is not very good, but the cape is superb, and I set to work on it at once. I am just as delighted with it as I was with the sou'wester before.

And the sketch of the refuse dump is so far advanced that I have caught the sheepfold-like effect of the interior in contrast with the open air and the light under the gloomy sheds: and a group of women emptying their dustbins is beginning to develop and take shape. But, the moving back and forth of the wheelbarrows, and the dustmen with the dung forks, that rummaging under the sheds, must still be expressed without losing the effect of light and brown of the whole: on the contrary, it must be strengthened by it.

I suppose you will take Father's words in the same way of your own accord, so that I'm not telling you anything new, but I should be glad if, with a little good will, peace might be preserved. Last winter Father was nearly as much opposed to my living with the woman as he is in your case now, yet he sent me a warm woman's coat "I might have some use for," not precisely indicating for what, but obviously with the thought, "Perhaps she is suffering from the cold." Well, you see that is the right thing, and for one such deed I would endure a whole shower of words with pleasure.

For neither do I myself belong among those people who always use the right words – such people would be perfect – and I haven't the slightest pretension to perfection.

But what I wanted to point out to you is this: At all events Father certainly objects to my living with the woman much more than in your case, and notwithstanding that, last winter he thought, "Confound the woman but she must not freeze." And perhaps in your case, "That poor Catholic girl must not be forsaken," or something like that; so don't worry, keep good courage and try to reassure them. Adieu, lad, with a handshake,
Yours sincerely, Vincent