

Amice Rappard,

I just received your letter. It is drier and prosier than ever.

However, since you say in it, "I want to answer your esteemed letter at once in order not to encourage you in your opinion that there is any idea of a rupture, at least on my part," I feel impelled to repeat again that you should know once and for all that there is at your disposal, or at the disposal of any painter whatever who wants to come here to make studies, a spare bedroom in the house where I have my studio. And I for my part want to advise you, as well as Wenkebach, whom I shall probably see tomorrow, to come here once in a while, as there are enough beautiful things here. If you are inclined to appreciate this, very good; if not, very good just the same. But if you come, each goes his separate way.

Here is my explanation of the lithograph. I did it entirely from memory and in a single day; I thought a certain composition somewhat forced, and was using an altogether different process in an attempt to find a new idea to put it together. Besides, it was only an experiment and nothing more, and I used corrosives on the stone later on. Originally – although the faulty drawing of an arm or a nose that made you fly into a rage remains – the chiaroscuro was much better, as it is in the composition that I painted later. And as for the latter, although there are faults in it too, there are still things in it that keep me from regretting that I painted it.

I cannot say that your letter of today was the least bit useful or necessary to me. Only I assure you that your saying your belief in me was shaken and all that leaves me pretty indifferent – you are no exception in this as far as certain others are concerned. I let people say of me and think of me whatever they like and treat me just as they like – that is their business; I am not obligated to listen to their everlasting drivel. My parents, my teachers, Messrs. Goupil & Co., and furthermore all kinds of friends and acquaintances have said so many unpleasant things to me for my own good and with the best intentions that in the end the burden has become a little too heavy for me; and since I let people talk without paying any attention to it, I have not fallen off, my friend – this much I think I know for sure. In reply to your remarks, however, this. It is a fact that your work is good; but this does not mean, amice, that you are always right in thinking that there are no other ways and methods of arriving at something good and sound than yours; I should like very much to talk things over with you – but please don't gather from this that it would mean consulting you – but our discussions are becoming less and less successful. Speaking of self-knowledge – who has it? Here again it is a matter of "la science – nul ne l'a," only de la science – everyone greatly needs it for himself, as regards his good or bad propensities – and I started with myself. But don't think that you never deceive yourself because of a lack of it, don't think you never hurt others horribly and undeservedly with superficial judgments... I know, everyone does this, and yet we must try to put up with each other. But for you to speak about self-knowledge – no, my friend, I am awfully sorry that you should touch upon the subject, as I am afraid it is the very weakest side of your character, from a human point of view. Oh well – but I will try to state clearly what I think about when I think about you.

As far as your work goes – there you are! – I think your present work is excellent – but here comes a thought exactly as it is in my mind, without concealing anything – I have known you for a pretty long time. There was a time – immediately before and immediately after your illness – when you were much less dry as a human being than you have been at other times – fuller, milder, broader, more generous – more straightforward and ingenuous. Now you are speaking to me and behaving to me exactly as a certain abominably arrogant Rappard studying at a certain academy did at one time.

I am sorry that this acquaintance has come back to me, and I am still more sorry for the loss of you as a friend, which you were in the exceptional period when I found you changed and improved; and seeing that I have observed this, I can't help thinking, What about his work?? – will that too be broader, fuller, nobler for only a short time?? Do you know the answer to that?

I have taken only half a sheet of paper to express this thought, but you will see from it that I am afraid at times that your work too may lose the nobler quality. I think I am stating this idea clearly and simply.

Whatever my faults of character may be, it is my sincerest desire to do well in my efforts as a painter, and I also have the sincere desire to treat others well – I have too much heart to be as frivolous in my work as you are always reproaching me with being. I need not take what you wrote to heart, and I don't do so. And as for your saying that I am in need of someone who will tell me some home truths, that may be true, but it may also be true that I myself am the one to tell me some home truths, and that I can do without other people, especially if they are as prosy as you are.

Greetings. But your letter, as a whole, was unfair, even though there are details in it that are more or less accurate.

Vincent

© Copyright 2001 R. G. Harrison

You do not write me anything about your work, nor do I about mine.