

My dear Theo,

A few words to wish you and your fiancée all happiness these days. It is a sort of nervous affliction with me that on festive occasions I generally find difficulty in formulating good wishes, but you must not conclude from that that I wish you happiness less earnestly than anyone else, as you well know.

I have still to thank you for your last letter, as well as for the consignment of paints from Tasset and for several numbers of *Le Fifre* with drawings by Forain. These last especially had the effect on me of making me see my own stuff as very sentimental beside them.

I waited several days before answering, not knowing which day you were leaving for Amsterdam. Besides I do not know either if you are getting married in Breda or in Amsterdam. But if as I am inclined to think it will be in Amsterdam, then I have assumed that you would find this letter there by Sunday.

By the way – just today our friend Roulin came to see me. He told me to give you many greetings from him and to congratulate you. His visit gave me a lot of pleasure; he often has to carry loads you would call too heavy, but it doesn't prevent him, as he has the strong constitution of the peasant, from always looking well and even jolly. But for me, who am perpetually learning from him afresh, what a lesson for the future it is when one gathers from his talk that life does not grow any easier as one gets on in life.

I talked to him so as to have his opinion as to what I ought to do about the Studio, which I have to leave in any case at Easter, according to the advice of M. Salles and M. Rey.

I said to Roulin that having done a good many things to put the house into a far better state than when I took it, especially as regards the gas I had put in, I considered it as a definite piece of work.

They are forcing me to leave – very well – but I should be pretty well justified in taking away the gas and making a rumpus about damages or something only I haven't the heart to do it.

The only thing I feel I can do in this business is to tell myself that it was an attempt to make an abiding place for unknown successors. Besides, before seeing Roulin I had already been to the gas works to arrange it this way. And Roulin was of the same opinion. He expects to stay in Marseilles.

I am well just now, except for a certain undercurrent of vague sadness difficult to define – but anyway – I have rather gained than lost in physical strength, and I am working.

Just now I have on the easel an orchard of peach trees beside a road with the Alpilles in the background [F 514, JH 1681]. It seems that there was a fine article in the Figaro on Monet, Roulin had read it and been struck by it, he said. Altogether it is a rather difficult problem to decide whether to take a new flat, and even to find it, especially by the month.

M. Salles has spoken to me of a house at 20 francs which is very nice, but he is not sure if I could have it. At Easter I shall have to pay three months' rent, the removal, etc. All this is not very cheering or convenient, especially as there seems no prospect of any better luck anywhere.

Roulin said or rather hinted that he did not at all like the disquiet which has reigned here in Arles this winter, considered even quite apart from what has fallen on me.

After all it is rather like that everywhere, business not too good, resources exhausted, people discouraged and ... as you said, not content to remain spectators, and becoming nuisances from being out of work – if anybody can still make a joke or work fast, down they come on him.

And now, my dear lad, I do believe I shall soon not be ill enough to have to stay shut up. Otherwise I am beginning to get used to it, and if I had to stay for good in an asylum, I should make up my mind to it and I think I could find subjects for painting there as well.

Write to me soon if you can find the time.

Roulin's family was still in the country and though he earns slightly more, the separate expenses are greater in proportion, and so they are not really a farthing better off and he was not without very heavy anxieties.

Fortunately the weather is fine and the sun glorious, and people here quickly forget all their griefs for the time being and then they brim over with high spirits and illusions.

I have been re-reading Dickens's "Christmas Books" these days. There are things in them so profound that one must read them over and over, there are tremendously close connections with Carlyle.

Roulin, though he is not quite old enough to be like a father to me, has all the same a silent gravity and tenderness for me such as an old soldier might have for a young one. All the time – but without a word – a something which seems to say, We do not know what will happen to us tomorrow, but whatever it may be, think of me. And it does one good when it comes from a man who is neither embittered, nor sad, nor perfect, nor happy, nor always irreproachably right. But such a good soul and so wise and so full of feeling and so trustful. I tell you I have no right to complain of anything whatever about Arles, when I think of some things I have seen there which I shall never be able to forget.

It is getting late. Once more I wish you and Jo plenty of happiness, and a handshake in thought.

Ever yours, Vincent

