

My dear Vincent,

Many thanks for your letter, which shows us that at least your physical strength leaves nothing to be desired, seeing that you say you have too much of it; however, this is something you should not rely on; feeling one's strength does not mean having much of it; but if it is really true, all the better. Now there is one thing in your letter which I entirely disapprove of, and I am going to tell you what it is, and after that you may do what you like. I mean your plans to join the Foreign Legion.¹

It is meant as an act of despair, isn't it? For I don't think you have developed a taste for that profession spontaneously. The fact is that you can do no painting at the moment; that you are in a state of convalescence, and this fact has given you the idea that you will never be able to paint again, and so you tell yourself that three months of being taken care of without being able to work cost money and don't bring any in. But you forget that, suppose they let you work when you are a soldier, you will be kept like a boy in a boarding school, and that, if you are already afraid of the supervision of an establishment like the one at St. Rémy, you will have a great deal more to fear from the practices of military life. Viewed as a whole, this idea is born of an exaggerated dread and causing me expense and worry, and you consequently bother your head unnecessarily. Last year was not a bad one for me as far as money is concerned, so you may count on what I sent you before without any scruple and without fear of causing me trouble. If it is not repulsive to you to go to St. Rémy, say for only a month, you will be examined by medical specialists, and you will probably be able to profit by their advice.

On the other hand, the director of the establishment at St. Rémy tells me in a letter he wrote me that he will not pledge himself to anything with reference to allowing you to go out before he has examined you, but I suppose that after he has seen you, there will be no doubt about his leaving you free to go out in order to work.

As for me, I attribute a large part of your disease to the fact that your material existence has been too neglected. In an establishment like the one at St. Rémy there will be approximately the same regularity in the mealtimes and so on, and I think this regularity will do you no harm – on the contrary. Now if you should prefer, we might try to get information about the establishment at Aix or Marseilles in order to see whether they make other conditions there.

What you ought to know is that from one point of view you are not to be pitied, though it may not seem so.

How many are there who would be glad of having done the work you have accomplished; what more do you ask; wasn't it your cherished wish to create something, and if it was granted you to make what you have made, then why do you despair that a time will come when you will do good work again? However bad society may be at present, there are still ways of living in it; witness Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, and others. I feel sure that if you have the will, you'll be able to take up your work again very soon. For all that don't think that I am without fellow feeling for your disillusionment when, for example, you went back to your studio and found it all moldy because of the moisture.

Yet be of good heart; your disasters will surely come to an end.

The kindest regards from my wife, who is in good health. She is getting quite accustomed to the house. A hearty handshake.

Theo

1. See Vincent letter 588.