

Letter W12  
Saint-Rémy, 16 June 1889

My dear sister:

If I didn't write to you in a hurry this Sunday morning, while the canvases I have started are drying a little in the sun, I should have to wait still longer before answering your kind letter.

I hope all is well with you, and with Mother too – I think of you both very often. I was unable to foresee at the time, when I left Nuenen to go to Antwerp, that the course of events would keep me away for so long, and at such a distance. Perhaps this is the reason that my thoughts go back to those parts involuntarily so often, and then it seems to me that I am carrying on the same work that I left unfinished there, seeing that so many things in nature are parallel.

Though it is with an obstinate ingratitude that I feel my health gradually returning, the fact is that I am quite well; but, as I told you, my inclination to take up the joys of life again can hardly be called strong.

I have just finished a landscape representing an orchard of olive trees with grey leaves, somewhat like those of the willows in colour, their violet shadows lying on the sunny sand. [F 712, JH 1740] And another one too, which represents a field of wheat turning yellow, surrounded by blackberry bushes and green shrubs.

At the end of the field there is a little house with a tall somber cypress which stands out against the far-off hills with their violet-like and bluish tones, and against a sky the colour of forget-me-nots with pink streaks, whose pure hues form a contrast with the scorched ears, which are already heavy, and have the warm tones of a bread crust. [F 719, JH 1725]

I have still another one in which a wheat field on the slope of the hills is all devastated and smashed to earth by the pouring rain and the rushing water of a cloudburst. [F 611, JH 1723]

It seems to me that the people of this country work a good deal less than the peasants at home; one hardly sees any cattle, and the fields make a much more deserted impression than those in our country. In my opinion this is very deplorable, all the more so as nature here is the reverse of stingy, and the air is so pure and healthy. So what one should like to see is a more energetic race of men. The cases where doing nothing becomes doing wrong do not seem to be exceptional here. Aren't there heaps of honest workers without enough bread in the North because people there work so much that work is no longer held in high regard. I don't mean to say that this is always the case, but surely there is something of the kind. Well, the farms here would produce three times as much as they do now if they were well kept, and the whole land too if it were sufficiently manured. And if the country here should produce three times as much, it might feed a lot more people.

Now I think you asked me whether always supposing that love is a bacillus, which I am unable to affirm or to prove, a fact I request you please not to lose sight of, I think you asked me whether there are persons who have said bacillus, and others who do not, or whether on the contrary it is a fatal and universal malady. There again I am pretty incompetent to form a well-founded, clear opinion. But in my estimation it is probable that, if somebody – let's say you for the sake of argument – were convinced he did not have it, it would perhaps be sensible of such a person to inoculate herself or himself with the aforesaid bacillus according to the method of Pasteur or someone else. Joking apart, I am of the opinion that a man or a woman ought to be desperately in love with something or somebody, and the only precaution one might be able to take is to do it in a certain way according to one's ideas, and not in any other way.

As to knowing one's own mind in matters of this kind – alas, we know ourselves so little.

As a matter of fact I am inclined to believe that women are apt to take the offensive in these things; that those among them who are wise, or rather who have the truest and surest instincts, do not wait for somebody else to love them before they fall in love themselves—which (and I am disposed to think there are good reasons for this) seems to them to be the essential thing.

And finally, it is more than probable that, even after having inoculated oneself with the attenuated bacillus of the right virus, well chosen and of the correct dosage, and thus having become all the more secure against contagion, at least if one has not caught the malady yet, that does not definitely prevent one from catching it, whereas, if one already has it, one cannot catch it again.

I am sort of longing for news from Theo, who seems to be rather absorbed in his honeymoon, which is a very good thing. Last week he sent me a consignment of paints and canvases, but a month has gone by since I received a letter from him. It is a great consolation to me to know that he is no longer living alone. His wife wrote me a very good letter [See Letter T08] some time ago, which proved to me that she is a very serious young woman. She will need this quality now and for a long time to come, for Theo's life is rather complicated because of his duty toward Boussod Valadon & Co. As for her, she will learn to prefer life

with him to life without him without being obliged to change too much, or to forget all the things she already knew in Holland.

Now I am going out to work a little, so I wish you all prosperity and health, you and Mother too. With a kiss in thought,

Yours, Vincent