

My dear Theo,

I have been feeling better since I wrote you, and though I do not know if it will last, I do not want to wait any longer before writing you again.

Thank you once more for the lovely etching after Rembrandt. I would very much like to know the picture and to know in which period of his life he painted it. All this goes – along with the “Portrait of Fabritius” in Rotterdam, the “Traveler” of the Lacaze Gallery – into a special category in which the portrait of a human being is transformed into something luminous and comforting.

And how different this is from Michelangelo or Giotto, though the latter nevertheless comes near it and thus Giotto forms as it were a possible link between the school of Rembrandt and the Italians.

Yesterday I began to work a little again – on a thing that I see from my window – a field of yellow stubble that they are ploughing, the contrast of the violet-tinted ploughed earth with the strips of yellow stubble, background of hills [F 625, JH 1768].

Work distracts me infinitely better than anything else, and if I could once really throw myself into it with all my energy possibly that would be the best remedy.

The impossibility of getting models, however, and a lot of other things prevent me from doing it.

Altogether I really must try to take things a little passively and have patience.

I think very often of the other fellows in Brittany, who are certainly busy doing better work than I. If it were possible for me to start again with the experience I have now, I should not go to see the South. Were I free and independent, I should nevertheless have kept my enthusiasm, because there are some beautiful things to be done.

The vineyards, for instance, and the fields of olives. If I had confidence in the management of this place, nothing would be better or simpler than to bring all my furniture here to the hospital and go quietly on.

If I get better, or in the intervals, I could sooner or later go back to Paris or to Brittany for a time.

But first of all it is very expensive here, and then just now I am afraid of the other patients. Altogether lots of things make me feel that I haven't had any luck here either.

Perhaps I exaggerate in the misery of my having been bowled over by my illness again – but I am sort of afraid. You will say – as I say to myself too – that the fault must be within me and not in the circumstances or in other people. Anyway, it is not pleasant.

M. Peyron has been kind to me and he has much experience. I do not doubt that he speaks and judges correctly. But has he come to any conclusion – has he written you anything definite? And possible?

You see that I am in a very bad humour, things aren't going well. Then I feel like a fool going and asking doctors permission to make pictures. Besides, it is to be hoped that if sooner or later I get a certain amount better, it will be because I have recovered through working, for it is a thing which strengthens the will and consequently leaves these mental weaknesses less hold.

My dear brother, I wanted to write better than this, but things aren't going very well. I get great pleasure from going into the mountains to paint the whole day. I hope they will let me do it one of these days.

You will soon see a canvas of a hovel in the mountains, which I did under the influence of that book of Rod's [F 622, JH 1766]. It would be good for me to stay at a farm, for a time at least; I might do good work there.

I must write to Mother and Wil one of these days.

What do you say to Mother's going to live in Leyden? I think she is right in that I understand how she hankers after her grandchildren. And then there will be hardly any of us left in Brabant.

Speaking of that – not very long ago – I read in Arles I forget which book by Henri Conscience. His peasants are dreadfully sentimental if you like, but speaking of impressionism, do you know that there are descriptions of landscapes in it with notes of colour, of a truth, an experience, and a primitiveness of the first rank? And it is always like that. Oh, my dear brother, that heath down there in the Campine was something after all. But there, it will not come again, so let's go on.

He – Conscience – described a brand-new little house with a roof of red tiles full in the sunshine, a garden with dock and onions, potatoes with their dull green, a beech hedge, a vineyard and farther on some pines, the heather all yellow. Don't be afraid, it was not a Cazine, it was a Claude Monet. Then there is some originality even in the excess of sentimentality. And I who feel that and can do nothing, isn't it maddening?

If you happen to have an opportunity to get lithographs after Delacroix, Rousseau, Diaz, etc., past or present artists, Galeries Modernes, etc., I cannot advise you too strongly to hold on to them because you'll see, they will become rare. It was, however, just the way to make fine things popular, those old prints at 1 franc, those etchings, etc., of those days.

The pamphlet on Rodin and Claude Monet, very interesting; I'd have liked to see that. It's no use saying that nevertheless I don't agree with him when he says that Meissonier is no good, and that the Rousseaus are of great

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interest for those who like them and want to know what the artist was feeling. It's impossible that everyone should be of this opinion, because for that one must have seen and looked at them, and that is not as common as blackberries. Now if you looked at a Meissonier for a year, there would still be something in it to look at next year, you may be sure of that. Not to mention his lucky days, when he had perfect flashes of genius. Certainly I know that Daumier, Millet and Delacroix have a different style of drawing – but Meissonier's workmanship, that something essentially French, above all when the old Dutchmen would have found nothing to quarrel with in it, and yet it is different from them, and modern; one must be blind to think that Meissonier is not an artist and – a first-rate one.

Have many things been done which give the nineteenth-century note better than the portrait of Hetzel? When Bernard did those two fine panels, primitive man and modern man, which we saw at Petit's, when he made the modern man a reader, he had the same idea.

And I shall always regret that in our day people believe that the generation of say '48 and the present one are incompatible. I think that the two nevertheless belong to each other, though I cannot prove it. See, take old Bodmer. Wasn't he able to study nature as a hunter and as a woodsman, didn't he love it and know it from the experience of a long life, virile and complete – and do you think that any chance Parisian who goes to the suburbs knows as much or more about it because he does a landscape in cruder tones? Not that there is any harm in using pure and jarring tones, not that I am always an admirer of Bodmer from the point of view of colour, but I admire and love the man who knew the whole forest of Fontainebleau, from the insect to the wild boar and from the stag to the lark, from the great oak and the rock mass to the fern and the blade of grass.

Now a thing like that is not felt, nor even found by any chance comer.

And Brion – oh, a maker of Alsatian type pictures, people would tell me. Very good, he has as a matter of fact done the "Betrothal Feast," the "Protestant Marriage," etc., which are indeed Alsatian. However, when no one could be found equal to illustrating Les Misérables, he did it in a way not yet surpassed, and he made no blunders about his characters. Is it a little thing to know people so well, and the humanity of that period so well, that you hardly ever make a mistake in an expression or in a character?

As for us, we have to grow old in hard work, and that is why we eat our hearts out when things don't go well. I think that if one day you see the Brias Gallery at Montpellier, I think that then nothing will move you more than Brias himself when you realize, from his purchases, what he tried to be to artists. It is rather disheartening when you see some portraits of him, his face is so heartbroken and obviously frustrated.

If one doesn't make a success of it in the South, there is always the thought of that man who suffered all his life for the same cause.

The only serene portraits are the Delacroixs and the Ricards.

By pure chance the one by Cabanel, for instance, is true and very interesting in its keenness of observation, at least it gives an idea of the man.

I am glad that Jo's mother has come to Paris. Next year it will be a little different perhaps, and you will have a child, and that will bring a fair amount of the little worries of human life – but as some great worries of spleen, etc., will disappear forever, it is certainly the way things should go.

I will write again soon, I am not writing to you as I should have liked. I hope that all is well at your home and will continue to be well. I'm very glad that Rivet has rid you of your cough, it worried me somewhat too!

The trouble I had in my throat is beginning to disappear; I still eat with some difficulty, but after all it has got better.

A good handshake for you and Jo.

Ever yours, Vincent