

Letter 619
St. Rémy, c. 20 December 1889

Dear Mother,

Toward the end of the year I come once more to say good day to you – you will say that I have forgotten that several times. It is a year since I fell ill, and it is difficult for me to say how far I have or have not recovered. I often feel much self-reproach about things in the past, my illness being more or less my own fault, in any case I doubt if I can make up for faults in any way.

But reasoning and thinking about these things is sometimes so difficult, and sometimes my feelings overwhelm me more than before.

And then I think so much of you and of the past. You and Father have been, if possible, even more to me than to the others, so much, so very much, and I do not seem to have had a happy character. I discovered that in Paris, how much more Theo did his best to help Father practically than I, so that his own interests were often neglected. Therefore I am so thankful now that Theo has got a wife and is expecting his baby. Well, Theo had more self-sacrifice than I, and that is deeply rooted in his character. And after Father was no more and I came to Theo in Paris, then he became so attached to me that I understood how much he had loved Father. And now I am saying this to you, and not to him – it is a good thing that I did not stay in Paris, for we, he and I, would have become too interested in each other.

And life does not exist for this, I cannot tell you how much better I think it is for him this way than in the past, he had too many tiresome business worries, and his health suffered from it.

In the beginning when I fell ill, I could not resign myself to the idea of having to go into a hospital. And at present I admit that I should have been treated even earlier, but to err is human.

A French writer says that all painters are more or less crazy, and though quite a lot can be said against this, it is certain that one gets too distraught in it. Whatever the truth of it may be, I imagine that here, where I don't have to worry about anything, etc., the quality of my work is progressing.

And thus, I go on with relative calmness, and do my best in my work, and don't consider myself among the unhappy ones.

For the moment I am working on a picture of a path between the mountains and a little brook forcing its way between the stones. The rocks are of a plain violet-grey or pink, with here and there palm bushes and a kind of broom, which has all kinds of colours, green, yellow, red, brown, all through the autumn. And the brook in the foreground, white and foaming like soapsuds, and farther on, reflecting the blue of the sky [F 661, JH 1871].

And now the work that people do here at the moment is certainly quite different – with more colour, and drawn more boldly, than what they used to do in Holland in Schelfout's time, for instance. And yet one thing is simply the consequence of the other. For instance, at the time you knew old Van de Sande Bakhuisen and Jules Bakhuisen. Only a little while ago I thought of their work, and that with all the apparent difference, there is yet so little change in people's thoughts. Well, I believe that Jules Bakhuisen, for instance, would quite well understand what I am painting these days – this ravine with the brook, and another picture of the hospital park – big fir trees against an evening sky [F652, JH1843].

I hope Theo has sent you my studies, but I started still another rather big picture for you of women gathering olives. The trees, grey-green, with a pink sky and a purplish soil. All the colours softer than usual [F655, JH1869]. I had hoped to send it one of these days, but it is drying slowly.

As I told you, I am sometimes sorry that I am often so absent-minded, I struggle against it, but it makes me unable to do many things I ought to do. As for my health, there is literally nothing the matter with it, but the shock of last year makes me feel like not leaving the hospital. Sometimes I imagine that if I gave up painting and had to lead a hard life, say, as a soldier in the East, it would cure me. But it is somewhat late for that, and I am afraid I should be refused. I am thinking this half in jest, half in earnest.

For the present my work is going well, but of course my thoughts are always directed on the colours and on drawing, going around in a rather small circle. So I want only to live by the day – trying to get on from one day to the other. And besides, my painter-friends also often complain that the profession makes one so powerless, or that it is the powerless who follow it.

How much you will be thinking of Theo and Jo and the coming event. I hope from the bottom of my heart that it will go well. I am glad to be able to imagine how your house is after Wil's description of it.

Is there any news of Cor? It is a very good thing that you are near Anna, and see your grandchildren about you. Give my kindest regards to all at Anna's, and my best wishes for the New Year.

The weather here is rather soft these days, though there are also many days of frost and wind, but here the sun shines more strongly than in Holland. Do you remember that Rappard once said, "It is sometimes

refreshing.” when he was staying with us after he had typhoid fever; I sometimes think of it when I am feeling much stronger and at times more clear-headed than last year.

And now I wish you a happy Christmas and a good Old and New Year’s Eve.

An embrace in thought from,

Your loving Vincent