

Saint-Rémy, 20 January 1890

Dear Sister,

The other day I saw some patients suffering from influenza, and I am curious to know whether you have had it too, which I am inclined to think. I saw one patient who had a rather disquieting nervous complication with distressing climacteric troubles.

Are you enjoying yourself in Paris? I can well imagine that it gives you the impression of too large, too confused a city. This is what always goes against the grain with us, who are rather accustomed to simpler surroundings.

Please write to me one of these days if you feel like it, for I should very much like to hear from you that you have recovered from your illness. I am more or less afraid of the effect Paris will have on me if I go back there, which will probably happen in the spring. I have been forcing myself to forget Paris as much as possible throughout the year on account of the trouble and excitement which a prolonged stay there causes me. As far as the painters are concerned it is right to say, One works better in the country; there everything speaks a distinct language, everything is firm, everything explains itself. And in a big city, when one is tired, one cannot understand anything, and feels lost.

I hope that the picture of the women in the orchard of olive trees will be a little to your liking – I sent a drawing of it to Gauguin a few days ago, and he told me that he thinks it good, and he knows my work well and would not hesitate to say so if he thought there was nothing in it. Of course you are quite free to choose another one to replace it if you like, but I dare believe that you will come back to this one in the long run.

It is not cold here these days, and next month I am going to work outdoors as hard as I can. Ah, speaking of the difference between the big city and the country, what a master Millet is. He, that wise and sensitive man, paints the countryside in such a way that you go on feeling it even in the city. There is something so unique, so good in this work, down to its very depths, that you feel comforted when you look at his pictures, and one asks oneself if he made them like that expressly in order to comfort us. I now see the true character of the Provence country better than in the beginning – and it is so very, very similar to our own country, although it manifests itself quite differently in the people, seeing that the manner of farming and work in the fields is not the same as that on the moors and fields of the North.

I often think of Holland, of our youth in the past – for the very reason that I feel entirely in the country here. And yet I am aging, you know, and it seems to me that life is passing by more rapidly, and that the responsibilities are more serious, and that the question of how to make up for lost time is more critical, and that it is harder to do the day's work, and that the future is more mysterious and, dear me, a little more gloomy.

Within the next few days I hope to write a little word to Mother; we owe much to you, all of us, you who take care of her so faithfully, and we shall try to keep her with us as long as possible. I expect that Theo is going to be made very happy shortly, but for all that I also have something of an idea that the preceding days of waking and watching and the day itself have their great anxieties, and, for that matter, I cannot refrain altogether from participating in them. And Jo, according to what he writes me, is so plucky and brisk. Well, in point of fact this is how we should always face things. I am so fond of my friend Gauguin because he has found the means of producing children and pictures at the same time; at the moment he is horribly distressed and uneasy in his mind because one of his children met with an accident and he was not there, and unable to assist.

Did you meet Bernard yet? I should very much like him to come here for a while in order to see the pictures I did here lately; I ought to write him a letter, but I am waiting for a letter from him at any moment. I suppose he has a lot of trouble fighting his way through. He is a Parisian from top to toe, and to my mind he is a model of vivacity. He uses his brains quite in a manner of Daudet, but then more ingenuously, and naturally much less fully.

And yet, my dear sister, to what an extent doctors, engineers, in short lots of people, have more practical, stabler ideas than artists! As for me, I often think with a deep sigh that I ought to have been better than I am. Let me stop talking of it at once, or else it might discourage me. Well, the fact is that one cannot retrace one's steps, and the steps one has taken greatly influence the future.

I hope you are going to see a lot of beautiful things, and above all that you are in good health now. Have you read anything these last few days or recently? – I haven't, not a thing.

If you have half an hour to spare, I recommend myself for a letter from you.

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I embrace you in thought.

Yours, Vincent

1. Written in French.