

Letter 205
The Hague, 3 June 1882

Dear Theo,

Today, Saturday, I am sending you those two drawings, "Fish Drying Barn" [F 940, JH 154] in the dunes at Scheveningen, and "Carpenter's Workshop and a Laundry" (seen from my studio window) [F939, JH 150]. I have been thinking of you very often lately, and also of that time long ago when, as you remember, you visited me once at The Hague, and we walked together along the Rijswijk road and drank milk at that mill [see Letter 10]. It may be this has influenced me somehow when doing these drawings; I have tried to draw the things as naively as possible, exactly as I saw them before me. Looking back on those days of the mill, how sympathetic that time always seems to me; however, it would have been impossible for me to put what I saw and felt on paper. So I say that the changes time brings do not alter my basic feelings; I think they are just developed in another form. My life, and perhaps after all yours, too, is not as sunny now as it was then; but I would not go back, because through that very trouble and adversity I have seen some good arise, namely the ability to express that feeling.

Rappard was greatly pleased with a drawing similar to one which C. M. has, and also with all the others I drew for C. M., especially the large one of the little yard. And he is a man who understands my intentions, and who appreciates all the difficulties. I think you would find Rappard greatly changed since his first visit to Paris, when you knew him.

In front of me is a book, an illustrated Household edition of Dickens. Those illustrations are splendid, they are drawn by Barnard and Fildes.

There are some parts of old London in it which, on account of the peculiar wood engraving, have quite a different aspect from, for instance, the "Carpenter's Shop." But I believe that the way to acquire that strength and power is quietly to continue observing faithfully. As you see, there are already several planes in this drawing, and one can look around it and through it, in every nook and cranny. It still lacks vigour – at least it is far from having as much of that quality as those illustrations, but it will come by and by.

I have had news from C. M. in the form of a postal order for 20 guilders but without one written word. So I do not know as yet whether he will give me a new order, or whether the drawings are to his liking. But in comparison with the price paid for the first one, 30 guilders, and taking into consideration that this last parcel (the first contained 12 little ones, this one contained one small one; 4 like those I am now sending you; 2 large ones; so 7 pieces in all) was more important than the first, it seems to me that C. M. was not in a good mood when he received them, or that for some reason or other they did not please him. I will readily admit that to an eye that is accustomed to watercolours exclusively, there might be something crude in drawings in which one has scratched with a pen and lights have been rubbed out or put in again with body-colour. But there are people who are not afraid of that crudeness, just as there are people who think it sometimes pleasant and invigorating for a healthy man to take a walk during a storm.

Weissenbruch, for instance, would not think these drawings unpleasant or uninteresting.

As things are, I should like to know whether C. M. would care to order new ones. Of course I will not or cannot force them on him, but I hope that when you come here, you will find out how things stand.

Of course I am content with 20 guilders, particularly because I left it to him to fix the price; but I had thought that he would not give me 10 guilders less for these than for the previous lot. If he approves of my beginning another 6 or 12 drawings for him, I shall certainly do so, because I shall not let any opportunity to sell something pass.

I shall try my best to please him, for if it only pays my rent and makes things somewhat easier for me, it is worth while. But he himself had spoken of paying more rather than less for more elaborate drawings. And if I mention it, it is after all because I want to know what to do in case of a possible new order or no order at all. It may also be that he will write about it himself later on.

One of these days when I have time, I shall send you a little list of my collection of wood engravings. I am sure you will like them.

If it is true that last winter I have spent less for paint than other artists, I have spent more on making an instrument for studying proportion and perspective, the description of which can be found in a book by Albrecht Dürer, and which the old Dutch masters also used. It makes it possible to compare the proportion of objects near by with those on a more distant plane, in cases where construction according to the rules of perspective is not possible. And when one tries to do it with the eye alone – unless one is an expert and very far advanced – it is always hopelessly wrong.

I did not succeed in making the instrument at once, but I managed it at last, after many efforts, with the help of the carpenter and the smithy. And after more efforts, I see a chance to get even better results.

I should be very pleased if you perhaps had in your wardrobe a discarded coat and pair of trousers fit for me. For when I buy something, I do my best to get things which are as practical as possible for working in the dunes or at home, but my street clothes are getting very shabby. And though I am not ashamed to wear common clothes when I go out to work, I am ashamed indeed of gentlemen's clothes that have a shabby genteel air. But my work clothes are not untidy at all, just because I have Sien to take care of them and make the necessary small repairs.

I close this letter by repeating that I hope so much the family will not regard my relation with Sien as an intrigue, which it isn't at all. This would disgust me beyond words, and raise the barrier between us still higher. What I hope is that people with a certain untimely wisdom will not meddle in order to prevent my living with her. You speculated about an inheritance, but that is quite out of the question; there is nothing for me to inherit that I know of. There cannot be anything I think, for there is nothing; in my opinion they have literally no money at home. The only person from whom I might have inherited in quite different circumstances, because I am named after him – Uncle Vincent – is someone whom I have been on decidedly bad terms with for years, for various reasons; and things cannot be redressed as though I were his protégé. Certainly I wouldn't wish it, and of course such a thing wouldn't occur to him, though I hope that if we meet by chance, like we did last year, we shall not have a public quarrel. And now, with a handshake, Yours sincerely, Vincent

WOOD ENGRAVINGS

1	Portfolio	Irish types, miners, factories, fishers, etc., most of them small pen sketches	
1	“	Landscapes and animals, Bodmer, Giacomelli, Lançon, and some particular landscapes	
1	“	“Travaux des Champs” by Millet; in addition, Breton, Boughton, Clausen, etc.	
1	“	Lançon	
1	“	Gavarni, supplemented by lithographs, but no rare ones	
1	“	Ed. Morin	
1	“	G. Doré	
1	“	Du Maurier, very numerous	} Draughtsmen for Punch
1	“	Ch. Keene & Sambourne	
1	“	J. Tenniel, supplemented by the Beaconsfield cartoons. John Leech is missing, but this is easily corrected, as reproductions of his wood engravings are for sale and are not expensive	} }
1	“	Barnard	
1	“	Fildes & Charles Green, etc.	
1	“	Small French woodcut, Boetzel album, etc.	
1	“	Scenes aboard English ships and military sketches	
1	“	“Heads of the People” by Herkomer, supplemented by drawings of others and by portraits	
1	“	Sketches of London life, types of the people, from the opium-smokers, and Whitechapel and The Seven Dials, to the most elegant ladies' figures and Rotten Row or Westminster Park. To these are added similar scenes from Paris and New York, so the whole is a curious “tale of those cities.”	
1	“	The large pages of Graphic, London News, Harper's Weekly, Illustration, etc., among which are Frank Holl, Herkomer, Fred. Walker, P. Renouard, Menzel, Howard Pyle.	
1	“	The Graphic portfolio, which is a separate edition of reproductions directly from the blocks, of some wood engravings, including “The Homeless and Hungry” by Fildes. Some illustrated books, among which are Dickens and Frederick the Great by Menzel, small edition.	