

Dear Theo,

It is not yet four o'clock. Last evening there was a thunderstorm and it rained during the night. It has stopped raining now, but everything is wet and the sky is grey, broken here and there by darker or lighter masses of neutral or yellowish white clouds which are moving across the sky. Because of the early hour the leaves look greyish and subdued in colour; along the wet road a farmer in a blue smock is approaching on a brown horse he has fetched from the meadow. In the background the city is a grey silhouette, also subdued in colour; however, the wet red roofs stand out strongly. It looks more like a Daubigny than a Corot because of the variety of colour in the ground and the green, the vividness of everything. I am sure that if you saw it, you would enjoy it as much as I. There is nothing more beautiful than nature early in the morning.

Your letter came yesterday and was not a little welcome. Many thanks. I was very hard up this time; I was absolutely penniless. The woman had no milk to nurse the baby those last days, and I too felt very faint. As a last effort I went in desperation to Tersteeg. I thought, "I have nothing to lose, perhaps it is a way to bring about a better state of affairs." So I went there with a large sketch, about which I wrote you in my last letter. It has turned into a row of diggers, men and women, with lumps of earth in the foreground and a glimpse of some roofs of a little village in the background. I told Tersteeg that I understood perfectly well this sketch could not be anything for him, but that I came to show it to him because it was so long since he had seen any of my work and because I for one wanted to prove that I did not feel any ill will about what had happened last year. Well, he said that he did not hold a grudge, either; as to the drawing, he had told me last year that I ought to make watercolours, and he did not want to repeat himself by talking about it again. Then I told him that I had occasionally tried a watercolour and had several in my studio, but that I myself had more heart for another kind of drawing and increasingly favored vigorously drawn figures.

Then I told him that I felt guilty about having kept those drawing examples of Bague's all the time, that I would have returned them long ago if what had happened last year had not prevented me from mentioning it, but that I came to settle that question, too. A few of them had been a little damaged by use, and as there were a few other things on my account at the time, I hoped he would be inclined, either now or later, to take a few of my drawings to balance that account, and I hoped he would approve of my having come to settle that affair. Well, he agreed to this, and I am glad the Bagues are returned now.

I told him that there were a great many things he had not seen in the studio. He said he was glad to see from the drawing that I was at least working, and I asked him if there had been any reason for him to doubt that I was working. Well, then a telegram came for him, and I went away. At all events the Bagues are off my mind, and I have thanked him once more for having lent them to me at the time, for they have been of great use to me. But, after all, I do not even really know whether he liked the drawing or not.

I should not be in the least surprised if he considered it crazy work, or absolutely absurd, because he said he would rather not have anything to do with it. But even if he does find it absurd or crazy, I don't think I should let it upset me, or take his opinion as decisive or conclusive.

I always think it possible that the time will come when Tersteeg will have another opinion of me, also of my actions now and last year. But I will leave it to time, and if he persists in thinking everything I do is wrong, well, I will take it in my stride and go my own way as if he did not exist.

For the rest, I will leave things alone, let's say, till you come here. I am not sorry I went there after all.

I was very glad to hear that things are going well with you. Have a good time, boy. Relatively speaking, I also have a good time, apart from many financial worries – many other worries too – but with my work I am in luck: I have been working with enormous pleasure lately, and with a firm feeling of "being on the open road," as Rappard says of himself in the letter which I sent you. Yes, boy, one perseveres and works on without minding the rest, if one tries honestly and freely to fathom nature, and does not lose hold of what one has in mind whatever people may say, then one feels calm and steady and faces the future quietly. Yes, one may make mistakes, one may perhaps exaggerate here or there, but the thing one makes will be original. You have read in Rappard's letter the words: "I used to make things now in this, then in that style, without sufficient personality: but these last drawings have at least a character of their own, and I feel that I have found my way." I feel almost the same thing now.

Some time ago I read a remarkable saying of Taine's (Essay on Dickens): "Le fonds du caractère Anglais c'est l'absence du bonheur" [the foundation of the English character is the absence of happiness]. I do not think that saying quite satisfactory and correct: it does not explain everything, but still it is remarkably to the point and contains much truth.

A typical English saying is Carlyle's "The result of an idea must not be a feeling but an action."

That concept of life which leads a man to concentration – not primarily to attain material happiness, but above all to concentrate on his work, to do some good – has many examples in England, and is perhaps a national characteristic. Carlyle also says, "Knowest thou that worship of sorrow, the temple thereof founded some

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eighteen hundred years ago, now lies in ruins, yet its sacred lamp is still burning." When I think of De Groux, for instance, or of what you have occasionally told me about Daumier, I find in them something of this "worship of sorrow."

The drawing which I showed Tersteeg showed up very poorly in his little room; one must see it surrounded by other drawings: then it has quite a different effect. Well, yesterday I worked at it all day again to finish the figures better.

Since I wrote you last, I have made four more large studies for the potato digging. Here in the neighborhood they dig the potatoes with a short-handled fork, and the digger is kneeling. I imagine a fine thing might be made of those kneeling figures in a flat country in the evening – something that would have a certain sentiment of devotion; therefore I have studied it closely, and have already got a man sticking his fork into the ground (the first movement); another pulling out the potato plant (the second movement); then a woman's figure in the same action; and the figure of a third man throwing the potatoes into a basket.

I will start this drawing today or tomorrow, but among the men's figures I want one with a bald head.

For the studies which I have already finished, I had a young farm hand, a real type, with something broad and rough and non ébarbé [unpolished] about him.

Now about these drawings, Theo, I don't think I shall sell them. I still remember what Israël's said to Van der Weele about the latter's large picture: "You certainly won't sell it, but that must not discourage you, for it will give you new friends and enable you to sell other things."

Someday, when I can afford it, I will make on canvas an elaborate sketch such as I have now made on paper, and try my hand at painting again. But I should have to take great pains with the models for it, otherwise it would certainly be a failure. I have a few things in mind that will do well painted in oil.

I had no answer from C. M. to my letter, and so I am not in a hurry to write again. So you see, Theo, there is very, very little chance of my selling anything. It was not pleasant going to Tersteeg, I assure you; but I did, thinking, Perhaps – perhaps he will be inclined to forgive and forget everything on both sides. But it was clear enough that he is not up to that yet; I believe it is still as you described it so well at the time, "sometimes he is aggravated by the way I shake hands with him," or one of those little idiosyncrasies which make one dislike a person so much that one would rather avoid him.

I am rather hard up. Last year, you remember, every now and then I had something extra from you; now for certain reasons you have been rather straightened yourself since February or March, I think. I do not know how to keep things going; the expenses increase beyond my power, though I economize on everything, and the woman, too. The money from Rappard helped me briefly in buying the materials for those large drawings, but the large drawings bring many expenses on account of the models. Then there are the stretchers and the paper, etc.; and besides, I make a lot of small drawings, too. So the days drag heavily on, and are hard for the woman and me to get through because of the scarcity of everything

I told Tersteeg that I was very anxious to be on good terms with Mauve again, but he did not answer a word. My total impression of the visit to Tersteeg is that it would have been nicer if he had taken things somewhat lightly, as such a long time had passed; but there was a ponderousness in the air, and something of, "There you are, bothering me again – do leave me alone." He did not use those exact words, for he spoke very formally, but I think the meaning was quite obvious considering what he might have said, namely, "I agree to our making up, and I will come and look at your work"; or something like it.

But I may be wrong in this; I will let time pass over it again and hope for the best, and see whether it will redress itself. I must continue to work hard for the very reason that I hope some things will redress themselves and come out right.

The one thing I hope for more than anything else is that when you come, you will find that I have made progress and that there is some good in my work. From time to time you have written me that you found something in it; I don't think you were mistaken, or that Tersteeg is right, with his absolute indifference which is almost hostile. Yes, that is the very first thing which I value: that you who from the very beginning have done so much – nay, everything – for my work may continue to find some good in it. If I can bring this about, your visit would make me forget all the cares of the whole year.

There is one thing that gives me hope there is some character in the big sketch, namely Iterson remarked that various things in it "annoyed" him, and that he thought them "not so felicitous"; I think you can imagine Iterson with a bland and sort of wise face, his head tilted a little to one side, and speaking his mind sweetly and mildly with undulating emphasis. His observations rather amused me. Eerelman, the painter, was also present and seemed to be more or less in agreement with Iterson, which I thought very understandable.

I think you will agree with me that this may be a step toward making it up, even though Tersteeg should be unwilling at first. One or the other will have to make an overture, but now I am going to wait until I have had a talk with you.

If Tersteeg saw them, I imagine that among the many figures I have drawn there might be some of which he might say, "I should like to see this or that one in such and such a size in watercolour." In such a case I would

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not refuse to try it, not for my own pleasure, but to sell something if possible. But these are not the only possibilities, for in the future I shall make things quite different from what I have made till now. I know from experience how one can have a dislike for someone's work, or be indifferent to it, and keep that up for a long time; then one day one unexpectedly sees a thing of his, thinks it over, and remembers his previous work, and says to oneself, "Wait a minute, that must be good after all." And then one feels an interest, one can't forget it – and one has learned to like it.

I felt this, especially with English drawings: at first I didn't like them at all, and just like most people here, thought that the English were actually quite wrong; but that did not last, and I have learned to look at things from a different angle.

Do you know what I sometimes long to do? To make a trip to Brabant. I should love to draw the old churchyard at Nuenen, and the weavers.

To make, let's say, studies of Brabant for a month, and to come back with a lot of them for a large drawing of a peasant funeral, for instance.

Before I finish this letter, I repeat that, when you write in your last letter that you are having a good time, I can say the same to you; I have a great serenity and good spirits in regard to the work, and I have so much to do that it quite absorbs me. But the money is the damndest thing, I have more expenses than I can cover.

Do you know what I was thinking of recently? Of that book on Gavarni that you have. I remember from it how Gavarni's drawings of London drunkards and beggars, etc., according to his own saying, only turned out well after he had lived there for some time, I think after a year, and in a letter he wrote of how it takes time to feel at home in new surroundings.

Well, I am starting to feel quite at home here now compared to the beginning, and I now find what I made here at first very superficial. And the very hope of expressing myself more and more strongly and more elaborately makes the present time seem good to me, for there is no lack of subjects or models (provided I can pay them). I am full of ideas and plans, and so the cares aren't overwhelming me yet.

But things must be paid for, and everything costs money, and the obstructions make it like cutting one's way through a hedge of thorns. It is a fact that I ought to take more models but can't; I try my utmost, and, so to speak, more than my utmost, to pay the expenses for it, but the household costs money too, and I can't make both ends meet. Qu'y faire?

Do you remember, perhaps from your time at The Hague, persons to whom I could show my work? I myself do not, except one, and that is Lantsheer, but he wants things to be very, very good, and for the very reason that I hope to sell him something later on, I should not like to show him anything now. Lantsheer is an uncle or some such relation of Rappard's. Rappard wrote me once that he had shown him a little sketch of mine, and that L. had liked it.

If someday I should have something which I thought suitable for him, I could contact him through Rappard. I do not like to go and see people to show them my work; if it were somebody else's work, I shouldn't mind it, but now it is my own. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I am almost sure that someday, when Rappard has seen the large drawings, he will speak to Lantsheer about me, even without my asking it.