

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your kind letter, thanks for the good news it contained and also for the 100-franc note. I was very, very glad to hear that you feel easier in your mind since your marriage. Then one thing that gave me great pleasure was your saying that Mother looks as if she were growing younger. Naturally very soon, or even now already, her mind will be running on seeing you with a child. That is dead certain.

I very much regret for your sake and for your wife's too that you are not living at Ville d'Avray, for instance, instead of in Paris. But that will come, I hope. The great thing now is that you should pick up again instead of wearing yourself down.

I went to see M. Salles and took your letter for the director of the asylum at St. Rémy, and he is going there today, so I hope it will be fixed up by the end of the week. For myself, I shouldn't be unhappy or discontented if some time from now I could enlist in the Foreign Legion for five years (they take men up to forty, I think). From the physical point of view my health is better than it used to be, and perhaps being in the army would do me more good than anything else. Anyway, I don't say that we must or can do this without consideration and consulting a doctor, but after all, we must count on it that whatever we do, it will not be quite so good as one could wish.

But if not, naturally I can always do painting or drawing as long as it will work, and I do not in the least say No to that. As for coming to Paris or going to Pont-Aven, I do not feel I can, besides most of the time I have no very keen desire or keen regret.

Sometimes, just as the waves pound against the sullen, hopeless cliffs, I feel a tempest of desire to embrace something, a woman of the domestic hen type, but after all, we must take this for what it is, the effect of hysterical overexcitement rather than a vision of actual reality.

Besides, Rey and I have laughed about it sometimes, for he says that love is a microbe too, which does not surprise me much, and could not shock anyone, it seems to me. Isn't Renan's Christ a thousand times more comforting than so many papier mâché Christs that they serve up to you in the Duval establishments called Protestant, Roman Catholic or something or other churches? And why shouldn't it be so with love? As soon as I can, I am going to read Renan's Antichrist. I haven't the slightest idea what it will be like, but I believe beforehand that I shall find one or two ineffable things in it.

Oh, my dear Theo, if you saw the olives just now... The leaves, old silver and silver turning to green against the blue. And the orange-coloured ploughed earth. It is something quite different from your idea of it in the North, the tender beauty, the distinction!

It is like the pollard willows of our Dutch meadows or the oak bushes of our dunes, that is to say the rustle of an olive grove has something very secret in it, and immensely old. It is too beautiful for us to dare to paint it or be able to imagine it. The oleander – ah! that speaks of love and is beautiful like the Lesbos of Puvis de Chavannes, with women on the seashore. But the olive is different, if you want to compare it to something, it is Delacroix. This letter ends abruptly. I wanted to talk to you about lots more things, but it is just as I have already written, my ideas are not orderly.

I will send shortly, by goods train, two cases of pictures, of which you must not hesitate to destroy a good number.

I had a letter from Wil, who is going back to Mme. D.'s, a very nice letter. Ah! Cancer – it is cruel and difficult; by the way, it is very curious, but do you know that during all this strange and inexplicable commotion which has taken place in Arles, and in which I was mixed up, there was a perpetual talk of cancer? I understand that according to the belief of these virtuous natives who know the future so well, it appears – I believe that according to them I must be blessed with that particular malady. About which I naturally know nothing, but all the same it's an occurrence which remains absolutely inexplicable to me; besides, for the most part I have completely lost the recollection of those days in question, and I can reconstruct none of it. Even if it were so, I should try to console myself by thinking that diseases like this are perhaps to men what ivy is to the oak.

A good handshake, and many thanks. Goodbye for now.

Ever yours, Vincent