

Dear brother and sister,

Jo's letter told me a very great piece of news this morning, I congratulate you on it and I am very glad to hear it. I was much touched by your thought when you said that neither of you being in such good health as seems desirable on such an occasion, you felt a sort of doubt, and in any case that a feeling of pity for the child who is to come passed through your heart. Has the child in this case even before its birth been less loved than the child of very healthy parents, whose first movement must have been quick with joy? Certainly not. We know life so little that it is very little in our power to distinguish right from wrong, just from unjust, and to say that one is unfortunate because one suffers, which has not been proved. Remember that Roulin's child came to them smiling and very healthy when the parents were in straits. So take it as it comes, wait in confidence and possess your soul with great patience, as a very old saying has it, and with good will. Leave nature alone. As for what you say about Theo's health, although, my dear sister, I share your anxiety with all my heart, I must comfort you, just because I have realized that his health is, like mine too, more changeable and uneven than feeble. I very much like to think that illness sometimes heals us, that is to say, when the discomfort comes to a crisis, it is necessary for the recovery of the body's normal condition. No, after he has been married for some time, he will recover his strength, as he still has a reserve of youth and power to restore him.

I am very glad that he is not alone, and truly I do not doubt but that after some time he will recover his old temperament. And then above all, when he is a father and the sense of fatherhood has come to him, it will be so much gained.

In my life as a painter, and especially when I am in the country, it is less difficult for me to be alone, because in the country you feel more easily the ties that unite us all. But in town, as he has been for ten years on end with the Goupils in Paris, it is impossible to exist alone. So with patience it will all come back.

I am going to Arles tomorrow to get the canvases which are still there, and which I will send you soon. And I am going to send some of them as soon as possible to try to give you, even though you are in town, a peasant's thoughts.

This morning I talked a little with the doctor here – he told me exactly what I already thought – that I must wait a year before thinking myself cured, since the least little thing might bring on another attack.

Then he offered to store my furniture here, so that we should not be paying double. Tomorrow I am going to Arles to talk it over with M. Salles. When I came here, I left M. Salles 50 francs to pay the hospital in Arles; he is sure to have some of it left. But as I was still pretty often in need of various things here, the surplus which M. Peyron had is exhausted. I am rather surprised, myself, that while I have been living with the greatest possible frugality and regularity for six months, not counting having my studio free, I spend no less and produce no more than the previous year, which was comparatively less frugal, and inwardly I feel neither more nor less remorseful, as it is called. That is as much as to say that what is called good and bad is, however – as it seems to me – pretty relative.

I live soberly because I have a chance to, I drank in the past because I did not quite know how to do otherwise. Anyway, I don't care in the least!!! Very deliberate sobriety – it's true – leads nevertheless to a condition in which thoughts, if you have any, move more readily. In short, it is a difference like painting in grey or in colours. I am going to paint more in grey, in fact.

Only instead of paying money to a landlord, you give it to the asylum, I do not see the difference – and it is hardly any cheaper. The work is a thing apart and has always cost me a lot.

Thank you very much for the package of colours and canvas, which I am very glad to have. I hope to go and do the olives again. Unfortunately there are very few vineyards here. I am well, however, and I have a feeling rather like I had when I was younger, when I was very sober, too sober they used to say then, I think. But it doesn't matter, I shall try to overcome my difficulties.

As for being godfather to a son of yours, when to begin with it may be a daughter, honestly, in the circumstances I would rather wait until I am away from here.

Then Mother would certainly rather set her heart on its being called after our father. I for one would think that more logical in the circumstances.

I enjoyed myself very much yesterday reading Measure for Measure. Then I read Henry VIII, in which there are such fine passages, such as that of Buckingham, and Wolsey's words after his fall.

I think that I am lucky to be able to read or reread this at leisure and then I very much hope to read Homer too at last.

Outside the cicadas are singing fit to burst, a harsh screeching, ten times stronger than that of the crickets, and the scorched grass takes on lovely tones of old gold. And the beautiful towns of the South are in the same state as our dead towns along the Zuyder Zee that once were so bustling. Yet in the decline and decadence of things, the cicadas dear to the good Socrates abide. And here certainly they still sing in ancient Greek. If our friend Isaäcson heard them, it would certainly rejoice his heart.

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What Jo writes about your having all your meals at home is splendid. Altogether I think it is all going very well, and once more, while sharing with all my heart all possible uneasiness about Theo's health, with me the hope predominates that in this case a more or less sickly condition is only the result of nature's efforts to right herself. Patience. Mauve always asserted that nature was good and even much more so than is generally believed; was there anything in his life that proves he was wrong? The fits of depression during his last days, do you think? I should be inclined to think otherwise.

Good-bye for the present, but I wanted to write straight off and tell you how pleased I am with this morning's news.

A handshake from  
Ever yours, Vincent