

Dear Theo,

The more I think of it, the deeper the impression your last letter made on me.

Generally speaking (apart from the difference between the two persons in question), to you and me there appeared on the cold cruel pavement a sad pitiful woman's figure, and neither you nor I passed it by – we both stopped and followed the human impulse of our hearts.

Such an encounter has the quality of an apparition about it, at least when one recalls it; one sees a pale face, a sorrowful look like an Ecce Homo on a dark background – all the rest disappears. That is the sentiment of an Ecce Homo, and there is the same expression in reality, but in this case it is on a woman's face. Later it certainly becomes different – but one never forgets that first expression

I think it probable that your meeting this woman will take your thoughts back to the period some ten or even twenty years ago, and even further back.

Anyway, what I mean is that you will rediscover in her, a phase of your own life you had nearly forgotten – that is to say, the past – and I do not know whether, after having been with her for a year, you will view the present with the same eyes as, for instance, before you knew her.

Underneath a figure of an English woman (by Paterson) is written the name Dolorosa; that expresses it well.

I was thinking of the two women now, and at the same time I thought of a drawing by Pinwell, "The Sisters," in which I find that Dolorosa expression. That drawing represents two women in black, in a dark room; one has just come home and is hanging her coat on the rack. The other is smelling a primrose on the table while picking up some white sewing.

That Pinwell reminds one a little of Feyen-Perrin – in his early work; it also reminds one of Thijs Maris, but with an even purer sentiment.

He was such a poet that he saw the sublime in the most ordinary, commonplace things. His work is rare – I saw very little of it, but that little was so beautiful that now, at least ten years later, I see it as clearly as I did the first time.

At the time they used to say of that club of draughtsmen, "It is too good to last." Alas, Herkomer's words show that it was true; but it is not dead yet, and in literature as well as in art, it will be difficult to find a better conception of that time than theirs.

I often disliked many things in England, but that Black and White and Dickens are things which make up for it all. I speak from my own experience. It's not that I disapprove of everything in the present, far from it, but still it seems to me that something of the fine spirit of that time which ought to have been preserved is disappearing – in art especially. But also in life itself. Perhaps I express myself too vaguely, but I cannot say it differently – I don't know exactly what it is, but it is not just the Black and White which changed its course and deviated from its healthy, noble beginning. Rather, there is in general a kind of skepticism and indifference and coolness, notwithstanding all the activity. But all this is too vague, too indefinite. I do not think too much about it, because I think of my drawings and have no time to spare.

I am still busy making heads this week, especially women's heads and women with bags, among other things.

Did you ever see anything by Boyd Houghton – he is one of the Graphic's early contributors who, though little known, nevertheless has his own niche (he died young)? I thought of him once when you wrote about Daumier's "Barricade." At the time he drew the Parisian pétroleuses and barricades too, but later he went to America, and I know drawings of his of Quakers, and a Mormon church and Indian women, etc., and immigrants.

In such a barricade scene, for instance, he had something ghostly, or rather mysterious, like Goya. He also treated the American subjects in that same way, quite Goya-like; but then all at once there are some with a wonderful soberness which reminds one of Méryon. His wood engravings might almost pass for etchings.

The world says, "Too good to last," but for that very reason, because it is rare, the good lasts. It is not produced every day, it will never be achieved mechanically, but what is, is; it is not lost, but lasts. And if another good thing turns up later on, the first retains its value so I think one must not regret that such and such doesn't become more common; even though they are uncommon, the good and beautiful things that exist remain.

What about the etchings which Cadart started at that time? Did they also prove to be something "too good to last"?

I know quite well that many beautiful etchings are published nowadays. But I mean the old series, "société des aquafortistes" [etchers' club], in which appeared "Les Deux Freres" by Feyen-Perrin and the "Park à Moutons" by Daubigny and work by Bracquemond and so many others – did they keep their full power or did they slacken?

Then if they slackened, aren't the things they did important enough to endure forever, so that the expression "too good to last" loses its meaning? Daubigny, Millet, Feyen-Perrin, so many others, showed what the etching needle can do, just as the Graphic, etc., showed what black and white can do.

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And this is a lasting truth, which can give energy to whomever wants it.

The truth is that whenever different people love the same thing and work at it together, their union makes strength; combined, they can do more than if their separate energies were each striving in a different direction. By working together one becomes stronger and a whole is formed, though the personality of each need not be blotted out by working together. And therefore I wish that Rappard were entirely better; we do not really work together, but we have the same thoughts about many things. He is recovering, though, and we are already fussing over our wood engravings again.

But it is my constant hope that we shall become even better friends than we are now, and that perhaps later we shall go and visit the miners together, for instance. But for the moment, I think we must both apply ourselves to a thorough study of the figure; the better we master that, the easier it will become to carry out such plans. He writes that he had a fever, that's all, that he is still very weak; but he writes little about his illness.

We've had snow again, which is thawing just now. That thaw weather is very beautiful. Today, while the snow is melting, one feels spring approaching, as it were, from afar.

I think when you come, sooner or later, we'll have a really good time together. I long for the spring breezes to blow away the weariness from working indoors so long.

I am very glad to have my sou'wester; I wonder if you will find some good in those fishermen's heads. The last one I made this week was of a fellow with white throat whiskers [F 1017, JH 302].

I know a drawing by Boyd Houghton which he calls "My Models"; it represents a passage where a few invalids, one with crutches, a blind man, a street urchin, etc., come to visit the painter on Christmas Day.

There is something very pleasant in the intercourse with the models, one learns much from them. This winter I have had some people whom I shall not easily forget. It is a charming saying of Edouard Frère's that he kept the same models so long that "celles qui posaient dans le temps pour les bébés, posent maintenant pour les mères" [those who used to pose for the babies, are now posing for the mothers].

Well, adieu, Theo, write soon, my best wishes, believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent