

Letter 070
Isleworth, 5 July 1876

Dear Theo,

The time may come when I shall look back with a certain melancholy on the “fleshpots of Egypt,” connected with other situations – that is, the bigger salaries and the higher worldly esteem – this I foresee. There is indeed “plenty of bread” in the houses that I shall enter if I continue along the road which I have taken, but there is not plenty of money. And yet I see a light in the distance so clearly; if that light disappears now and then, it is generally my own fault.

It is very doubtful whether I shall make great progress in this profession, whether the six years spent in the house of Messrs. Goupil and Co., – during which time I ought to have prepared myself for this profession – will not always remain an insuperable obstacle. However, I think I cannot now draw back in any way, even if a part of me should wish to (later on – at present this is not the case).

Lately it has seemed to me that there are no professions in the world other than those of schoolmaster and clergyman, with all that lies between these two – such as missionary, especially a London missionary, etc. I think it must be a peculiar profession to be a London missionary; one has to go around among the labourers and the poor to preach the Bible, and as soon as one has some experience, talk with them, find foreigners who are looking for work or other persons who are in difficulties and try and help them, etc., etc. Last Sunday, I went to London two or three times to find out if there was a chance of becoming one of them, as I speak a number of languages and have mixed, especially in Paris and London, with people of the lower classes and foreigners. Being a foreigner myself, I thought I might be fit for it and might become increasingly so. However, one must be at least twenty-four years old, and at all events I shall have to wait another year.

Mr. Stokes says that he definitely cannot give me any salary because he can get teachers enough for just board and lodging, and that is true. But will it be possible for me to continue this way? I am afraid not; it will be decided soon enough.

But, my boy, however this may be, one thing I can repeat: these few months have bound me so strongly to the sphere that extends from schoolmaster to clergyman, as much by the pleasures connected with those professions as by the thorns which have pricked me, that I cannot draw back any more. So I have to go on! I can assure you that some very peculiar difficulties will present themselves right away, and others are looming in the distance; one is in quite a different world from that of Messrs. Goupil and Co.

When will I get those small engravings, “Christus Consolator” and “Remunerator,” which you promised me? Write to me as soon as you can find a moment, but send your letter to Father, as my address will probably change very soon, and he will know it first.

Last week, I was at Hampton Court to see the beautiful gardens and long avenues of horse chestnuts and lime trees, in the tops of which a multitude of crows and rooks have built their nests, and also to see the palace and the paintings. Among other things there are many portraits by Holbein which are very beautiful; two splendid Rembrandts (the portrait of his wife, and of a rabbi); beautiful Italian portraits by Bellini, Titian; a picture by Leonardo da Vinci; cartoons by Mantegna; a beautiful picture by S. Ruysdael; a still life of fruit by Cuyp, etc. I wish you had been there with me; it was a pleasure to see pictures again.

And involuntarily I thought of the persons who had lived there at Hampton Court, of Charles I and his wife (she is the one who said: “Thank you, Lord, for making me a Queen, but an unhappy Queen”) at whose tomb Bossuet spoke from the fullness of his heart. Do you have Bossuet’s *Oraisons Funèbres*? In it you will find that speech (there is a very cheap edition, I think for 50 centimes); and I thought also of Lord and Lady Russell, who must have been there very often, too (Guizot described their lives in *L’amour dans le mariage* – you must read that when you can lay your hands on it).

Enclosed, a feather from one of the rooks there.

Write as soon as you can, I long to hear from you, believe me with a handshake,

Your loving brother, Vincent