

Letter 074
Isleworth, 26 August 1876

Dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find a note for Mr. Tersteeg; the last time I wrote to him I was still in Paris and it is time he had another letter. We have not lost track of each other since I left The Hague.

The morning is beautiful, the sunlight falls across the enormous acacias in the courtyard, it lights up the roofs and windows visible beyond the garden. There are already gossamer threads in the garden, it makes the morning fresh and the boys run left and right to warm themselves up.

I intend to recount to them this evening, in the dormitory, the story of John and Theogenes. I often tell them stories in the evening, for instance, the Conscript, by Conscience, or Madame Thérèse by Erckmann-Chatrian, and New Years Eve by Jean Paul – which I am sending you at the same time – and Andersen's Fairy Tales, such as The Story of a Mother, the Red Shoes, The Little Matchseller; King Robert of Sicily by Longfellow, etc. I sometimes tell them episodes from Dutch history.

Every day we study the Bible; this gives us the best feelings of joy.

No day passes without praying to God and without talking about Him. For the moment, my talks about Him leave much to be desired, but it will get better with His help and blessing.

Did I ever tell you about that picture by Boughton, "The Pilgrim's Progress"? It is towards evening. A sandy path leads over the hills to a mountain on which one can see the Holy City, lit by the sun setting red behind the grey evening clouds. On the path, a pilgrim on his way to the city. He is already tired and asks a woman in black, who is standing on the path and whose name is 'Sorrowful yet always rejoicing':

Does the road go uphill then all the way?
'Yes to the very end.'
And will the journey take all day long?
'From morn till night, my friend.'

The landscape through which the path runs is very beautiful, brown heathland with birches and pine trees here and there and patches of yellow sand, and in the distance the mountains against the sun. Truly, it is not a picture but an inspiration.

I am writing to you between lessons. Today I took a few moments off to go for a walk between the hedgerows with 'John and Theogenes' to study it. How I wish you could see the playground and the garden beyond, now, in the twilight. The gas is flickering in the school and one can hear the companionable sound of the boys at their lessons. Now and then one of them starts to hum a snatch of some hymn or other, and then there is something of the "old faith" in me. I am still far from being what I want to be, but with God's help I shall succeed. I want – to be bound to Christ with unbreakable bonds and to feel these bonds. To be sorrowful yet always rejoicing. To live in and for Christ, to be one of the poor of His Kingdom, steeped in the leaven, filled with His spirit, impelled by His Love, reposing in the Father with the repose of which I wrote to you in my last letter. To become one who finds repose in Him alone, who desires nothing but Him on earth, and who abides in the Love of God and Christ, in whom we are fervently bound to one another.

Thanks for your postcard. Mr. Jones has not yet decided what he will do. My compliments to all who may ask after me, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

One word more. I have just been telling the story of John and Theogenes, first in the dormitory, then in the upper room where there are four more; I told it in the dark, and they had gradually all fallen asleep before I had finished speaking. No wonder, for they have raced about a great deal today on the playground, and then, you see, I do not speak without difficulty, how it sounds to English ears, I do not know, but "practice makes perfect." I think the Lord has taken me as I am, with all my faults, though I am still hoping for more profound acceptance.

Tomorrow evening, I must tell the same story to the assistant and two older boys who could stay up later. We eat our bread together in the evenings. While I was telling my story, I heard a piano playing, down below, the tune of "Tell me the old, old story."

The hour is very late and the rules do not allow me to work so late. Soon I am going to smoke a pipe in the courtyard, it is nice there, also in the little courtyard where a pig has his liberty during most of the year (he is not there at the moment). In truth, it is amusing to amble about a while.

Now, good night, sleep well and, if you pray in the evenings, think of me as I remember you. Good night, my boy. A handshake from

The heart that is fainting
May grow full to o'erflowing
And they who behold it
Shall wonder and know not
That God at its fountains
Far off has been raining.

Your loving brother, Vincent