

Letter 078
Isleworth, c. 24 October 1876

Dear Theo,

How grateful I was for your little note, and for Mother's letter; so we shall wait until Christmas and may God give us a happy meeting then. "My illness is no misfortune." No, for "sorrow is better than laughter." No, when God supports us, illness is no misfortune, especially when we get new ideas and new intentions in those days of illness that would not have come to us if we had not been ill, and when in those days we achieve clearer faith and stronger trust in God.

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." In our weakness we are strong. Illness sanctifies health and teaches us to keep well. But do get well soon, my boy. Oh! how I long for Christmas.

Yesterday I was in Mr. Jones's church¹ to help with the preparations for tonight. A clergyman from Leicester will then lecture on the Reformation and illustrate it by magic lantern with slides of that period. I have already seen some of the pictures, they are in the style of Holbein – you know that many painters and graphic artists here work in that style. There was a very beautiful picture of Luther's marriage.

Last Monday there was a "tea meeting" in that church; it was the anniversary of its opening. More than two hundred and fifty people were at tea, and afterward Mr. Jones and a few other clergymen spoke until late in the evening.

It has been very beautiful here lately, especially the streets in the evening when it is more or less hazy and the lamps are lit, and also in the park which I wrote you about. A few days ago I saw the sun setting there behind the elm trees with their bronze-coloured leaves. Over the grass was that haze which Anna wrote about, and the brook which the swans swim in runs through the park. The acacia trees in the playground have almost lost their leaves; I see them through the window in front of my desk – sometimes they stand out dark against the sky, sometimes I see the sun rise red in the mist behind them. It will soon be winter now; I am so glad Christmas comes in winter – that's why I like winter best of all the seasons.

How delightful it will be to sail down the Thames and across the sea, and see those friendly Dutch dunes and the church spire that is visible from so very far away.

How little we see of each other and how little we see of our parents, and yet the family feeling and our love for each other is so strong that the heart is uplifted and the eye turns to God and prays, "Do not let me stray too far from them, not too long, O Lord."

No, when God supports us, illness is no misfortune, especially when we get new ideas and new intentions in those days of illness that would not have come to us if we had not been ill, and when we achieve clearer faith and stronger trust in God.

À Dieu, boy, my very best wishes; regards to Roos, and to other acquaintances if you see them and believe me with a handshake,

Your loving brother, Vincent

1. A little wooden church at Turnham green.