

Letter 085
Dordrecht, 21 January 1877

Dear Theo,

Adam Bede costs 2.60 guilders, so I am sending you back 1.40 guilders. Now I only hope they will enjoy the book at home, but they certainly will. Thanks for your letter, which gave me much pleasure. The next time we meet, we shall be as good friends as ever; sometimes I feel so delighted that we are again living on the same soil and speaking the same language.

Last week we had a flood here. Coming from the store at night, between twelve and one, I walked around the cathedral; the wind raged in the elm trees around it, and the moon shone through the rain clouds and was reflected in the canals, which were already filled to overflowing. At three o'clock that morning everybody in Rijken the grocer's house, where I live, was busy carrying the things from the shop upstairs, as the water in the house had risen to three feet. There was no little noise and bustle: on all the ground floors people were busy carrying things upstairs, and a little boat came floating through the street. In the morning at daybreak I saw a group of men at the other end of the street; one after the other they waded through the water to their warehouses. Much damage has been done. The water also penetrated the place where Mr. Braat keeps his paper, etc.; it was not flooded from the outside, but by underground seepage. Mr. Braat says that it will cost him a lot of money. We have been busy a day and a half carrying everything upstairs into another house. Working with one's hands for a day is a rather agreeable diversion – if only it had been for another reason.

You ought to have seen the sunset that evening; the streets seemed of gold, the way Cuyp used to paint them. I am eager for my trunk, which is on the way, especially so that I may put my prints up in my room again. The only ones I have up now are "Christus Consolator," which you gave me, and two English woodcuts of the "Men of Emmaus."

But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. – And another one, Those that sat in darkness and the shadow of death have seen a great light, weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

It may be that there is a time in life when one is tired of everything and feels, perhaps correctly, as if all one does is wrong – do you think this is a feeling one must try to avoid and to banish, or is it "the sorrow for God," which one must not fear, but cherish to see if it may bring some good? Is it "the sorrowing for God" which leads us to make "a choice that we will never regret?"

And at such a time, when one is weary of oneself, one should think with devotion, hope and love of the words: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest upon your souls."

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up my cross, and follow me." At such a time one may well think: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

If we let ourselves be taught by the experience of life, and led by the sorrowing for God, vital strength may spring from the weary heart. If only we are truly weary, we shall believe in God all the more firmly, and shall find in Christ, through His word, a friend and a Comforter. And days may come when we feel: "Thou removest my iniquities from me as far as the East is from the West" [sic, Ps. 103:12], and when we may feel something of "the zeal for Thine house hath consumed me" [sic, Ps. 69:9] and "our God is a consuming fire," when we shall know what it means to be ardent in spirit. "Not always shall hope droop." Let us not forget "the things which we heard in the beginning." In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Nothing shall separate us from the Love of Christ, neither things present nor things to come.

[Written in the margin]

Juich Aarde juich tot God omhoog
Dat dankbre tranen uit uw oog...

[Translation of the whole poem]

Rejoice, oh earth, rejoice unto God on high;
Let grateful tears flow from thine eye
For Him, the All-bountiful;
Gaily celebrate this joyful day,

The most beautiful the world
Has ever seen glow on her horizon.
We still can hear the cheering of that blissful night
When the stars with new splendour
And the Host of Angels with new gladness
Rejoiced in the coming of Jesus.

Ik weet aan wien ik mij vertrouwe...[for translation of the whole verse, *see* Letter 79].
Niet altijd zal de hope kwijnen...[Not always shall hope droop...]

‘t Hijgend hert der jacht ontkomen...

[Dutch version of the well-known hymn

As pants the hart for cooling streams
When heated in the chase,
So longs my soul, O God, for thee,
And thy refreshing grace, etc.]

O mijn ziel, wat buigt ge u neder...[For translation see Letter 82a]

Last Sunday I was in the French church here, which is a very solemn and dignified and has something most attractive about it. The text was, “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The sermon closed with: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” After church I went for a lovely walk along a dyke past the mills; the glittering sky over the meadows was reflected in the ditches. There are some special things in other countries, for instance the French coast I saw at Dieppe: the cliffs topped with green grass, the sea and the sky, the harbour with the old boats as if painted by Daubigny, with brown nets and sails, the small houses, among them a few restaurants, with little white curtains and green pine branches at the windows, the carts with white horses harnessed in large blue halters and red tassels, the drivers with their blue smocks, the fishermen with their beards and oilskins, and the French women with pale faces, dark, often rather deep-set eyes, black dresses and white caps. And, for instance, the streets of London in the rain with the lamps, and a night spent there on the steps of a little old grey church, as happened to me this summer after that trip from Ramsgate.

There are indeed some special things in other countries, but last Sunday, when I walked on that dyke, I thought how good it felt to be on Dutch soil, and I felt something like, “Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God!” For the memory of old times came back to me, among other things how we used to walk with Father to Rijsbergen, etc., during the last days of February and heard the lark above the black fields with young green corn, beheld the sparkling blue sky with the white clouds above, and then the paved path with the beech trees.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Or rather, Oh, Zundert! Oh, Zundert! Who knows if we might not walk together beside the sea this summer! We must stay good friends, anyway, Theo, and just believe in God and trust with an abiding trust in Him who presides over prayer and over thought – who can tell to what heights grace can rise?

Warmest congratulations on today [Their father’s birthday] – it is already half-past one and so it is the eighth of February – may God spare us our father for a long time yet and may “He bind us closely to one another, and may our love for Him strengthen our bonds ever more.”

Father wrote that he had already seen starlings. Do you still remember how they used to perch on the church at Zundert? So far I have not noticed any here, but I did see a great many crows on the Great Church in the morning. Now it will soon be spring again and the larks, too, will be returning. “He reneweth the face of the earth,” and it is written: “Behold, I make all things new,” and much as He renews the face of the earth, so He can also renew and strengthen man’s soul and heart and mind. The nature of every true son does indeed bear some resemblance to that of the son who was dead and came back to life. Let us not forget the text “sorrowful yet always rejoicing,” “unknown and yet well known,” and write the word weemoed [melancholy] as two words, wee [woe] and moed [courage] and faith in God, who in His time can cause the loneliness which we sometimes feel even in the midst of a crowd, to fall from us. He, of whom Joseph said,

“He hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.” And yet Joseph had not forgotten his father, as well you know, but you also know what he meant by his words. Take care of yourself, give my regards to all at the Roos’s and above all to Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg, and accept a handshake in my thoughts and believe me,
Your very loving brother, Vincent

Tell Mr. Tersteeg not to take it amiss that the drawing samples have been kept for so long. They are for the H. B. school [Hogere Burgerschool (high school)] and there are 30 already there. But they also want to choose some for the evening classes and so they need to keep them for about a week longer. You will have them back as soon as possible.

[In the margin] Send me that page from Michelet again, my boy. The one you sent me before is in the box in my desk and I need it. Write again soon.