

Letter 091
Etten, 3 April 1877

Dear Theo,

I must send you another letter; as you see, I am writing from Etten.

Yesterday morning I received a letter from home in which Father wrote that Aerssen was dying and that he had been to see him, as Aerssen had expressed the wish that Father should visit him. At this news my heart was drawn so strongly towards Zundert that I longed to go there also.

But more about this later. I have just read your last letter, from which I see that your trip is over and you are back in The Hague. Please write again soon, and let us stay close together.

Today I received a postcard from Anna, saying she arrived safely; may she do well. Has it struck you, too, that something has come over her that makes you think of the woman who loved Jesus, of whom the Bible speaks? And thinking of her, I am reminded again and again of Béranger's words:

Dans les palais et sous le chaume,
Dit la Vierge, j'ai de mes mains
Préparé le miel et le baume
Pour les souffrances des humains.

[In the palaces and under the thatch,
The Virgin says, I have prepared
With my own hands the honey and balsam
For human sufferings.]

And how sweet she was with that family at Welwyn, sharing their happiness and misfortune, and never withholding any help or comfort that was within her; also in the days that child fell ill and died. I have seen so clearly how they all loved her. From the very beginning she exerted herself to the utmost, rising early in winter to light the fire with her own hands, even though the first days were not easy for her, and she wrote she often thought, "Without Thou, O Eternal Being, Ah, what would man be on this earth; Who is there in heaven but Thou; Nought delights me any more on earth but Thou."¹ And how she looked forward to Communion, and went to it, and was fortified by it. And how Pa and Mother love her, as, indeed, we all do; ay, let us stay close together.

Saturday night I took the last train from Dordrecht to Oudenbosch, and walked from there to Zundert. It was so beautiful on the heath; though it was dark, one could distinguish the heath and the pine woods and moors extending far and wide – it reminded me of the Bodmer print hanging in Father's study. The sky was overcast, but the evening star was shining through the clouds, and now and then more stars appeared. It was very early when I arrived at the churchyard in Zundert; everything was so quiet. I went over all the dear old spots, and the little paths, and waited for the sunrise there. You know the story of the Resurrection – everything reminded me of it that morning in the quiet graveyard.

Having arrived at Aerssen's house, I heard from young Aerssen and Mientje, as soon as they had got up, that their father had died that night – oh! They were so grieved, and their hearts were so full. Hein also came very early in the morning. I was glad to be with them, and I shared their feelings, for I too had loved the man.

The aunts send you their love, as well as Jan Doome, whom I also visited. From there I walked with Hein to Rijsbergen and spent about an hour in the house; we read the Bible together. Woutje Prins² had also sat up with Aerssen three nights, and had been with him to the last. His passing was peaceful. I shall never forget that noble head lying on the pillow: the face showed signs of suffering, but wore an expression of peace and a certain holiness. Oh! It was so beautiful, to me it was characteristic of all the peculiar charm of the country and the life of the Brabant people. And they were all talking about Father, how good he had always been, and how much these two had loved each other.

Then I walked with Hein Aerssen to Etten, and I am home now, ready to start for Dordrecht early tomorrow morning.

Good-by, brother, it is mail time; a firm handshake and kind regards to all, from

Your loving brother, Vincent

1. Quotation from Dutch poem.
2. Their old nurse at Zundert.