

Letter 101
Amsterdam, 12 June 1877

Dear Theo,

I received your letter of June 7, and was glad to learn from it that you had been to Etten and spent Sunday there; it was fine that Father and little brother accompanied you back to Dordrecht.

And then you tell me that you spoke with Father and Mother about your plans for the future; when I read that my heart went out to you; I think you are quite right. Launch out into the deep. But I only hope that you will go to London before you see Paris. But we must calmly wait and see how things turn out. I have loved so many things in these cities; I often recall them with tender melancholy, and I almost wish to go back there with you. When I occupy a small place in that large Dutch Protestant church, those recollections will furnish many a topic for sermons. Let us go on with faith and confidence, you and I. Who knows, we may shake hands one day, as I remember Father and Uncle Jan did one time in the little Zundert church when Uncle returned from his journey; many things had happened in both their lives, and they finally felt, as it were, firm ground under their feet.

As soon as you hear any particulars, be sure to write at once. I hope we shall spend some quiet hours together before you go. Though there does not seem to be any immediate opportunity, such a thing can happen overnight. But I repeat, brother, when I think of you, my heart goes out to you. I think it is a very fine plan – my past comes to life again when I think of your future. “Behold, I make all things new,” will perhaps soon be your experience also.

Blessings on you during these days. Take a last good look at the things around you and do not forget them, “walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it,” as the Bible says.

I am very busy every day, so time passes quickly and the days are almost too short, even when I stretch them very little. I have such a great longing to make progress, and also to know the Bible well and thoroughly – and also to know many things like what I copied for you about Cromwell. “Not a day without a line”; by writing, reading, working and practicing daily, perseverance will lead me to a good end.

This week I visited the cemetery here outside the Muiderpoort; in front of it is a little wood where it is very beautiful, especially when the sun shines through the leaves in the evening. There are many beautiful graves and all kinds of evergreens, and roses and forget-me-nots are in bloom. I also walked to the Zuider Zee again; it is forty minutes from here, along a dyke from which one can see meadows and farms all around; it always reminds me of Rembrandt’s etchings.

Amsterdam is a beautiful city; today I again saw a little corner for Thijs Maris or Allebé to paint – houses behind the East Church on a little square. I had to speak to the sexton about Uncle’s seat in church, and I was in his house; next door there lived a cobbler, etc.; but you will find it everywhere, the world is full of it. That sexton reminded me of a woodcut by Rethel I think, I suppose you know it too – “Der Tod als Freund.” [Death as a Friend] That picture has always struck me; when I was in London one could see it in the show windows of almost every art shop. There is a sequel to it, “The Cholera in Paris,” and the “Dance of Death” is also by Rethel.

Sunday morning I heard the Reverend Mr. Laurillard at early morning service; he spoke about, “Jesus walked in the newly sown field.” He made a deep impression on me. In that sermon he spoke also about the parable of the sower, and about “the man who should cast seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and he knows not how.” He also mentioned the “Funeral Procession through the Cornfields” by Van Der Maaten. The sun was shining through the windows; the few people in the church were mainly working men and women. Later that morning I heard Uncle Stricker in the East Church on, “praise not from men but from God,” also referring to the death of the Queen.

This morning at a quarter to five there was a terrible thunderstorm here; shortly after, the first gang of workmen came through the gates of the yard in the pouring rain. I got up and went out into the yard, taking a few copybooks with me to the summerhouse. I have been sitting there, looking out over the whole yard and dock; the poplars and elderberry and other shrubs were bowed down by the heavy storm, and the rain poured down on the piles of wood and on the decks of the ships. Boats and a little steamer were sailing back and forth, and in the distance, near the village across the Ij, one saw swift-moving brown sails and the houses and the trees on Buitenkant and the more vividly-coloured churches. Again and again one heard the thunder and saw the lightning; the sky could have been from a picture by Ruysdael, and the seagulls were skimming the water. It was a grand sight and a real relief after the oppressive heat of yesterday. It has quite refreshed me, for I felt very tired when I went upstairs last night.

Yesterday I visited the Reverend Mr. Meyes and Mrs. Meyes – Father had asked me to – and had tea with them.

When I arrived, his reverence was taking a nap and I was asked to come back in half an hour, and I did; fortunately, I had the little book by Lamennais in my pocket, and read it walking under the trees along the canals, where the evening sun was mirrored in the dark water. Then I went back, and they reminded me of “Winter” by Thorwaldsen. Father and Mother remind me of it even more, but I repeat that they did, too.

The days fly by. I am four years older than you are, and probably they seem to go more swiftly to me than to you, but I fight against it by stretching them a little in the morning and evening.

Will you write soon? It’s a pity that Mager will not come now after all. The weather has cleared: the sky is blue and the sun is shining and the birds are singing – there are many of them in the yard, all kinds. In the evening I generally walk up and down there with the dog, and then I often think of that poem, “Under the Stars.” The roses against the house are in bloom, and in the garden, the elder bushes and the jessamine also. A little while ago I went again to the Trippenhuis to see if those rooms which were shut when we were there were open again; but it will be another fortnight before they are open to the public. There were many foreigners there, French and English; hearing them speak called up many memories in me. Yet I am not sorry to be back here. “Life has quicksands, life has snares,” is a true saying.

How is Mrs. Tersteeg? If you meet Mauve or go to see him, give him my best regards; also at Haanebeek’s and Roos’s.

Now I must set to work again; I have no lessons today, but tomorrow morning, two hours, so I have a great deal to prepare. I have studied through the Old Testament up to Samuel; tonight I begin with the Kings, and when that is finished it will be something worth while.

Now and then when I am writing, I automatically do a small drawing, such as I sent you lately. I did one this morning representing Elijah in the desert under an orange sky, with some hawthorns in the foreground. It is nothing special, but I see it all so clearly before me, and I think that at such moments I could speak about it enthusiastically – may it be given me to do so later on.

I hope you are having a good time; when you go to the woods at Scheveningen or to the beach, say hello to them for me. When you come here again, I shall be able to show you some fine spots here, too. When I go to Mendes’s, I pass the Jewish quarter every day. And now à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent