

Letter 105
Amsterdam, 5 August 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for yesterday's letter; it was a good one – there was so much in it, it was quite refreshing to me. I found a few stamps enclosed, for which many thanks, and then you say you will send a money order so that I can come to The Hague to see the exhibition of drawings. The money order arrived today, Sunday; many thanks for it and for your kind offer, but I am sending it back and will not come, much as I should like to see the beautiful and interesting things which you write about.

I have already refused to go to Baarn, first, because I'd rather spend my Sunday in going to church a few times, in writing, and in studying a little; second, because I should have to ask Uncle Stricker for the money for the journey. He has money from Father which is at my disposal in case of need, but I hope to use it as little as possible. If I go to The Hague, I must also go to Baarn, and then once is not enough – *quois qu'il en soit* – I had rather not. Besides, boy, I know you need the money yourself. But many, many thanks, you know.

I do not regret in any way not always having money in my pocket. I do have a craving for thousands of things that, if I had money, I would spend it perhaps on books or other things which I can very well pass by and which would distract me perhaps from my studies. Even in my current situation it is not always easy to resist distractions; if I had books in reach of my hand it would only make it worse. I understand that, the same as the pauper and needy of the world, one can be enriched in God and that this treasure, nothing can take it from you. Perhaps, one day, we will have leisure for all books: we would then have regretted spending our youth only in our personal satisfaction – particularly if we had a hearth and a family which would be necessary for us to take care of and to preoccupy us.

In the midst of life we are near death, that is a phrase which touches each one of us personally, it is a truth we see again confirmed in what you tell me about Carolien van Stockum, and formerly we saw it in another member of the same family. It has touched me, and with all my heart I hope she may recover. Oh! what sorrow, what sadness and suffering there is in the world, in public as well as in private life. How everything is changed in that house, compared to what it was a few years ago, "das war vor langen Jahren, wenn [sic] wir beisammen waren" [that was many years ago, when we were together]; that was the time of Der Wirthin Töchterlein. Longfellow says, "There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak," but above all it is written, "Let him who puts his hand to the plough not look back, and be a man." I often look at that engraving after the picture by Ruysdael, "Haarlem and Overveen"; that painter knew, too.

If she should soon recover enough to be moved to The Hague, and if you see her then, remember me to her. If you can find words which will cheer her or give her courage, remind her of how much she is needed in this world and of the right and reason she has to live, especially for her children's sake, say them; you will be doing a good deed. Spoken in time, forceful words from the heart can cheer and comfort.

This morning I was up rather early and left the house about six o'clock to go to early morning service. Then I walked through all kinds of old streets where I wished you were with me; you know the picture (at least the lithograph and wood engraving after it) by Daubigny, "Le Pont Marie" – it reminded me of that. I like to walk on old, narrow, and more or less gloomy streets, with drugstores, lithographic and other printing offices, sea-chart shops and stores with ship's victuals, etc., which one finds there near the Oudezijds Chapel and the Teertuinen and at the end of the Warmoes Straat; everything is interesting there. I just stepped in to say good morning to Vos and Kee, and then went on to the Island Church, where the Reverend Mr. ten Kate, the poet of "The Creation" and author of many beautiful books, preached on Romans 1:15-17. The church was very crowded, and one saw an expression of faith written on many faces, men's as well as women's, but written in different characters. Sometimes his intonation and expression were like Father's. He spoke very well and from a full heart, and though the sermon was not short, the service was over almost before one knew it, for his words were so interesting that one forgot the time. For a change last week I made an excerpt from the journeys of Paul and drew a map of them; it is a good thing to have.

The other day Uncle Stricker gave me a book on the geography of Palestine (in German, by Raumer) of which he had a duplicate copy.

The following is a fine fragment from *Télémaque*. Mentor says:

The earth is never ungrateful, she always bestows her fruit on those who cultivate her with care and with love; she refuses her wealth only to those who fear to labour for her. The more children the peasants have, the richer they are – if their lords do not tax them too heavily – for from their earliest childhood the

children begin to assist them. The youngest tend the sheep in the meadows; those who are a little older have large herds entrusted to their care; the oldest work with their father. Meanwhile the mother prepares a simple meal for her husband and her dear children, who will come home tired from the day's toil. She milks the cows and the goats, and streams of milk are flowing; she makes a big fire, around which the whole innocent, happy family sits singing of an evening, until the time comes for peaceful repose.

It is more beautiful still when one thinks of it illustrated with etchings by Jacque.
Your postcard arrived just now, thanks for the quick news. I hope you had a good Sunday. Cousin Fanny and Betty and Bertha are still here and are like flowers in the house. Bertha especially is a nice little girl.
My compliments to the Rooses and a handshake in thought from
Your loving brother, Vincent

I cannot get a money order, so I must send back the amount in stamps.