

Letter 122
Amsterdam, May 1878

Dear Theo,

It is time for you to hear from me again. I have already heard from Father of your safe arrival and how you walked all over the city during those first days. I am very curious to hear what your first impressions were, so as soon as you can find time to write, your letter will be welcomed. It is true, however, that first impressions often change, for we know only too well that all is not gold that glitters and that though there may be a bright dawn, there is also a dark midnight and a burning, oppressive heat at noon. But just as the morning hour is blessed and is worth much gold, so first impressions keep their value even though they pass, for sometimes they prove to have been right after all, and one comes back to them. So write me what you saw these first days and what your thoughts have been.

Just now we are having bad weather here, and probably it is the same in Paris. You will soon perceive that it is much warmer there in summer than in Holland, and you will also see thundery skies like the ones Bonington painted. The quarter of town where you live is rather interesting. When one walks through the streets there, or towards Montmartre in the morning or evening, one sees many a workshop, and many a little room that reminds one of "Un Tonnelier" or "Les Couturières" or other pictures by Édouard Frère. At times it is good to see such simple things when one sees so many people who for different reasons have strayed from all that is natural and so have lost their real and inner life, and when one also sees so many who live in misery and horror – for in the evening and at night one sees all kinds of black figures wandering about, men as well as women, in whom the terror of the night is personified, and whose misery one must class among the things that have no name in any language.

Last week one of the clergymen here died; he was known all over the country (Pantekoeck). He was buried last Saturday; that procession on the path along the green borders of the Amstel reminded me of "In Memoriam." He was the father of six children, the eldest about twenty years old. A large crowd followed and they literally jostled each other. A memorial service was held in almost all the churches yesterday. I heard Uncle Stricker, who had known him very well. He preached in the Oudezijd Chapel, where the boys from the orphanage and those from the sailors' training school usually go. The sermon was full of sentiment. Uncle's text was, "I am greatly distressed and what shall I say?" He had undergone terrible and long suffering. One night I heard one of his last sermons, and it was clear from what he said that he shuddered and shrank from each new day and night, especially from the one which followed the exertion of preaching. Even then one could not hear him without feeling with him and shuddering involuntarily, for the road leading to the eternal home is dark, and happy is he who is strengthened by the hope of a better life when the darkness and night approaches.

Do not let all the new distractions keep you from reading some good book, for instance, the one by Michelet on the Revolution, or something by Thoré or Th. Gautier on Paris and the time of the young painters and authors. Oh! boy, how I should like to wander with you through the city.

Today I hope to take a long walk through the section of town where I have not often been. I finally found the house in the Breestraat where Rembrandt lived – you know we spoke about it when you were here. Think of that particular picture in the Luxembourg, "Qui vous reçoit me reçoit, et qui me reçoit, reçoit celui qui m'a envoyé" [He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me], and tell me who painted it.

Paris is so beautiful in autumn; you will begin to notice it toward the end of September.

Give my kind regards to all at Soek's, I so often remember an excursion I made with his family to Ville d'Avray. Entering the little church there, it struck me to find more than one picture by Corot – you know he was there often.

Give also my compliments to Braat and Mutters. Have a good time and write soon, and imagine a warm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

I still have to thank you for your photograph; it is very good and I am glad to have it, many thanks.