

Letter 128
Petit Wasmes, March 1879

Dear Theo,

I heard from Father and mother that you paid them a surprise visit recently, just after Father came to visit me. I am very glad Father came. Together we visited the three clergymen of the Borinage, and walked in the snow, and visited a miner's family, we saw the coal being bought up out of a mine called Les Trois Diefs [The Three Mounds]; Father also attended two Bible classes, so we did a great deal in those few days. I think that Father has been impressed with the Borinage and that he will not easily forget it; no one who visits this curious, remarkable and picturesque region can.

It is a long time since I wrote you. If with God's help my work here is a success, you must come to see me someday, perhaps when you have to go to Paris again or when you take a business trip.

The other day I found a list of all the coal veins south of Mons, 155 in all, in the house of an elderly man who has worked in the mines for many years. The country and the inhabitants charm me more every day. One has a homelike feeling here, like on the heath, or in the dunes; the people have something simple and good. Those who leave are homesick for their country; on the other hand, homesick foreigners lose their nostalgia for their own country and adapt easily.

How are Mauve and Maris? Have you seen many pictures recently? Spring is near, and it will bring fresh subject material. What has Israël's been doing this winter? They would find so many things here that would appeal to them. When the cart drawn by the white horse [l'blanc ch'val] brings an injured man home from the mines, one sees things that remind one of "The castaway" by Israël's: every moment there is something which moves one intensely.

Write again soon, and when you tell me something about painters, remember that I am still capable of understanding it, though I have not seen any pictures in a long time.

I have rented a small house that I would like to make my home, but now it serves only as a workshop or study; Father, and I too, think it preferable that I lodge with Denis. Still, I have some of my things there, including some prints on the wall. I must go out to visit a few of the sick, and some others as well.

Have a good time, and write me soon. Remember me to Mauve when you see him, and the Roos family. Spring is coming, for the larks are singing, and in the wood the branches and buds are beginning to sprout, especially on the alder trees. When Father was here, everything was covered with snow, so that he has seen the curious effect of the black charbonnages and the many black chimneys in the snow. There are many places here that remind one of that drawing by Bosboom, "Chaudfontaine."

À Dieu, a handshake in thought, and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent