

72 Boulevard du Midi, Brussels, January 1881

My dear Theo,

You will quite forgive me when you know that I wrote my last letter in a moment of spleen. My drawings went all wrong, and not knowing what to do, I began to write. I certainly ought to have waited for a better moment, and this will show you that I myself undoubtedly belong to that class of people of which I spoke in my last letter, namely, that class of people who do not always reflect on what they say or do. This being so, let us drop it.

I can tell you one thing; during these last days there has been a change for the better. I have finished at least a dozen drawings, or rather sketches in pencil and in pen and ink, which seem to me to be somewhat better. They vaguely resemble certain drawings by Lançon, or certain English wood engravings, but as yet they are more clumsy and awkward. They represent a porter, a miner, a snow shoveller, a walk in the snow, old women, a type of old man ("Ferragus" from Balzac's *L'histoire des treize*), etc. I am sending you two small ones, "En Route" and "Devant les Tisons" [In front of the wood fire]. I see perfectly well that they are not good, but they are beginning to look like something.

I have a model almost every day, an old porter, or some working man, or some boy, who poses for me. Next Sunday perhaps one or two soldiers will sit for me. And because now I am no longer in a bad humour, I have quite a different and better opinion of you, and of the world in general. Also I have again drawn a landscape – a heath – a thing I had not done for a long time.

I love landscape very much, but I love ten times more those studies from life, sometimes of startling realism, which have been drawn so masterfully by Gavarni, Henri Monnier, Daumier, De Lemud, Henri Pille, Th. Schuler, Ed. Morin, G. Doré (e.g. in his "London"), A. Lançon, De Groux, Félicien Rops, etc., etc. Now without in the least pretending to compare myself to those artists, still, by continuing to draw those types of working people, etc., I hope to arrive at the point of being able to illustrate papers and books. Especially when I am able to take more models, also female models, I shall make more progress – I feel it, and know it. And I shall also probably learn to make portraits. But the condition is to work hard, "Not a day without a line," as Gavarni said.

So it is understood that for the present I shall stay here, till you perhaps find something better for me. Only write me now and then. I am for the moment busy drawing for the third time all the *Exercices au Fusain* by Bargue.

You told me of a change in the staff of the house Goupil & Co., and also of another change in your own position. I congratulate you, and as to those gentlemen Goupil & Co., I am inclined to believe that they are to be congratulated on having got rid of some of the staff. I have always thought that those gentlemen themselves were animated by a superior and nobler spirit than that of those who have now left. Perhaps the position the latter have occupied so long in the firm, the influence and domination, which Messrs. Goupil & Co. put up with, were repugnant to some of the other employees, whom the company would perhaps have done better to retain, but who were so driven to extremes that they resigned.

As you vaguely spoke to me some time ago about coming to Paris, I must tell you that I wish no better than to go someday soon, provided I were sure of finding some work there which would give me a salary of at least 100 fr. a month. I must also tell you that as I have begun to draw, I do not intend to drop it, so I will try chiefly to get on in that line. Not only does drawing figures and scenes from life demand a knowledge of the technique of drawing, but it also demands profound studies of literature, physiognomy, etc., which are difficult to acquire.

Enough for today; write me when you have a moment to spare, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

72 Bd. du Midi

Someday I hope to go to see Mr. Horta.