

Dear Theo,

Your registered letter arrived in good order, many thanks. From your letter I gathered that you are very busy with the inventory; good luck with it, it will be a tough job.

How I wish we could be together these two Christmas days – I should so love to see you in the studio again. I too have been working hard lately, just because I was full of that Christmas sentiment; the feeling is not enough, one must express it in one's work.

So I am now working on two large heads of an old man from the workhouse, with his wide beard and his shabby old-fashioned top hat [F 954, JH 287; F 945a, JH 288]. The old fellow has the kind of wrinkled, witty face that one should like to have near a cozy Christmas fire.

Harper published a Christmas issue illustrated by some painters who call themselves the "Tile Club." Boughton is one of them. The best of the drawings are by Abbey – they are mainly scenes from long ago, when the Dutch founded New York under the name of New Amsterdam.

I think these drawings have been reproduced by the process you described on the paper which Buhot sent a sample of. I must compare these American drawings again with the pictures in *Vie Moderne*.

I trust I shall be able to learn it, and who knows, maybe next year we shall be able to make a trial.

While you are so busy just now, I'll try my utmost to make some drawings for that purpose. When you are less busy after a while, I shall have to ask you or Buhot some more about it.

But I see clearly enough that the process is very satisfactory, that, if the drawing is good, one is almost sure of a good reproduction. So working on the drawings is the main thing.

As to lithography, as I have assisted a few times at the printing and the preparation of the stone, I think I shall try to make some lithographs without having recourse to paper, etc. – simply by drawing on the stone itself. For much as I like those drawings in Harper's Christmas Number or in *Vie Moderne*, still there is always something mechanical in them, something of a photograph or photogravure, and I prefer an ordinary lithograph by Daumier or Gavarni or Lemud. Well, a firm hand for drawing is needed for one as well as for the other, that's the main thing.

I am afraid that a new process is one of those things which cannot quite satisfy one, that it is in fact rather too smooth. I mean that an ordinary etching, an ordinary wood engraving, or an ordinary lithograph has a charm which cannot be replaced by anything mechanical.

The same can be said of engraving – the photogravure reproduction of the "Sewing Class" by Israëls, for instance, or of the picture by Blommers or Artz is superb – the way they are published by Goupil and Co. But if this process should entirely replace the real engraving, I think in the long run one would miss the ordinary engraving, with all its difficulties and imperfections.

Rappard is still sick, though the crisis is past; he is very weak, his father writes.

What is it? I don't know – perhaps brain fever or inflammation? His father doesn't give particulars.

Well, I hope your Christmas will be pleasant after all – that you will be able to take a nice long walk, and that you will have a good time – but I am afraid you will be up to your ears in the inventory. Well, work is always cheering, even the kind of work which isn't very pleasant in itself.

My very best wishes, write again if you can, but if you are too busy, I'll understand perfectly, and then you will make up for it later by a few descriptions of Montmartre or so. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent