

Letter 284  
The Hague, 9 or 10 May 1883

Dear Theo,

I received in good order your letter with 50 francs enclosed. It was a deliverance, at least a relief, to me. I also have some news from Rappard, but nothing definite.

A letter in answer to mine, that he will help me and come to see me, but he writes, "I don't feel well again," finishes with, "I enclose the money."

"P.S. I think I will come at once and bring the money. I shall come tomorrow."

Next day a wire: "Cannot come. Letter follows."

So, though I have heard, I am not more advanced than in the Game of the Goose, where, as you remember, when one alights on a goose, one goes on, but if one chances to drop on another goose which turn its bill the wrong way, one has to go back to one's former position.

But it is not his fault, for he really has been very ill, and is still suffering from the aftereffects. Besides, his sister has had the same illness as he, and they have been very anxious about her; but she also has recovered. But I believe that our friend Rappard is doing things which cost him much energy and nervous power and are not worth the time he spends on them; so I heard that before his illness he made decorations for the centenary of a Utrecht painters' corporation, and now he is speaking of church ornaments. I happened to write him my disapproval of both things, and both times he happened to fall ill after this work. If he was laid up from overwork on his own things, it would be all right, but this, I repeat, it is not worth powder and shot, and I wrote him again, "You are a sharp-shooter and one of the few in the present time who carry cartridges in their bag. Do not use them except in cases where a shot is unavoidable."

I am afraid, dear brother, that the money you advanced our dear cousin H. has for the moment assumed the shape of a malignant hound, or some such purchase of which he is very fond. I believe it is sometimes impossible for him to change them back into bank notes or silver coins afterward, because he, like many another horse or dog trainer, is caught in some jobber's net. I am among those who wish him the greatest possible success in his negotiations, and can wish no better result than that he may soon pay back what he owes you. At one time there were great plans for peopling the plantation with innumerable dogs. This kind of breeding may be very laudable, but for the moment, I will not say more about it than that I hope it may be extraordinarily profitable.

Has your patient left the hospital for good? But perhaps some days of anxiety will follow, no less serious than when she was still there.

Michelet rightly says: "Une femme est une malade." They vary, Theo, they vary like the weather. Now he who has eyes to see it finds something beautiful and good in every kind of weather, he finds the snow and the burning sun beautiful, the storm and the calm, the cold and the heat; he loves every season and cannot spare one day of the year, and in his heart he is contented and resigned to things being as they are. But even if one feels this way about the weather and the changing seasons, and the same way about the changing feminine nature – believing at heart that there is a reason in its enigma too, submitting to what one cannot understand – I repeat, even if one could feel this way about it, still our own character and opinion are not always, and at every moment, in harmony and sympathy with those of the woman to whom we are united; and one personally feels anxiety or dissatisfaction or doubt, notwithstanding the courage, faith and serenity one may have.

As the professor who attended her confinement told me, it will take years before the woman has completely recovered her health. That is to say the nervous system remains very sensitive, and she possesses the changeability of women to a high degree.

The great danger is – as you will understand – her falling back into former errors. This danger, though of a moral nature, is connected with the physical constitution. And what I should like to call oscillations between improvement and falling back into former bad habits worry me continually and seriously. At times her temper is such that it is almost unbearable even for me – violent, mischievous, bad. I can tell you, I am sometimes in despair. She comes round again, and she has often told me afterward: I myself do not know what I am doing then. Do you remember you wrote me last year that you were afraid the mother would become a burden on me? Sometimes I wish it had been so. The mother is so energetic when she wants to be, and might have done so much better than she did. Now she often is more of a trouble than a help. Well, when the woman does wrong, it is sometimes the mother's fault; and when the mother does wrong, sometimes the family is in back of it. These are things which are not so very bad in themselves, but they prevent improvement and destroy or neutralize all better influences.

The woman has certain faults and shortcomings in her behavior – how could it be otherwise? – but for all that she is not bad in my opinion. But those errors must be corrected – habits of slovenliness, indifference, lack of activity and ability, oh, a lot of things. But they all have the same root: bad education, years of quite wrong views on life, fatal influence of bad company. I tell you this in confidence, you know, and not out of desperation – so that you may understand that mine is not a life of moonlight and roses, but something prosaic like a Monday morning.

A small picture by Tissot represents a little figure of a woman in the snow among faded flower stems, “Voie des Fleurs, Voie des Pleurs.”

Well, my woman no longer walks on a path of flowers, as she did when she was younger and went her own way and followed her instincts. But life has become more thorny for her, has become a path of tears, especially last year but this year has thorns too, and so will the years to come – but with perseverance she will get over it.

But sometimes there is a crisis – especially when I venture to reprove her for some fault which I have had my eye on for a long time. So for instance, to give you an example, mending the clothes and making clothes for the children herself. But the result is that one day she takes it up, and in this respect, as in many others, she has already improved greatly. I still have to change so many things in myself, too; she must find in me an example of diligence and patience, and it is damned difficult, brother, to act so that one can indirectly be an example to somebody else, and I too fail sometimes. I must raise myself to a higher level in order to rouse new impulses in her.

The little boy, however, does very well; the girl used to be very ill and neglected.

But the little one is a miracle of vitality, already he seems to oppose himself to all social institutions and conventions. As far as I know, all babies are brought up on a kind of bread porridge. But he has refused this most energetically; though he has no teeth yet, he bites resolutely at a piece of bread, and swallows all kinds of eatables with much laughing and cooing and all kinds of noises; but he absolutely keeps his mouth shut for porridge. He often sits with me in the studio on the floor in a corner, on a few sacks; he crows at the drawings and is always quiet in the studio, because he looks at the things on the wall. Oh, he is such a sociable little fellow!

The number of studies steadily increases; when you come, I think you will perhaps find enough among them to fill a portfolio for your room; but this is your own business, as long as you understand that you must of course consider those you like your own property. But the studies must produce new things; and the old studies must produce better ones. I am not sure of them myself, but I long for you to see them.

I saw with great interest an edition of *Le Salon 1883*: a first series of illustrations, some of them remarkably well done. Reproduced in that new way. I subscribed to it – notwithstanding all my other expenses – with a view to what I am doing myself just now with printer’s ink and lithographic crayon. Listen, I firmly believe that some of my things would do well if reproduced in this way, especially those in which the deeper blacks are expressed by lithographic crayon and printer’s ink; the brownish wash, which I often notice in those illustrations, I can get as well. Well, when you come, we can talk it over.

And perhaps I shall write down in detail the different things which I want information about, and then you might take some of my studies, together with that letter, to show for instance to Buhot, who probably could explain many things to me.

I have just read *Un Mâle*, by Camille Lemonnier – very well done, in the manner of Zola. Everything observed from nature, and everything analyzed.

In the show window at Goupil’s I saw a large Fromentin, “A Battle of Fellahs.”

I also saw the nouveautés, perhaps not all of them. By Julien Dupré, about whom I wrote you, I saw two things, which I liked less, and found more conventional than what I saw by him in a magazine last winter. Have you heard that Rappard’s picture has now been accepted in Amsterdam? It is already late. Thanks for your timely help.

I hope Rappard’s “letter follows” will not last too long, and that H. may have some success with his hound breeding. Adieu. Best wishes for everything.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

After all, Fromentin is clever and is a seeker, and somebody who has perseverance, and he is conscientious too.