

My dear brother,

As M. Peyron returned today, I have read your kind letters, and also the letters from home, and that has done me an enormous amount of good in giving me back a little energy, or rather a little desire to climb again out of the present state of prostration I am in. Thank you very much for the etchings – you have chosen just the ones I have liked for a long time now, the “David,” the “Lazarus,” the “Samaritan Woman” and the big etching of the “Wounded,” you have added to them the “Blind Man” and the other very little etching, the last one, so mysterious that I am afraid of it and do not wish to know what it is: I did not know it, the little “Goldsmith.”

But the “Lazarus”! Early this morning I looked at it and I remembered not only what Charles Blanc said of it, but in fact even everything he didn’t say. The unfortunate thing about it is that these loafers here are too curious and too ignorant of painting for me to practice my profession. The one thing we can always claim is that you and I did make an attempt here in the same direction as some others, who were understood no better and whose hearts were broken by circumstances.

If ever you go to Montpellier, you will see that what I say here is true.

Now you propose, and I accept, a return to the North instead.

I have led too hard a life to die of it or to lose the power to work.

So Gauguin and Guillaumin, both of them, want to exchange something for the landscape of the Alps. Well, there are two of them, only I think that the one done last, which I have just sent you, is done with more decision and is truer in expression. I am perhaps going to try to work from Rembrandt, I have especially an idea for doing the “Man at Prayer,” in the scale of colour from light yellow to violet.

Enclosed is Gauguin’s letter, do what you think best about the exchange, take what you like yourself, I am sure that more and more our taste is becoming the same. Oh, if I could have worked without this accursed disease – what things I might have done, isolated from others, following what the country said to me. But there, this journey is over and done with. Anyway, what consoles me is the great, the very great desire I have to see you again, you and your wife and child, and the many friends who remembered me in my misfortune, as indeed I too never cease thinking of them.

I am almost certain that in the North I shall get well quickly, at least for a fairly long time, even while still apprehensive of a relapse in some years’ time but not at once. That is what I imagine after having observed the other patients here, some of whom are considerably older than I, or else in their young days were more or less idlers – students. Anyway, what do we know about it?

Fortunately the letters from our sister and from Mother were very calm. Our sister wrote extremely well and described a landscape or a view of the town in such a way that it might have been a page out of a modern novel. I always urge her to occupy herself with household matters rather than artistic things, for I know that she is already too sensitive, and at her age she would find it difficult to develop herself artistically. I am much afraid that she also suffers from a thwarted artistic desire, but she is so full of vitality that she will get over it.

I have talked to M. Peyron about the situation and I told him that it was almost impossible for me to endure my lot here, and that not knowing at all with any clearness what line to take, I thought it preferable to return North.

If you think well of it and if you mention a date on which you would expect me in Paris, I will have myself accompanied part of the way, either to Tarascon, or to Lyons, by someone from here. Then you can wait for me or get someone to wait for me at the station in Paris. Do what seems best to you. I will leave my furniture temporarily where it is in Arles. It is with friends, and I am sure that they will send it when you want it, but the carriage and packing would be almost as much as it is worth. I think of it as a shipwreck – this journey. Well, we cannot do what we like, nor what we ought to do, either. As soon as I got out into the park, I got back all my lucidity for work; I have more ideas in my head than I could ever carry out, but without it clouding my mind. The brush strokes come like clockwork. So relying on that, I dare think that I shall find my balance in the North, once delivered from surroundings and circumstances which I do not understand or wish to understand.

Peyron was very kind to write you, he wrote you again today; I leave him regretting that I have to leave him.

A good handshake for you and Jo, I thank her very much for her letter.

Ever yours, Vincent