

Letter 120
Amsterdam, 3 March 1878

My dear Theo,

It is time to write to you again. How I should have liked to be with you today. It is such lovely weather here and one has the feeling that spring is on its way. The lark can probably already be heard in the country, but that's unlikely to happen in the city, unless one can detect its call in the voice of some old clergyman, whose words come from a heart that's in tune with the lark's.

Heard the Reverend Mr. Laurillard preaching this morning in the Oudezjide Chapel. Uncle Stricker was at church as well and I had coffee with him. Uncle Jan had gone to the Nieuwe Diep this morning but is back again now. Then to a Sunday School in the Barndesteeg and then walked around the outer embankments and, in passing, called in on three Roman Catholic churches.

Went round to see Vos last night, who is none too well. It was such a sad sight to find him sitting there moodily in front of the window, hollow-eyed and with his feet on a stove – he is afflicted with cold feet. Kee too is so pale and looks so tired. I went on from them to Uncle Cor's. He has had the salon repapered and a new grey carpet laid on the floor. Now those beautiful bookcases with the complete Gazette des Beaux Arts, etc., in their red bindings, stand out better than before. Uncle told me that Daubigny had died. I freely confess that I was downcast when I heard the news, just as I was when I heard that Brion had died (his *Bénédictité* hangs in my room), because the work of such men, if it is understood, touches us more deeply than one realizes. It must be good to die in the knowledge that one has done some truthful work and to know that, as a result, one will live on in the memory of at least a few and leave a good example for those who come after. A work that is good may not last forever, but the thought expressed by it will, and the work itself will surely survive for a very long time, and those who come later can do no more than follow in the footsteps of such predecessors and copy their example.

Speaking of good works, would you like to have a Flemish Imitation of Christ? I hope to send it to you shortly, in a small book which, if need be, can easily be slipped into the pocket.

When Uncle told me about Daubigny, I thought of his etchings after Ruysdael (*Le buisson* and *Le coup de soleil*), and Uncle has promised to get hold of them, as he did not know them at all.

I was at the Reverend Mr. Gagnebin's last Monday night and met his wife and daughter as well and also went to his study, where we talked until about 11 o'clock. He told me, amongst other things, 'That at certain times in his life it did him good to forget himself completely and to throw himself into his work without reservation, that he then achieved a great deal and later felt strengthened and further along the road on which he had set out, and enlightened in spirit. For all that, no one knows even how much effort his sermons cost him.'

I have worked my way through the history of the Netherlands and have done an abstract of 30 closely written pages. (I was pleased to come across the battle of Waterloo and the 10-day campaign in it once again.) Do you know that Rochussen once painted the siege of Leyden? I mean the picture owned by Mr. De Vos. Am now also working on general history.

I am looking forward more than a little to your coming here again. Do try your best to stay as long as possible. And if you can, write again soon, for you know how much pleasure your letters always give me. Have you read anything good lately? Be sure to get hold of the works of George Eliot somehow, you won't be sorry if you do, Adam Bede, Silas Marner, Felix Holt, Romola (the life of Savonarola), Scenes from Clerical Life. I shall reread them once more. Both the Reverend Mr. McFarlane and Adler spoke to me about them, that is, they advised me to read them.

Wrote to Harry Gladwell this week, as he had not replied to my last letter and I so wanted to know what he was doing and what he was planning to do. I am still hoping he will become a clergyman, and if he does he will do a good job, of that I am certain. But it won't be an easy thing for him to achieve.

Did you ever see an original etching by Millet of a man wheeling a barrow full of manure into a garden on a day like today, in early spring? And remember as well that he made an etching, 'Les becheurs'. If you ever do come across it you are unlikely to forget it in a hurry. I was thinking of the first this morning when Uncle Stricker was looking for texts in which the word manure, or dung, appears, e.g., 'Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it'. Made a list recently of all the pictures by Brion I could remember. When you come here, you must tell me whether I have forgotten many of them. Lord, keep my memory green! That is something one should say over and over again.

Last Sunday went to see Cousin Vrijdag at the timber yards. There are still 7 children at home, a pleasant little bunch, most of them very young. Could you perhaps give me notice somewhat in advance of your arrival? Then I can do some of my work beforehand so that we'll have more time to spend together.

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Goodbye, a handshake in my thoughts, and believe me,
Your loving brother, Vincent

Uncle Jan sends you his regards.
Remember me to everyone at your house.