



The Letters of a Post-Impressionist : Being the Familiar Correspondence of Vincent Van Gogh by Van Gogh

Vincent Van Gogh

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON VAN
GOGH AND HIS ART.

THOUGH the collection of letters contained in Cassirer's publication, "Vincent Van Gogh. Briefe," is not a complete one, from my knowledge of a very large number of the letters which are not included in this volume, I feel able to say that the present selection is in any case very representative and contains all that is essential in respect to Van Gogh's art-credo and general attitude of mind.

For reasons into which it is unnecessary for me to enter here, it was found convenient to adopt the form of Cassirer's publication arranged by Margarete Mauthner, and my translation has therefore been made from the German (Fourth Edition, 1911). Still, with the view of avoiding the errors which were bound to creep into a double translation of this sort, I took care, when my version was complete, to compare it with as many of the original French letters as I was able to find, and I am glad to say that by this means I succeeded in satisfying myself as to the accuracy of every line from page 39 to the end.

The letters printed up to page 38, some of which I fancy must have been written in Dutch—a language which in any case I could not have read—have not been compared with the originals. But, seeing that the general quality of the German translation of the letters after page 39 was so good that I was able to discover only the small handful of inaccuracies referred to in the appendix, I think the reader may rest assured that the matter covering pages 1 to 38 is sufficiently trustworthy for all ordinary purposes.

I say that "I fancy" some of the letters which occur between pages 1 and 38 were written in Dutch; for I am not by any means certain of this. In any case I can vouch for the fact that the originals of all the letters after page 38 were in French, as I have seen them. But in this respect Paul Gauguin's remark about his friend Van Gogh is not without interest: "Il oubliait même," wrote the famous painter of *négresses*, "d'écrire le hollandais, et comme on a pu voir par la publication de ses lettres à son frère, il n'écrivait jamais qu'en français, et cela admirablement, avec des 'Tant qu'à, Quant à,' à n'en plus finir." [1]

Rather than disfigure my pages with a quantity of notes, I preferred to put my remarks relative to the divergencies between the original French and the German in the form of an appendix (to which the Numbers 1 to 35 in the text refer), and have thus kept only those notes in the text which were indispensable for the proper understanding of the book. Be this as it may, the inaccuracies and doubts discussed in the appendix are, on the whole, of such slight import, that those readers who do not wish to be interrupted by pedantic quibbles will be well advised if they simply read straight on, without heeding the figures in the text. To protect myself against fault-finders, however, such readers will understand that it was necessary for me to prepare some sort of a list referring to those passages which, in the German, differed even slightly from the French original.

In the letters not included in Cassirer's publication, there are, of course, a few passages which, for obvious reasons, could never have been brought before the German or English reading public; as will be seen,

however, the present letters in themselves are but more or less lengthy fragments, carefully edited by the friends of the deceased painter, while the almost complete omission of dates and other biographical information usually accompanying a volume of this sort, may also at first be felt as a rather disturbing blemish.

I would like, however, to seize this opportunity to defend Margarete Mauthner against the charge of having made a “fantastic arrangement” of these letters; for, if the person who made this charge had only been acquainted with the facts of the case, he would have known that she had done no more

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