

**Letters of Constant Van Crombrugghe to his parents**  
**February 1804 (aged 15)**  
**to**  
**August 1820 (aged 31)**

**Dramatis Personae:**

*Family Members mentioned in the letters and of whom there exist family tree details.*

Father Ghislain-Francois Van Crombrugghe, born 5th June 1851. Son of Bernard Van Crombrugghe (1726-1783) and Anne Marie Huleu (1727-1800)
Mother Cécile-Josèphe Spitaels (1757-1826), daughter of Jean-Baptiste Spitaels and his first wife, Jacqueline Reyns.
My brother Jean Constant had two brothers called Jean. Of Jean Van Crombrugghe, no information. Jean-Ghislain Van Crombrugghe (1788-1849) had 11 children, of whom Marie (b.1819) became a DMJ, and Columban (b.1825) became a Josephite. Three others became Religious of the Sacred Heart, one became a Jesuit, one a Carmelite and one a Religious of Perpetual Adoration.
My brother Francois Francois Van Crombrugghe (1793-1865) married Collette De La Haye, and they also had 11 children. Félicité (1827-1848) became a DMJ. There was another brother Francois, but he died in 1790.
My sister Rosalie Rosalie Jeanne Van Crombrugghe (1791-1843) married Francois Nayebergh.
My sister Cécile No information
My sister Charlotte Charlotte Van Crombrugghe (1794-1865) married Dominique Van Wymelbeke (1794-1864) who was the Director of College Melle. They had 6 children, of whom Clotilde (1823-1878) became a DMJ.
Constant had other brothers and sisters whom he does not mention: Sophie, who became a Sister of Charity, Thérèse, Anne Antoinette, Marie Bernardine and Adolphe.
My Uncle and Aunt Huleu Relatives of Constant's grandmother Anne Marie Huleu (1727-1800). My Uncle Huleu was Canon Jean-Francois Huleu (1746-1812), Anne-Marie's brother.
My Aunt De Scheppere
My Aunt the Beguine Presumably a sister of his Aunt Bernardine Van Crombrugghe's (1763-1846) second husband Louis de Scheppere, or possibly their daughter Adelaide.
My cousin Vandenhende A child (either Jean-Bernardin or Marie) of Aunt Bernardine Van Crombrugghe's (1763-1846) first husband, Jean-Francois Vandenhende
My Uncle the Regent Brother of Constant's mother.
Mimie Van Crombrugghe Nickname of Clotilde (DMJ), daughter of Constant's sister Charlotte and Dominique Van Wymelbeke

P1

3rd February 1804

To Mr Van Crombrugghe, Brewer etc. in Grammont  
Gent, 3rd February 1804.

Dear Parents,

I have received the two white caps from Miss Stevens, and the bottle with the wine for the eyes. I also learned with pleasure that your health was as good as mine. You ask me to send one of my essays, and as I have only done two and haven't any good ones I will ask Mr Wulf to let me write one. I will send it with my brother Jean if he comes, as I would very much like, for the carnival. If he doesn't come, I will send it during the week of the carnival: as for the caps, please bring me two more, my dear mother, because they don't wash them often enough, and besides, people are always very clean here and I would be the only one with a dirty cap.

I am your very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please give my compliments to my Aunt Huleu and to my brothers and sisters

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mantelpiece of my room, as I have an urgent need to open it for my school things.

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: I ask you to give my compliments to my Aunt Huleu to my brothers Jean and François, and to my sisters.

hg

P3

24th April 1804

To Mr. Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont

Gent April 24th 1804

My very dear Parents,

I learned with pleasure through my dear brother Jean that you are all in good health, as we are all here. I am sending you, my dear Father, the book you told me about, and two books that my brother asked me to send. My uncle Van Crombrugghe is very well; he left eight days ago and he wants to see you as much as I do and I hope than you will not delay any more in coming to Gent.

I have the honour to be

Your very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: My sister Rosalie is very well, my Aunt Scheppers finds her more disobedient than three years ago, but I hope that you will find her much changed.

hg

P4

12th May 1804

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont

Gent May 12th 1804

My very dear Parents,

I hope that you are all in as good health as I am. This letter is to ask you not to take it badly that that I haven't written sooner; the reason is that I have painful eyes which thankfully my Aunt Sheppere looked after for the four days I was with her and they are much better. My Uncle Van Crombrugghe is not very well and he wants to see you, my dear Father. As for Rosalie she is already very changed; she has not been at my aunt's house for the past eight days, she has been at Mrs Glusener's where she has become more cheerful, and she will go there again every Sunday; at my aunt's house she will have better instruction for her shyness. I do not doubt that you will be very happy about it.

I have the honour to be

Your very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS Please give my love to my dear brothers and sisters.

hg

P5

18th May 1804

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont

My very dear Parents,

The Feast of Pentecost that we are going to celebrate gives me the opportunity of expressing my affection, and of offering you my good wishes. The respect, the gratitude and the love that I owe you are so sweet and so dear to my heart, that I will always take pleasure in proving it to you, and your happiness is too precious to me not to be constantly the object of my wishes. I wish you therefore not only a happy Pentecost, but also everything that could contribute to your pleasure. Be persuaded that I will feel the same way for my whole life,

Your very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

Gent May 18th 1804

hg

P6

30th June 1804

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman of Grammont

Gent June 30th 1804

My dear Parents,

It was with much pleasure that I received the letter in which you told me of the happy state of your health, and the arrival of my Aunt de Scheppere with her little group. I am very happy with the casimir and the snuffbox that you sent me. Please, my very dear Mother, also send me my white jacket that I left at the tailor when I left Grammont. I am happy to learn that my sister Rosalie is going to boarding school in Hunneghem; I hope that she will be as happy there as my cousin De Bakker. Until I have the joy of seeing you here, my very dear Father, I have the honour to be

Your very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please give my greetings to Aunt de Scheppere, my cousin Marie and Miss Michielline etc. (whom I am impatient to see again) and to my dear brothers and sisters.

hg

P7

11th October 1805

Mr Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dpt. Escaut

Amiens 11th October 1805

Very dear Father and Mother.

I hope that my brother has arrived safely at home. This letter is to tell you that the school I am in is not as we believed; the curriculum is based mainly on the Latin language and the same plan is followed as in the Collèges. Arithmetic is only a minor subject taught twice a week, and the remainder of the time is used for Latin, History, etc.

As, dear Father, I do not have any inclination for Latin, I would like to have your decision.

There is, in the city, another school run by a Clergyman where what is germane to trade is taught. Fr Sellier, one of our masters knows it well. If you want, I could present myself for admission there. I ask you to write me as soon as possible, because the academic year is already well advanced.

Please present my good wishes to all the family.

Your very obedient and respectful son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: As for the fees at the other school they are pretty much the same as here

Sir,

If I might add a word to your son's letter in order to explain the topic of his letter. He is right to tell you that Latin is the basis of the teaching given here, and in receiving him as one of our Pupils, we did not imagine that he was destined to follow another plan of study. The Prospectus you were sent letting you know the nature of our Establishment should surely have made it clear enough that our object is to give an complete education and not only what is germane to trade. Your son has made a good impression and although we have only had him a few days we find him to be of intelligence, good will and docility, so we are led to believe that he would succeed in the study of the Latin language as everything else.

There are pupils older than him who have recently begun to study the elements of this language and who have had success; we have had some of 24 or 26 years old and at that age were still in the fourth form. So if your son has the inclination no time been lost. But he has declared that Latin repels him and that he has no intention of applying himself to it. So, Sir, if you want to follow the path that he proposes to you, of going to another school in Amiens in where he will find help and the kind of studies that he wants to follow, then well and good. However, if you judge it right to make him remain with us it will be sufficient for you to let him know your will. He is disposed to do what you want and it is this submissiveness, joined to other good qualities that he has already shown us, that would make us regret it if he were to leave us. I do not need to make any claims in favour of the Latin Language; you know its

usefulness in all kinds of study. I will only tell you that if your son had been with us since the beginning of his education he would know everything that he already knows in the fields of calculus, orthography and geography. Furthermore he would be in a position to appreciate "latinity" which would have given him two inestimable advantages; firstly in having a pure, epistolary style; secondly, he would be ready to learn living languages such as Spanish, Italian and English in only a few months. Without Latin these languages would take him years. Please accept, Sir, the assurance of my esteem and that I have the honour to be,  
Your very humble and very obedient servant

Sellier  
hg

P8  
28th October 1805  
To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Escaut  
Amiens 28 October 1805

Very dear Father and Mother,

I received your kind letter of the 17th of this month, but it is with great joy that I am replying in a completely opposite sense to what you might expect. Fr Sellier will be kind enough to teach me about trade and epistolary style so that I can remain with him. I am very pleased because the arrangements in this School please me a great deal and we are led by sweetness and affability.

Please, my very dear Parents, accept my sincere wishes for the imminent feast of All Saints, and believe that I will not cease to address my poor prayers to the heavens in order always to be able to call myself,

Your very humble and very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS Give my best wishes to Aunt Huleu and my dear brothers and sisters. I enclose my School bill which has been settled except for "extras" which are 200 francs.

hg

P9  
9th November 1805  
To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept. of Escaut  
Amiens 9th November 1805

My very dear Father and Mother,

I hope that you are in good health as well as my dear brothers and sisters. I am sending you my report for the last month, but since the uncertainty as to whether I would remain here has affected me I hope that you will be more satisfied next month.

My trunk only arrived on the 28th of October: the reason for the delay was the loss of the address; there was no danger of losing it but I was in some difficulty and without clean linen.

I ask you, my very dear Parents, to accept my filial good wishes and to believe me to be,

Your very obedient and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P10  
6th December 1805  
To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut.  
Amiens 6th December 1805

Very dear Father and Mother

I enclose my report for the last month, I hope that you will be happy with it. I am very unhappy not to have received your news, not knowing if some accident has befallen you, or if I am the reason for your silence; understand, my dear Parents, that some months have passed without my receiving any news, and therefore I have every reason to be worried. A week ago the Misses Langevins came to see me, and were not able to tell me any anything about you. Please tell me why as soon as possible; I would be very happy if you would write to me.

While waiting for your answer I am very sincerely

Your very devoted and submissive son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
PS: Please give my best wishes to my dear brothers and sisters  
hg

P11  
18th December 1805

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut  
Boarding School, Amiens, 18th December 1805

Very dear Father and Mother.

It was with great joy that I received your letter of the 16th of this month in which you tell me that you are well; you ask me to let you know if I am happy; you cannot imagine the happiness that I enjoy. We are some 60 to 70 pupils, under the wise tutelage of eight tutors, whose goodness and affability are extreme. Fr Le Blanc, the Headmaster, is like a shared Father; each of us goes to him to open his heart and to ask for advice with the same confidence that one would have with his own Father. To tell you in few words how much this school is different to all the others, you should know that in all the time that I have been here I have never seen a serious punishment given. We rise at six o'clock in the morning and have study until seven thirty. We go to Mass, which is said in the School, after which we eat very high quality bread. At nine o'clock we have class until twelve thirty, then we have lunch where we could not ask for better food. We drink water mixed with wine and we also have beer but it is not worth much. At two fifteen we go to class until five, then we have tea. At five thirty we have study until seven thirty and after a quarter hour of reading we dine. After dinner we have a recreation of one hour during which we chat with the tutors or play; during the other recreations everybody is obliged to play, which makes us all very cheerful and healthy. You can judge for yourselves, but I will repeat that it would be impossible for me to be complimentary enough. I had not believed that it would be possible to find such an opportunity of being formed so well in the spiritual and the temporal domains and it is as you know, dear Father and Mother, a singular stroke of fortune that I have been accepted here. These Fathers have had a consideration for me that they would not have had for any other, because a School known as (and clearly is) one of the finest in France does not lack pupils. Accept my good wishes and my thanks for all your kindness and believe that I will always strive to show you the greatest gratitude. Please, dear Parents, embrace my dear brothers and sisters for me and ask my brother Jean to write to me from time to time.

Your very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my New Year wishes to my Aunt Huleu. In your letter I also learned of my Aunt Spitaels' illness; I hope that her recovery will continue  
hg

P12  
1st January 1806  
To Mr Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut.  
Suburb of Noyon, Amiens, 1st January 1806

Very dear Father and Mother

I received from Mrs Byl the small packet you sent me through her. I was very happy to learn of the good state of all the family and the change for the better in my sister Rosalie; please embrace her for me as well as my other sisters and brothers.

I am sending you my report for the month of October hoping that you will be happy with it. In conclusion I ask you to accept my filial wishes and very sincerely to believe that I am

Your very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please give my best wishes of the season to my Aunts Huleu and De Bakker and to all the family,  
hg

P13  
1st January 1806

To Mr Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut.  
Amiens, 1st January 1806

Very dear Father and Mother

It is in haste that I am writing to you on occasion of the New Year to wish you a very prosperous one and to renew my expression of gratitude and filial love. I will not stop addressing my humble prayers to the heavens in order to receive the grace of frequently repeating this expression.

Accept my love and please very sincerely believe me to be  
Your very devoted and submissive son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P14

20th January 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept. Escaut.  
Suburb of Noyon, Amiens 20th January 1806

My very dear Father and Mother

I hope than you and my dear brothers and my dear sisters are well. I cannot express to you the gratitude which fills my heart for you as I think of the great care and the tender goodness that you have for me; permit me, however, my very dear Parents, to make a further request of you. Several of my schoolmates play instruments as on Sundays Mass is celebrated with music in the School and one serpent is not sufficient. My Tutors have urged me to ask you to permit me to learn the bass; as I know music the bass-player assures me that in two months I could accompany him. This would not only be useful during the time I am in school, but if one of my dear brothers or my dear sisters were to learn music we could make music together. I am, my very dear Father, much more ready to ask you because you have on occasion given me the choice of learning some instrument. The lessons only come to ten francs per month, and as soon as I am a little advanced I could take only two or three lessons per week as you see fit. While awaiting your answer with impatience, I am most sincerely

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: The Misses Langevin asked me, the last time that I dined with them, to give you their best wishes.

hg

P15

4th February 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut.  
Amiens, February 4th 1806

My very dear Father

It was with great joy that I received your letter in which I learned of the happy state of your health, as well as of my dear Mother, my dear brothers and sisters; this news is most pleasant. I ask you to believe that I will not stop addressing my prayer to the heavens in order to get God's grace for the welfare of the Father for whose tender goodness towards me I am more and more grateful.

Enclosed is last month's report, and I hope that you will be happy with it. It is in this hope that I have the honour to call myself truly

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: I ask you to give my good wishes to my very dear Mother, my dear brothers and sisters.

hg

P16

24th February 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Grammont, Escaut  
Suburb of Noyon, Amiens, 24th February 1806

My very dear Father and Mother.

I am writing to you through the good offices of Miss Langevin who was kind enough to take it upon herself to tell you, better than I know how to express in writing, the happiness which I enjoy, and the goodness of this School. I was overjoyed to receive the letter that you wrote to me. As for the bass, I did not learn it as others of my companions were asked to learn it. I am quite happy about this, because this is strictly speaking an sideline to the knowledge that you want me to acquire, and for the time that I stay here I will strive to fulfil your wishes in all things. I also learned from your letter the good health which you are enjoying; that is probably the one piece of news which gives me the most pleasure, because what could I wish for more than the protection of the Parents who have been so good to their son who, in truth, has not always given proof of his gratitude. But please believe that I recognise my mistakes; and I won't stop asking from the All-Powerful the grace and the means to show you by my conduct that it is not for nothing that you have sent me to this School. I hope that God will grant me this, because after all the goodness that I have received from Him and especially that he has convinced me that it is from Him in his infinite mercy that we have everything, He will grant me this request. Permit me, my very dear Parents, to tell you again that never will I be able to convince you enough of the happiness that you have given me by sending me to this School. I am learning to know my religion here, and if that is all I learn this would be the greatest good you could have given me; I am sure it is certainly this goal that you had in mind. However, with this knowledge we are supposed to acquire others, less precious probably, but in spite of that necessary for the world.

So that you can judge my progress, I will tell you to what I am learning now with Fr Sellier who is the Tutor of the Rhetoric. I continue to learn mathematics, and soon I will learn rhetoric; I have a second master who teaches me précis. What I do most is to strive after my goals and in that I am following your wishes. I am making much more progress than I would have done in a School like the one in Lille. I do not have to wait for my companions to catch up with me - this could have happened quite often.

Please send me some coloured handkerchiefs, I do not have enough. I end by embracing you and I have the honour of calling myself

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P17

1st March 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut.

Amiens 1st March 1806

My very dear Father and Mother

I am sending you my report for the month of February and I hope that you will be happy with it. As Miss Langevin will tell you better everything that I want to tell you, and will express it better than I can write it, I will limit myself here to asking you to write to me as soon as possible; I embrace you with all my heart, as well as my dear brothers and sisters. I ask you to give my best wishes to all the family, and particularly to my Aunt Huleu. Finally, I want you to know that I enjoy being

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P18

29th April 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dépt. Escaut.

Amiens, 29th April 1806

My very dear Father

I cannot express how glad I was to receive your letter yesterday. I understand that you would have wanted me to let you know directly my thoughts on my vocation. If I didn't do so, please believe, my dear Father, that this was not due to a lack of confidence in you; I know you how much want to procure for us the means to serve the Lord in the state to which he calls us, and thus to assure us an eternal happiness. You know, however, that until the moment of my

departure I did not show any inclination for the ecclesiastical state, for fear that this sudden change might appear inconsistent, and might cause you concern. I took the liberty of sharing my thoughts with to my Uncle, the priest, so that he could judge them and inform you if he approved. This is, my very dear Father, why I did not write to you first. If I had written to you at Easter I could not have done otherwise than revealing my thoughts to you, but I had already written to my Uncle some time before and I was waiting every day for his answer. While waiting I saw more and more every day that I had been wrong not to write to you. It is true that in spite of all these reasons I should have offered you my good wishes on occasion of Easter, but, as you know, when one is in error one doesn't know how to extricate one's self and repair the original mistake.

You ask me, my dear Father, if I am persevering in the choice of the ecclesiastical state that I made with God's grace. Yes, my very dear Father, and it seems to me that my vocation gets stronger from day to day. Be persuaded that I did not take this decision lightly; I consulted a lot and prayed a lot, and I clearly believe that it was the Good Lord who inspired me with this intention. Every day I bless Him for having led me to a School where it was so easy to know my vocation. I do not discount all the difficulties that are attached to the holy Ministry in a time like the present: and this is precisely what gave me new courage. When one considers everything that our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to suffer for the love of us nothing should appear difficult to us if one does it for the love of Him. Thus, all things considered, I do not doubt that Divine Providence is calling me to this holy state, and for me to concur with the will of the Lord I only needed your consent; now that I have it I hope that all the other difficulties that I have with the study of the Latin will smooth themselves out with God's grace. But the reason for which I am studying this language cannot be too dearly bought, and therefore I am delighted to be able to do something for my Redeemer.

It is not without pain that I see myself deprived your presence, but if I am separated from you for some time in the flesh we will be very close in the heart of Jesus Christ and in a little time I hope we will be inseparable in the Heavens.

I will finish by assuring you that I never cease to pray to God for the protection of my Parents who take every opportunity to show the love that they have for their son. I ask you to present my respects to my very dear Mother. I would like to write something to her, but it is already late and I have to get my letter to the post office. Please, my very dear Father, embrace also my dear brothers and sisters.

Your very loving son  
CG Van Crombrughe  
hg

P19

9th May 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrughe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut  
Amiens, 9th May 1806

My very dear Father and Mother

The pain that I feel in reading your letter, and the concern which you have for me, would seem very weak if I could describe it to you; however I comfort myself when I think that probably the day that you wrote to me, or the following day, you will have received my answer: because it was April 28th that I received your letter and I answered it on the 29th or the 30th, and as letters sometimes take five days to arrive here I presume that mine won't have been taken less time to arrive in Grammont. Nevertheless, for fear that it might have gone astray I am going to tell you approximately what I wrote. I told my Father that if I had not written to him first it was in order to have my Uncle's approval about my vocation, as I considered him capable of judging; and I was waiting for him to let you know his feelings. You asked me in your letter, very dear Father, if I was persevering in the decision that I had taken; you can be sure that I didn't take this decision lightly, and only decided after having prayed to the Lord a great deal and consulted people who were in a position to guide me. Yes, my dear Parents, I am of the same opinion and I hope that with God's grace I will not change. I am quite aware that the ecclesiastical state is a state of holiness which requires much virtue; but I hope that the Good Lord who inspired this vocation in me will give me what will be necessary to fulfil it. Ah! my very dear Parents, if only I could persuade you of the signal goodness that the Lord has for me; without considering what He did for me before my birth, what has He not done since I came into the world! Firstly it was certainly not by chance that I didn't learn Latin when I was younger; the Good Lord wanted to lead me to a School where I would have every means of

knowing Him and of sanctifying myself. It is also not by chance that I remained in this School, that I finally realised the danger which I had escaped in not going to one of these corrupt Schools of which there are so many, and in which, with the mentality that I already had, I would have been certainly lost. What praise should I give Him! After your consent I only want God's holy will to be done in me; if I have known so little of my Benefactor up to now I want nothing more henceforth than to seek to know Him and to serve Him in the best way possible. I end, very dear Father and Mother, in recommending myself to your prayers, and in assuring you that I will never stop praying to God for your protection.

Your very loving and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: I ask you to embrace my very dear brothers and sisters for me, and to tell my brother Jean that I will write to him at the first opportunity. Please present my good wishes to my Aunt Huleu

hg

P20

25th May 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.  
Amiens 25th May 1806

My very dear Father and Mother

The feast of Pentecost provides me with the opportunity of renewing my sentiments of respect and gratitude. I pray continually to the All Powerful that He will condescend to send you the same inspiration that He sent to the Apostles.

I hope that you will be satisfied with the progress that I am making in Latin. The Fathers have had the goodness to give me a private tutor which will be a very big advantage to me, and with the principles of French that I already possess I will advance very quickly. Besides, we work a lot here, because when one has ten and a half hours a day of study and class, you can be persuaded that time is used well and consequently you can judge the advantages we have here without even taking into consideration the spiritual advantages. If I had to describe to you happiness that you have given your son in sending me here I would never come to an end, and I don't doubt that the best way of showing my gratitude is to thank the Good Lord; it is also this road that I strive to follow. I embrace you, my very dear Parents, with all my heart. I often speak to you in my imagination, so that I often imagine myself to be in Grammont, and I assure you that we are never very distant in the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your very loving son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my good wishes of the season to all the family, but particularly to my Aunt Huleu to whose prayers I commend myself.

hg

P21

1st June 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.  
Amiens 1st June 1806

Very dear Father and Mother

Enclosed is last month's report; I hope that you will be happy with it because you can be sure that I have done everything possible by my application to live up to the care you have for me. I can hardly express, my very dear Parents, in writing, the gratitude which fills me.

Nevertheless, I constantly thank the Lord in as much as my weakness permits. If only I could tell you of the graces that the good Lord gives me; alas I am too little affected by them. For the rest, you can see all the means He has used to attract me to Him.

I embrace you with all my heart as well as my dear brothers and sisters, and am

Your very affectionate and devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please give my good wishes to my Aunt Huleu, and to all the family.

hg

P22

30th June 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Amiens, 30th June 1806

Very dear Father and Mother

I was very happy to learn from Mrs Byl about the good state of your health, as well as that of all the family. You want to know, my dear Parents, if I am coming home on holiday or not. I do not simply wish to follow my own will in the matter; it would be infinitely more pleasant if you were to let me know your will which is as an order for me. However, since you ask me to tell you my thoughts, after much reflection and after having consulted my Masters, it seems to me that the journey, this year, would be harmful to my studies. Firstly, at my age I don't have time to lose and I intend to work in the holidays as well as at other times; besides, the Fathers have told me that it is not only holiday time that one loses, but also a lot of the time that follows them, because one forgets many of the things which one has learned, especially when one is only beginning, and then one has much pain in getting back to where one was before. So it is clear that it would do me a lot of harm, but if you want me to come and see you, I will gladly deny these reasons in order to follow your will.

As for my brother François, I have learned that he is feels the same away about Latin as I did; Miss Langevin told me that you were inclined to send him to Alost for some time in order for him to learn a little French. Permit me, my very dear Parents, to tell you that the school in Alost is falling apart, and what is more I know from reliable sources that religion is disregarded; this makes me believe that you won't send him there. The Fathers of this School have given me a prospectus of a Boarding School in Roulers; I don't doubt that you will find that is exactly what it is necessary for François, unless you would prefer to put him with me; that would give me a lot of pleasure.

While waiting for your answer I have the honour to be

Your very obedient and devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please give a thousand best wishes on my behalf to my dear brothers and sisters, and to all the family, particularly to my Aunt Huleu. I read in a letter from Mr. Aranel that my Uncle has been obliged to leave Malines because of his health .

hg

P23

16th July 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Amiens, 16th July 1806

My very dear Father and Mother,

I am sending you my report of last month, having forgotten to send it to you with my last letter; I hope, my dear Parents, that you will be happy with it, because I strove to do all my duties as best as I could; as for the study of Latin I don't doubt, my very dear Father, that you will be happy with the progress that I have made there, since I could shortly be as proficient as those in the sixth year. Be sure, very dear Parents, that I will not fail to respond, by my application, to the care that you take of me.

In accordance with your wishes I asked Mr Langevin to pay for this term. Please embrace my dear brothers and sisters; it would be me pleasant to receive their news sometimes! Even their shortest letters would be infinitely pleasant and would be a measure of their affection for me. I would be obliged if my brother Jean were to condescend to write to me briefly giving some details of the state of the restaurant, salt works and the vinegar trade because although my studies don't permit me to take much interest in that, these subjects of my attentions last year have not been entirely erased from my memory. In hoping for your answer to my last letter I am

Your very loving son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P24

31st July 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Amiens, 31st July 1806

Very dear Parents,

I hope that you will have received my last letter. This letter to inform you that the lack of space that we have here has obliged the Fathers to transfer the School to Mondidier. We will leave here between the 3rd and the 6th August and the school year will end in this city. I have been to say adieu to Mr Langevin who asked me to give you his best wishes.

Enclosed is my last month's report: I hope that you will be happy with it as I have done everything possible to respond to your goodness.

I embrace you as well as my dear brothers and sisters and am

Your loving son

C Van Crombrughe

PS: Please give my best wishes to all the family. You asked me in your last letter if still had pain in my eyes. Thank God I have had none since leaving home. My report has been lost in the move, but Fr Leblanc is happy to confirm that it was perfect in every department.

hg

P25

2nd September 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrughe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.

Mondidier, the 2nd September 1806

Very dear Father and Mother,

The transfer of our School went well; the place that we now occupy is big, beautiful, comfortable, and situated in a very healthy locality. I should tell you how the exercises went. They lasted two days and attracted a lot of applause: the Sub-Prefect, the mayor and other the dignitaries that were there were very satisfied with the manner in which my schoolmates answered the questions. The Sub-Prefect gave witness to this in a speech that he gave at the opening of the prize distribution two days after. He showed how the study of Latin is useful for all situations; he also indicated how laudable the method that the Fathers follow for the education of their pupils is.

After him Fr Sellier gave a speech in which he has what progress was made in the exercises, and on the utility of religion for the happiness of society; he made the Parents see what difference there was between a child educated in religion and another educated without religion. Next came the distribution of prizes. I am sure that you received a list of prizes. It was the Sub-Prefect who distributed crowns and prizes to those who had earned them. The following day we went to the accompaniment of instruments to put the prize-winners' crowns at the foot of the altar of the God of Light and the Author of all good, who had deigned to give us the means of winning prizes.

Please, very dear Father and Mother, give my good wishes to my brother Jean. I would be obliged to him if he would take it upon himself to present my respects to Mr Jacques Verhaeghe, and to tell to him that I regret not being able to speak to him directly, but that I hope to do so next year.

Believing that my sister Rosalie is at home on holiday, I ask you to embrace her for me. I would like to know if she is happy at Mons and if she is making progress. Please tell her that she occupies a large part of my heart, and that I expect her to remember me in her prayers, because it is thus that she will prove that she loves me.

Permit me, very dear Parents, to ask you one other thing. It is to Charlotte and Cecile that I have something to say. I hope that they are always very cheerful, and very well-behaved.

Please embrace them for me and say that I am sad not to see them this year, but that it is also a cause of their brother's happiness because the good Lord wills it so. They should pray for me and we will always love each other, and I hope that we will love each other more, and for ever, in Heaven. Ah! dear Parents, I cannot express to you the pain that our separation causes me! But I am comforted to know that it is to accomplish the will of the Lord that I am deprived of a so natural a pleasure to all hearts, that of seeing one's Parents. I embrace you, oh my very dear Father and Mother; give me, I pray, your blessing; my greatest trial is not to be able to show you my gratitude as much as I should.

At the beginning of the next academic year I hope to go up to the fourth class; that means that I will have completed the normal course of three years. I am waiting with impatience for your answer concerning the business of my dear brother François. You will never regret the money that you will pay for the education that he will receive here; money perishes but education remains. If he comes here I could give him a half dozen cravats, two or three white waistcoats, socks, and as many pocket handkerchiefs as are necessary and which I do not need.

Farewell, my very dear Father and Mother. Oh please God this business of François succeeds!

Your very devoted and submissive son

C. Van Crombrugghe

hg

P26

12th September 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.

Mondidier 12 7brth 1806

Very dear Father and Mother

In the hope that you received my last letter, I am writing to you now to find out about the state of your health and to know decision concerning a School for my brother François. I do not doubt that the advantageous offer that Fr Le Blanc made you has made you decide to let him come here with me; I will tell you now what things he will need to have if I have not guessed wrongly. He will need twelve shirts; as for the pocket handkerchiefs I could provide as many as necessary. I could also give him six cravats so that he would only need another six, but I would ask you to give coloured ones. I could give him two or three white waistcoats and as many vests as he would need. He would need twelve pairs of stockings of which some in wool would be useful. Six caps of cotton or (2 illegible words), six serviettes (unless you wanted him to use those which my brother Jean used in Lille), two combs, two bathrobes, three pairs of bed sheets, two blankets, a hat, two pairs of shoes, a silver table setting. I ask you, very dear Father and Mother, to consider quality rather than appearance, here we are more concerned with keeping warm than looking good as we have less heating here than in Flanders. There we are, this seems to me to be all he will need. What happiness for François! and what a pleasure for me if I was not mistaken in my hope! Please, very dear Father, let me know as soon as possible.

In the hope of a speedy answer,

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: To avoid useless expenses I would ask you, very dear Father, to make me a chest eleven inches high, twelve inches wide and four feet long. I ask you to bring him so that he is here for the 28th or the 29th September at the latest, because I know by experience what a setback it would be for him not to get sorted out for the beginning of the school year with the others. I ask you to give my good wishes to all the family.

hg

P27

17th September 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.

Mondidier, 17th September 1806

Very dear Father,

The joy with which I learned in your letter of the 11th of the month that my dear Mother will be coming to bring François here would seem very weak if I were to express it in a letter. That is why I ask you, my very dear Father, to forgive me if I don't really express it now.

I was very surprised by the news of the death of Mrs Verhaeghe; what a loss for the children!

As for the information that you asked for concerning classes, I can't give you the necessary information, but I will try to make you to understand as best I can through my dear Mother, by letting you know the authors with which we will begin the course.

Please, very dear Father, tell François that I am impatient for his arrival; I would like to be able to write him a brief word but the little time I have left makes this impossible; I ask you therefore, very dear Father, to give him my very best wishes, and to tell him it would oblige me greatly if he were to take it upon himself to present my respects to Aunt Namur and her family, to my cousin Elisabeth and to everyone I know, and to embrace my dear sisters and my brother Jean. He will, I hope, be I very happy here because there are some very fine boys of his age here. If only I could tell you everything face-to-face, but the hope of telling you everything through my dear Mother comforts me.

I would like to take the liberty, my very dear Father, of making another request. I would be afraid to bother you with my requests if I did not know that you have never asked anything

more particularly of us than to consult you in everything. It is in this spirit that I dare to send you a list of books that would be very useful to me and that I would like François to bring me. Firstly, a work in two volumes that you bought at a sale from a country curate with my cousin Albert Spitaels, but I have forgotten the title; it is about the duties of a curate. Secondly, Télémaque etc., son of Odysseus, in one volume. Thirdly a work in two volumes in Flemish by our Uncle Huleu. I believe that it concerns the practices of perfection by Alfonse de Rodriguez . Fourth, Cosmographic Journey through America. Fifth, Vlaemsche Chronologie. Sixth, A Treatise on Gaiety (which would be very useful to me). I leave it to your good judgement to add or remove any.

You tell me, very dear Father, that it will be Sunday 28th of the this month that my dear Mother will arrive in Amiens; if it is your wish I could go to meet her in Amiens; for that it would be sufficient for you to tell me your wishes so that I can tell Fr Le Blanc.

I ask you give my every good wish to all the family. I have the honour to be very sincerely

Your very loving and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P28

11th October 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.

Mondidier, 11th October 1806

Very dear Father

This is the first free moment that I have found to express to you, on occasion of your feast, the concern that I have for your prosperity. It seems to me, very dear Father, that nothing that I could say would convince you so much as if I were to tell you that I pray to St Guislène to ask for graces for you, as much for prosperity in your life as for the salvation of your soul. I know that one of the greatest graces that you can have here below is see your children fulfilling the ambitions you have for them. I will strive, therefore, to provide you with this grace with God's help, in fulfilling better and better my duties as son and as a Christian.

I have just learned by letter from my Uncle Joseph Spitaels that my dear Mother arrived safely home, but at the same time I am sad to learn that he is ill. I have already written to him as he wished; may it please the Good Lord that he recover through the intercession of St Joseph to whom I continually address my humble prayers to this effect.

François is well and very happy here, but the poor child has trouble in making himself understood by his schoolmates, but it won't last long because he has an easy nature and a good memory. As he didn't know that I was writing to you today he didn't have the time to add a letter, but he asked me to give you his best wishes, and to ask you to embrace his dear brother Jean and his dear sisters for him. Please, very dear Father, do the same for me.

I have run out of time, study has begun; I can write no more and I am afraid that in my rush to tell you so much I have actually told you too little; because I fear that you will have difficulty in deciphering my writing, but remember that it is a student's writing.

I have the honour to be very sincerely

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to my Aunt Huleu, to whom I will write the next time that I write to you.

hg

P29

29th October 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.

Mondidier, 29th October 1806,

Very dear Father and Mother

I am taking advantage of my monthly report to tell you of the joy that I felt on the arrival of Mr J Verhaeghe, it seems to me that he will settle down quickly. The letter that he has for me from my brother is in his trunk which hasn't arrived yet, which means that I cannot yet answer it.

Neither have I had the time to write to my Aunt Huleu. Please tell her that I won't forget to do so the first time that I write to you. I was happy to learn that you and the family are well.

I have the honour to be very sincerely

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P30

14th November 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, the 14th November 1806

Very dear Father and Mother,

The recent feast of All Saints provides me with a new opportunity to give you signs of my filial love, and to tell you that the prayer that I have addressed to them, however poor, is to prepare a room for you close to our ancestors, and as near to Jesus our Divine Master as possible. The joy that I experienced through my sister's letter is beyond all expression. What a good heart Rosalie has! Although it was only with difficulty that I made out the sense of her letter it didn't make any the less impression on my heart, and I could hardly contain my tears on reading it.

A saint has just died here; yes, dear Parents, a saint. It was the man, dear Mother, whom I showed you. He had been bed-ridden for some time, and became so weak that he could not receive the Good Lord anymore except lying down (he received communion every day). For some days we have awaited his last moment. Last Wednesday night they didn't even dare take him Holy Communion; however, towards midnight he asked for a drink, and immediately we could see his strength return, so it was decided that it was necessary to give him Communion. The Sacrament was brought, and this man, who only the previous day had only received Him lying down, and further, only a few moments previously could hardly move his body, at God's entry rose up on his bed, removed his cap and received his Best Friend with wonderfully radiant face. Towards four o'clock in the morning he gave up his soul, but it was with an inexpressible joy on his face. This man never complained in his illness, and we noticed that after his death his body preserved its natural suppleness. One of his last words was these; "Charity, humility, love of the Sacred Heart." Ah! this man was loveable! One must give very favorable testimony to religion when one has known Jean-Baptiste (the name of the one of whom I speak). It would be hard to find anywhere else a man who loved his fellow man as much. He was the nurse of the house, and how great was the goodness with which he relieved, comforted and acted with patients! I will end there because I could never express what my heart feels at the very mention of Jean-Baptiste's name. No- one cried over his death; everybody looks on him as an intercessor close to God.

I regret not being able to write to my Aunt Huleu; this is not for lack of good will. Please, very dear Father and Mother, tell her that I will supplement the letter that I should have written her at All Saints by addressing my prayers, poor though they may be, to the All Powerful for her protection.

Please, very dear Parents, in the first letter that you write to Rosalie, thank her for the love that she has for me; tell her that I didn't find the time to write to her. Maybe I should have written in Flemish, but at present I am not very familiar with written Flemish. If I only I could tell her directly what I feel in my heart. I would tell her - dear sister, benefit from the lessons you learn in the School where you are; time passes and it will not come back anymore, it is now that you need to sow what you will want to reap. A wise girl must always serve God, and where, dear sister, will you learn to serve Him better than in the School where you are? Soon you will be back with your Parents who will help you more with their wise lessons, it is true; but once on your own you will have many trials to bear; fortify yourself, therefore, in virtue while it is the right time and apply yourself so that that soon you can be useful to your dear Parents, because they are waiting for the happy moment when you will be able to render them service. I end by embracing you with all my heart; François says that he always loves you and his dear sisters; please tell to them that I also love them; and that they should pray for us because we need it.

Your very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P31

24th November 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, 24th November 1806

Very dear Father and Mother

Fearing that the length of my last letters might have bored you, I had decided to wait for your news before writing to you. But I would be derelict in my duty if I were not to write to you on the occasion of the imminent New Year. May it, my very dear Parents, be one of increasing happiness for you and for my dear brother and sisters. It is to this end that I address my prayers to Heaven. I hope his year to show you more and more a perfect gratitude for the tender care that you have for me. It is not out of simple custom that I write to you; I am led by my heart. My feelings are behind these expressions, please believe, my very dear Parents, that it is my heart that speaks.

Please be the bearer of my love to my dear brother Jean and my dear sisters. I ask them to accept my good wishes.

Accept, please, my very dear Parents, my tender embrace. I have the honour to be  
Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P32

28th November 1806

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.  
Mondidier 28 9brth 1806

Very dear Father and Mother,

For a long time I have been counting the days, my very dear Mother, before I could show you my filial love; it has at last arrived, this happy day, the feast of St Cécile, of the one who was given to you as Heavenly Protector. I pray her, my very dear Mother, to intercede for you, and to obtain from the All-Powerful for me the happiness of repeating these wishes many times.

Enclosed is my report for the last month; I hope that you will be happy, as I have made every effort, very dear Parents, to live up to the care that you have for take me. I have the honour to be

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to my Aunt Huleu, and to all the family

hg

P33

2nd January 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.  
Mondidier, 2nd of the year 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

I am going to pester you with all my letters; however I cannot avoid writing you this one as it is to send you my report. What is happening at home, my very dear Parents? It is two months now that I have received no news; I am rather worried and you will agree that this is not without reason. Please write to me as soon as possible in order to alleviate my concerns. François sends you his good wishes for the season; he is better than when he started here. However, he is always pale but the doctor told me that this is not anything to worry about. Please present my good wishes to my aunt, to Jean and to Jacques De Namur and to all those I know.

I am for all my life

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P34

27th January 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut.  
Mondidier 27 January 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

It was with great pleasure that I learned the of happy state of your health, as well as that of all the family. If only I could respond to the tender wishes that you offered me in your last letter! Please believe nevertheless, very dear Parents, that I am some most appreciative. I pray God to repay them, for His greater glory and your own satisfaction.

I received a letter from my Uncle Spitaels (the banker) that made me very pleased. I won't tell you more about it as his goodness is well known to you; besides he surpassed all that I could tell you about him.

I would like to know the present state of my uncle, the Regent . I expected to learn something about it by your last letter, and your silence gives me some concern. I hope I am wrong; I would be happy to learn of his restoration to health after everything that I have heard about him from Mr Verhaeghe. François is very well, and I hope that you will have the satisfaction of seeing by his reports that he is fulfilling his scholastic duties better. He was very grateful for your wishes as well as those of his dear sisters.

Please, very dear Parents, convey my expression of gratitude to my dear sisters Charlotte and Cécile, and tell them that I was overjoyed by what our dear Father told me about them; that they are learning well, and that they hope to make their First Communion at Easter; what happy news for a brother who loves his sisters as I love them! I won't cease to pray for them, and I expect the same from them. I ask you to say as much to my dear brother. I will not say much today about him and will do so more comfortably another time.

Farewell, very dear Parents, I have the honour to be

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

Please present my respects to my dear Aunt Huleu and to all the family. I enclose my report for the last month.

hg

P35

27th February 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.

Mondidier, 27th February 1807

Very dear Father and Mother,

It is quite a while since I wrote to you; my application my studies, whose progress is not yet as I would wish, is partly the reason but not all. Laziness is part of the reason also. I beg you therefore, dear Parents, to forgive me.

For some time, three times a week during the evening meal, a talk is given by senior pupil; this teaches one to speak in public, and educates children for preaching, the law or for the public declamations of the judiciary. Besides it is easy to judge how much these tests embolden one. There are other little exercises to encourage competition; in every class the children choose from among the cleverest two captains, who in their turn choose other children; and these two teams compete, in translation, in essays, etc. and strive to win the weekly composition prize cross. You can imagine the fervour that goes into these competitions, how much they stir up competition and excite the spirit. It is all done in good order; the teacher decides the victor and this is accepted without retort or grumbling. The time approaches where my two dear sisters are going for the first time to approach the Holy Table. I am sure that they are preparing themselves for it with ardour. I will be happy to write to them before this time, and will continually pray to the Good Lord that he might condescend to give them the necessary graces to take such a big step and on which perhaps depend their salvation.

I don't doubt that you are more and more happy with François; if he doesn't make brilliant progress it is not very surprising; this child knew hardly a word of French when he came here, and you will admit, dear Parents, that principles of a language, especially the French language, are very difficult.

I am sending you my report for the last month.

Farewell, very dear Parents; I have the honour to be

Your very obedient and devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P36

13th March 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, 13th March 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

The term being close to finishing I thought I should tell Fr Michel not to send you the account seeing that it is settled in Amiens; however I don't know if it will be sufficient to send it to Mr Langevin; please let me know before the end of the month.

Although our expenses are not large, for some time our funds have been depleted. I have therefore, in accordance with what you allowed me, asked for a Louis from Fr Michel.

You tell me in your last letter that you were not satisfied with François' report, and that you would like to have some details of this. This is what I can tell you for certain: for some time François has been overtaken by his schoolmates; this can be attributed to the advantage that they have over him from the point of view of the language. Also, his temperament being weak will have influenced his application; whatever the case, I have noticed that he has not been entirely at ease, and I have tried to discover the reason. Finally I discovered what I am now going to tell you: I knew full well, and his teacher also remarked on it to me, that one only wins him over by gentleness. Consequently I took him aside and asked him how things were in class. He told me rather sadly that it was very much more difficult now in class. I noted that this was the reasoning of a discouraged schoolchild! I tried to encourage him and told him: (I knew that he likes the game of "top" a lot): if beginning today you learn your lessons well, on Sunday I will buy you a top; that is what he wanted, and he promised me, and kept his promise and I did the same. It remains to be seen if he continues to apply himself. I would like to think so and I pray the Good Lord to help him and I ask you as very dear Parents to join your prayers to mine. He was very happy with the letter that you wrote to him and he told me that he will do everything possible to satisfy you in the future. As for his character: he is well liked by his masters and his schoolmates; this will prove to you sufficiently that he is not insensible to the good advice of our teachers. Some time ago he had won a lot of walnuts; I told him not to eat them all, that he would become sick; "I won't eat them," he said, "I will sell them and the money will be for the poor."

As for what you told me, that you would want me to send you our two reports in one letter, I will try to get them from my teacher.

I embrace you with all my heart and am forever

Your very devoted and submissive son.

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to my brother Jean. Mr Jacques Verhaeghe asked me to thank Jean and B. Ruyter (?) for the memories that they have of him.

[The following was written in Flemish]

Dear Charlotte and Cécile,

What happiness will be yours in a few weeks when you will receive the One who made the heaven and the earth! It is necessary for you to prepare to receive so a worthy a Guest. Oh! how many new graces you will receive! Please, my dear little sisters, prepare your little hearts; if a great king were to come to lodge at home, what preparations would you not make? The King whom you are going to receive is greater than all kings of the world. The best preparation that you can make is to be obedient your parents, to be charitable towards your neighbour, and to flee any danger of even the smallest sins, and to read some Christian books. Please, my sisters Charlotte and Cécile, pray to God for me and François now that you will have the happiness of receiving Him. Oh! God's goodness is excellent; this food that He gives to such young children as you seems to me capable of moving the most hardened hearts. Prepare yourselves well, my dear sisters, it is the greatest moment of your life.

I am forever

Your loving and submissive brother

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P37

24th March 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, 24th March 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

I am sending you my report for this month, taking the same opportunity to satisfy a duty that must be very dear to all Christians; that is to wish you happiness on the feast of Easter that we will soon celebrate. May the Good Lord give us a share in the graces that he pours out on this day in great abundance. The same good wishes I offer for my brother Jean, my dear sisters and Aunt Huleu. I ask her to forgive me for not writing to her, and to understand that I still cannot as I getting ready to appear in the public exercises that are going to take place next week. This small exercise will finish in two days after which the ordinary crosses will be distributed.

I dare to believe that you will be satisfied with François' report because he has effectively worked better this month. If I am not mistaken in my hope, I believe that it would be good to say a word about it in the next letter that you write to me as it will encourage him.

I asked you in my last letter for your wishes concerning the term; please, dear Parents, let me know as soon as possible.

You will probably be pleased if I give you some details about J Verhaeghe. In the beginning he was a little shy, as is often the case when one changes Schools; but at present he is quite happy, he is very happy to be instructed in depth about his religion, he is making a lot of progress in his studies, more so than I would have hoped. He regrets the time that he spent in his previous Schools without learning Latin, and he is beginning to see how much this language is necessary to have what is called a good education. You can judge, dear Parents, according to these few words about the son of Mr Verhaeghe, that he will be the consolation of his Father and all his family one day.

I have the honour to be

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P38

1st May 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.

Mondidier, 1st May 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

I have just received your letter of the 24th of April which caused me great joy. For a long time I was very worried not to receive your news, although I had written to you in the hope of an answer. However, very dear Parents, I beg you not to let three whole months go by again without writing to us; I assure you that it causes great worry to François and me.

I see in your letter that Van Crombrugghe are going into the lottery for the militia next week. I pray with all my heart to the Good Lord, that His holy will be done; that is what we must wish for; because this good Father arranges everything to our greater good. I will also commend the matter to prayers of several very devout people.

I learned with great pleasure that my Uncle Huleu has visited you. I would have been very happy to enjoy the company of such an estimable man, but I hope nevertheless that I will have the happiness of seeing him during the holidays. He wrote to me at Easter in a manner that makes his holiness evident.

I pray you, very dear Parents, to tell my dear sisters what my Uncle Huleu said to me in one of his letters. He tells me that after having made a retreat comes the time to execute those resolutions which the Good Lord makes us take in so precious a time; the time will come for them to put into practice the good thoughts that the Good Lord inspired in them at the time of their First Communion.

I am sure that you will judge it right that I should tell you the authors whom we now read in the fourth class. As an ordinary exercise G. Curtius; we explain Virgil and the De Amicitia of Cicero. You will see, dear Father, that we set more store here on translation version than learning by heart.

I am sending you me report for the last month; I hope that you will be satisfied. If not I hope that your opinions will be useful to me.

François is well; he has not seen you for so long.

I have the honour to be

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

When my brother has taken part in the militia lottery, let me know the outcome.

hg

P39

2nd June 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, 2nd June 1807

Very dear Father and Mother,

I am writing to you again to send you last month's report; I hope that it will meet your expectations. If not, please write about it to me. I wrote to you this morning by the hand of Mr Turpin who came to place his son here the School, and he said to me that his sister intended making a journey to Flanders. I wrote in my letter, very dear Parents, how astonished I am not to have received any of your news; I really cannot guess the reason. Perhaps you are saying "nihil est mihi, quod scribam" , dear father, but I say "hoc scribe te nihil habere quod scribas." Besides you would still be able to tell me the state of your health, and whatever news could interest me. François is well and is beginning to have a more taste for study. He aims sometimes for the ribbon in his class and has even already won it, which encouraged him. He is very happy that the holidays are coming because he greatly wants to see you; he embraces you as well as our brother and our dear sisters.

Farewell, very dear Parents, please be the bearer of my good wishes to my brother Jean and my sisters, and to my Aunt Huleu. I ask you to remember me in your prayers; I have much need of it, and don't think that it is out of humility that I speak thus; it is, as one says in Flemish, "regt uyt gespròoken" .

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P40

2nd June 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, 2nd June 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

I am taking advantage of Miss Langevin's visit to tell you in a few words, (because I am short of time), how much I am astonished, and François no less, that that we haven't received even any news on your part concerning the business of Jean; however, dear Parents, put yourselves for one moment in our position and I will let you judge for yourselves that it has indeed been too long a time since you wrote to us; perhaps you will tell me, very dear Parents, that it is time that you lack? I accept that, but I believe you will also agree with me that you have at least the time to write to us every month? Please realise that I haven't received more than four letters from you since the last holidays. Please, I pray you, write to us as soon as possible; a few lines, a few words will be sufficient! Perhaps you would also tell me, very dear Parents, that I haven't written to you as often as you told me to. This is because, very dear Parents, of the very little time that I have left after my classes. But that is enough on this matter; you will believe that I was in a bad mood at the moment that I wrote to you. No, not at all, dear Parents, but it is because François' worry is increasing again that makes me speak this way. I have to finish now; I would have many more things to tell you but I only have a half-hour and I have four lessons to learn and I don't know if I will know them.

Farewell, very dear Parents, I recommend myself to your prayers because I have real need of them.

Your very loving and submissive son

C. Van Crombrugghe

François asks me to give you his good wishes as well as to our dear brother and our loveable sisters.

hg

P41

19th June 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
Mondidier, 19th June 1807

Very dear Father

I am replying to the letter that you had the goodness to write to me about my brother. I give thanks to the Good Lord God who has seen the matter well resolved; it is a loss, dear Father, as you say, but a loss that is infinitely less than the loss of a child, because I would call it a loss to see a son leaving the parents that he loves and who know that he is not doing the right thing. Besides this is not extremely expensive; it costs much more here; one of my schoolmates from Tours has a brother whose replacement cost ten thousand livres. I believe that if it is necessary to pay for a replacement it is often not easy. I hope with God's help that you will not have the same problem with me, or at least that it will cost less. But let us leave that for the holidays. I read your letter from beginning to end in the presence of François; he appeared to be touched by your remonstrations. That is obviously the best way of dealing with him, as is proven by the fact that he is applying himself better, his teacher is more satisfied with him and has said that his next report will be a lot better if he perseveres until the end of the month. He now speaks French quite well now but it is by using it that he will learn since as for the principles of the language he doesn't give them much thought. I hope that will also come. He doesn't have as much perception as one could hope for at his age. Generally he has a good character and a noble heart.

I see in my dear mother's letter that you are worried that it is a long time since I wrote to you. I wrote a fortnight ago, and I put back answering your letter to the middle of this month. I read there, and I am very appreciative, that you want to see us both as much as I want to see you. Oh! what joy I feel already when I think that in about two months I will see our dear family again! But it seems to me that I am prolonging the time that remains by thinking too much about it; for it's true that there are no roses without thorns. The memory of what is dearest to me in the world serves only to sadden me; the more I think about it, the longer it seems I have to spend away from you. The Good Lord requires it of me, you also require it, and I submit with pleasure to the such sacred wishes.

I also see in my dear Mother's letter that she is thinking of going to see her daughter; I would be very happy if you would tell me the result of her journey.

Please, very dear Father, tell my dear Mother of my close feelings towards her, my dear brother and my dear sisters to whom I ask you to say that I pray to the Good Lord God for them, so that he might condescend to keep the nuptial dress of their First Communion pure and without spot. Ah! if they knew how precious this dress is how well they would avoid soiling it! Would it not be right that they should do everything they can to respond as much as possible to the love that Good Lord shows them!

I finish, very dear Father, in commending myself to your prayers and to those of my dear sisters. Ah! What are they not able to achieve being so close to such a good Spouse as Jesus Christ! May they ask this dear Spouse for forgiveness for a brother who is indeed ungrateful towards the God who does so much good for him. How happy I would be if I had kept the promise that I made to Him on my First Communion, to be all His! I embrace you with all my heart, as does François.

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: I see on rereading my letter that it is filled with careless errors but please ignore the style and find only my heart.

hg

P42

30th June 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout.  
College of Montdidier, 30th June 1807

Very dear Parents.

Here I am writing to you again to send you my report and François'. I hope that you will have the satisfaction of seeing that François has done better than previously in class. If it is the case please say so in a letter to me so that I can speak about it to him. It has been proposed that I should ask you to make him spend here the holidays here, but I dare not do so; besides it is not very feasible since it would be too long a time before he saw you again. If however, dear Parents, you want him to stay (which would not make me very happy) you might, perhaps, do a lot of good for his studies.

For the rest we are well, and we are happy to see that the time approaches when we will see each other all together. Ah! indeed, dear Parents, it is a joy which we will, perhaps, not have often, so it seems to me that this is all the more reason for us both to come home together. On the feast of St John the Baptist Jean we saw some very moving sights. Firstly, two children

of the ages of twelve and fourteen were baptised. How beautiful these ceremonies are! At the same time they are a good moment for those that are already baptised to remember their own covenant with God. Alas, very dear Parents, these are truths about which we have hardly been reminded, and it is important that one knows them. It seems to me, dear parents, that it would be very good to instruct my dear sisters about this.

Then we had some First Communions. Oh! what joy one felt at the sight of this ceremony! When one sees children, who look more like angels than weak mortals, approaching the Holy Table to be fed with God's body. Oh! If you had seen with what joy they went before the altar of the Lord to promise that they would always remain attached to the God who does them so much good. In vain would I tell you how moving it was; I could never give you an adequate idea of it!

I finish therefore, dear Parents, in commending myself to your prayers and assuring you of my tender devotion,

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please, I ask you, give my good wishes to all the dear family and especially to my Aunt Huleu.

hg

P43

26th July 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of Escaut.  
College of Mondidier 26th July 1807.

Very dear Father and Mother,

Yesterday I received the sheet that I was expecting from you. I am very satisfied with the colour; but that is not very surprising since it was chosen by someone who knows what I like better than I know myself. I am very grateful to you for it, my very dear Parents, and I will strive to respond to your kindness by a renewed application to my duties.

With great joy I see approaching, very dear Parents, the time that our long separation will end; only one month and, if it be pleasing to the Good Lord, I will already be on my way. We have already finished most of our prize compositions. The Good Lord knows if I will win or not: all I know is that I should accept His will. If do win, it will be so that I can thank Him for it, if the opposite happens it will be to tame my proud character. In short, whatever happens it will always be by God's will. Please pray, dear Parents, to the Good Lord that I may conform myself to His will.

François is well, and wants to deserve his holiday by his conduct. He has great difficulty in speaking Flemish; in truth I know more than he does, but we will always strive to make ourselves understood.

I will enquire about the coaches to Lille and Valenciennes and will let you know. It is likely that I will take the route to Roie and not to Amiens because I hope to acquire some books there and therefore the price will be more moderate. For the rest, dear Parents, I will tell you what I find out and then you will tell me what you want me to do.

I have the honour to be very sincerely

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to all the dear family; to my Aunt Huleu, and embrace my brother and my dear sisters for me until I can do so myself. Farewell.

hg

P44

9th August 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of Escaut.  
Mondidier, 9th August 1807

Very dear Father

I received with joy, my very dear Father, the letter that you wrote to me. I will strive, with the help of the Good Lord, to please you more with my character; as for the 9th place that I had in translation, I was most astonished; but Fr Leleu, my professor, soon made me see that it was a misunderstanding: it was in verse that I had this place. You tell me also, very dear Father, of the great grace that God gave you in inspiring in you the charitable thought of buying the

Chapel on the Oudenberg. No doubt the Good Lord had His intentions in this business and certainly they were not an illusion; you could say that you have re-established the cult of the Queen of the Heavens, and this tender Mother will not let it go without reward; she will give many graces to your family. I hope it will not be too soon, dear Father, before we can go together to the Chapel to give thanks to the Virgin.

I told you in my last letter that I would enquire about the best route; I believe that the road from Roie to Peronne, Valenciennes etc. as far as Mons will be the best. I will leave here at the beginning of next month. There are still about three weeks to go, but these weeks seem like years to me. However, it seems to me sometimes that we are already united, that I speak to you; but these sort of short, delicious dreams quickly fade and leave me very far from you. But if I come to look at my situation as the result of Providence, if I pay attention to what my God has done for me in that soon I will see again the Parents whom He condescends to favour by His graces, I would quickly say that this God, who does so much for His creature is good; that I have obligations to Him! In short that I am happy although I certainly do not deserve it!

I do not know if it is raining as much at home as it is here today. You will have much difficulty with the ceremony of transfer of the miraculous picture; however the sky brightens occasionally, and sometimes a wind blows and chases away the thick clouds, and this gives me the same pleasure as the olive branch which told Noah, the patriarch, that the earth had been re-discovered.

As for my journey, it seems to me that it is time for me to ask what I am to pay for it with. I am not well provided with money and I have very little. I will wait, therefore, for you to tell me how you will send me some, and how much; you know better than I do how much I need.

I was talking, very dear Father, to one of the Fathers, Fr Le Conte, an old man whom my dear Mother met, about what you were doing to the chapel that you have just bought. This good old man, who especially honours me with his friendship, was so moved, and spoke to me so much about my parents, that certain passages of Holy Scripture, joined to what he said, would do well for your funeral oration.

I assure you of the tender affection of both myself and François; please believe me always to be

Your very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects, and those of François, to all the family, particularly to my Aunt Huleu, and be the messenger of my feelings to my brother Jean, and to my dear sisters; I embrace them cordially whilst looking forward to doing so in person. Farewell, dear Father; there are many crossings-out in my letter, but please understand that my pen, my ink and even my head are not really in a good state to write a careful letter.

hg

P45

20th August 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of Escaut.

Mondidier, 20th August 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

I am writing to you in haste to ask you to answer my last letter, because time is short and I will leave here on the 30th of the month. You know, dear Parents, that it takes five days for me to get your answer. The distribution of prizes will take place on the 25th and tomorrow the competitions begin. I could have left here on the 26th but Fr Le Blanc and Fr Sellier advised me to wait for the Monday after. François is waiting impatiently for the fulfilment of your promise, whose conditions he has satisfied for some time, and I assure you that he has made a lot of effort: every day he has "satisfecits" and often "optimès". For myself, very dear Parents, I wait with no less impatience for you to tell me how I am to pay for the journey: please be aware of how little time there is left and how much this matter of money worries me, I don't doubt, however, that Fr Le Blanc will be kind enough to provide me with whatever is necessary if you considered it right for me to ask him. His Eminence, the Bishop of Gent, will be in Amiens next Sunday or Monday and it could well be that he will come here for the distribution of prizes. That, I believe, is everything that I have to tell you. I only ask you to forgive me this scrawl, but time does not permit to write better. Please present my respects to all the family, to those that will honour you with their presence during the kermesse, and please tell my dear brother Jean that it would please me if he would buy me, at the fair, one of those bottles for teeth ; he knows well enough what it is; I don't remember the name. Farewell, very dear Parents, I kiss you and will always be

Your very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P46

10th September 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of Escaut.

10th September 1807

Very dear Father and Mother.

The sad disaster that has just happened to us obliges me to write to you without knowing in what state my letter will find you; because indeed I don't know, dear Parents, why you didn't write to me. Velim, charissime Pater, si gravis casus acciderit, vel si aegrotas, quod commodo valetudinis (one illegible word) fiat, quam longissime poteris, mihi scribas. Si tu tamen, mater frater et sorores valetis, ego et franciscus valemus. But here is what has happened to us: the Government, believing that our School was harmful to the (state) high schools etc. has just suppressed it, and give orders that the masters are to go back to their own Dioceses as soon as possible. This is to have happened by the 15th of the month. But yesterday we received a letter on behalf of the Emperor, who has allowed our teachers to remain here for a reasonable time so as to be able to return the children to their parents or to seek, jointly with the Bishop and the Sub-Prefect, other Priests to continue the work. His Eminence the Bishop of Gent, greatly desirous of having his junior seminary continued, asks them in the same letter to write for this reason (probably it was the Bishop of Gent who got this favour). However, dear Parents, we do not need to be too concerned: the Good Lord is with us, he knows what we need, and as soon as I have more to tell you, I will write immediately. His Eminence the Bishop is doing everything he can to provide us with Priests in order to continue the education that we receive here. A Vicar General will come to occupy the room of our... For the rest, even if it did not suit me, I would still have the advantage of the advice of the one that you know well, and there will always be time to take another direction. In the meantime I put myself in the hands of our common Father, who does everything to His greater glory, and each day I apply this divine precept: "Sufficient unto the day", that it is not necessary to be worried about tomorrow, and so I enjoy the greatest peace of mind. I can't tell you more right now; the present circumstances permit me the liberty only of lifting a small corner of the curtain that has hidden many things from your eyes; things which have probably worried you a lot after having received the circular letter. I hope that shortly I will be able to give you more extended and more satisfactory information. Farewell; receive my tender respects and believe that I am

Your very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please do not make much of this news, his Majesty the Emperor having just granted a delay to our teachers to avoid the reaction that a too sudden suppression could have caused. Please give my respects to all the dear family, especially to my Aunt Huleu, and recommend this business to the prayers of the devout. You would give me great pleasure if you were to do something in honour of the Holy Virgin of the mountain, in order to beg the Mother of Mercy that God's will might be done. Please do not mention all this in your letter. Already we have with us, Fr Colen(?) (Vicar General), Fr De La Marche etc. If it were possible for you to send me a celestial (one illegible word), you would give me great pleasure, several of my companions want to have one.

hg

P47

11th October 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of Escaut.

Mondidier, 11th October 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

It is, very dear Parents, only seven days since I left you, but these seven days appear to me to have lasted so long that the sweet names of Father and Mother don't seem to exist any more except in my imagination. I will not say any more, my heart softens...

I did not arrive here until Thursday towards eleven o'clock in the morning; it was already late when I arrived in Mons last Monday. The coach to Paris had passed there between four and five in the afternoon and I had to wait until the afternoon of the following day, or to take the

coach from Valenciennes on Tuesday at six o'clock in the morning. We decided to leave by this coach in the hope of finding space in Cambrai on the coach from Paris. On my arrival in Cambrai I went to the coach office where I was told that coach would arrive at two o'clock in the morning and that there was no guarantee of a place as one departure had just been cancelled. However, I made a booking, but it was useless as there was no space. I saw myself reduced to taking a stopping coach, and therefore took a "cariolle" to Roi, spent the night there and left on foot for Montdidier where our trunk arrived a little time after us. I cannot tell you, dear Parents, how tired we were; you know what it is like to travel by cart. We are already settled here. I am in the second class and François is for some weeks in the eighth: I am not very put out by this as there is a good teacher - the same one that I had in the fourth class last year. I must tell you about a new innovation which has been introduced to excite competition between classes. There will be a particular assembly of our teachers every month to decide which class has worked best, and a vote will be taken among the pupils of that class to decide who has led the others in application. The two pupils who have worked best will be given medals: one will get a medal that says "labor improbus omnia vincit" on one side, "Mondiderimense collegium excellentia signum" on the other; the other pupil will get a ribbon of honour. Besides this, a banner will distinguish the class and the class will occupy the place of honour on walks. The pupil who is decorated with the medallion has right to excuse some of his companions who would otherwise have punishments. This was instituted today and it is the fourth class of last year that has been judged to have worked best before the holidays; in reward, it is this class that has the medallion, the ribbon and the banner until Christmas. We had a big dinner and we will have one day of holiday of our choice during this month. I would have many things to tell my dear brother and my dear sisters, but time does not allow it; once again I have failed in my duty. But please, dear Parents, be the messengers of my close feelings for them. My wish for my dear sisters is that they should be always obedient and grow in virtue as in age. Please also tell my brother Jean that I very often think about him, and François, and I embrace him most fondly.

Very dear Parents, please believe me forever

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: François seems to have more application than last year and I do not doubt that he will keep the promises that he made you. Please present my respects to all the dear family, particularly to my Aunt Huleu. As for the accounts I brought back, the mistakes have been recognised, and all is arranged as you wanted it. Farewell, very dear Parents, I recommend myself to your prayers. If it would be possible to send me the remedy that Mr Delmarre used to heal my eyes I would be very pleased, because it seems that I am going to have problems with my eyes.

hg

P48

28th October 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of Escout.  
Montdidier, 28th October 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

The report which I am sending you provides me with the opportunity to ask you if you received my last letter in which I asked you to send me as soon as possible the remedy that Mr Delmarre used, two years ago, to heal my eyes. I have had no reply and this causes me concern; it is not that I absolutely need this remedy, as my eyes are better, but it is, my dear Parents, that I have not heard from you for so long. I would like to know if you are happy about my brother's substitute, and if my Cousin Albert's health is entirely back to normal.

I am very happy in the second class, although I am quite weak, but the Good Lord knows well that I have age on my side and I hope that the Good Father will give me the necessary help to use the time that he has given me to browse through the poets.

I am also taking this opportunity to give you my good wishes for the forthcoming Feast of All Saints. May my feeble prayers obtain that one day we will all be together with them to adore and to love the Good Lord in an eternity of happiness; this is my main wish, the single wish of my heart, because indeed, very dear Parents, everything that one can ask for must relate to this end. I form the same wishes for my dear brother and my dear sisters. They are also the wishes of François; please accept them and believe that he will endeavour, with all his power, to respond by his application to his duties as a Christian and as a pupil to the promises that he made to you.

Please, I pray you, present the same wishes to my Aunts Huleu, De Bakker and all the family.  
I am forever, with the greatest respect  
Your very submissive and devoted son  
C Van Crombrughe  
PS: I ask you to send me at the first opportunity the works of Ovid that I forgot when I left you.  
hg

P49

17th November 1807

Montdidier, 17th November 1807.

Very dear Father and Mother

If you are in pain for a reason that you want to hide from me, since you don't judge it appropriate to write to me, the news that you received concerning our School might well have increased the pain. Although I am uncertain as to whether I am causing good or pain, it seems to me that it is my duty to write you to appease your concerns about us. But I am going to go a short way back in time to put you in the picture about the business that I have already written to you about. The Emperor (probably ill-informed by the enemies of Religion) suppressed all the houses run by the Fathers of the Faith and therefore dependent on a foreign chief (which they are not); you know, very dear Parents, that our masters are not Fathers of the Faith at all. This business was dealt with on the Feast of All Saints in the presence of the whole court, and the Cardinal (one illegible word) whom one believed to have protected these establishments, received the order that as the Head of the French clergy, to tell all these Fathers, presumed to be Fathers of the Faith, that their establishments would be suppressed, and that all those among them who were still in their houses on the 15th of the month would be transported to Guyana. You would be right in feeling that this was a savage blow. Our Fathers received this order with the greatest tranquillity of soul. Fr Le Blanc was in Paris; he came back as quickly as possible to deal with the matter at hand. Indeed, time was short. He withdrew to his room and left here without seeing us and never to see us again. Just like a tender Father, he did not have the strength to make his adieus to his children, the dearest objects to his eyes. The news of the departure of Fr Le Blanc, and his rapid return from Paris without seeing any one of us, made us guess that there was something desperate going on. Fr Sellier left for Amiens and promised to reveal all on his return. In fact, he arrived here a week ago last Saturday. Immediately everybody surrounded him to have his promised news: he made us gather in a room and told us that the government had just given them the order to disband, but that he been to speak to His Eminence the Bishop in order to procure other teachers for us (the Sub-Prefect also wants this with all his heart). At this news everybody broke down in tears, one only heard weeping and sighs; in vain the good Fr Sellier strove to tell to us more to comfort us and was interrupted. However he told us that faith had to overtake nature, and that we had to consider ourselves lucky to be able to endure something for the Good Lord; in short he told us to go to the Chapel to commend ourselves to the Holy Virgin, promising us that in this way we would get the favour of this good Mother. There, with more devotion than ever, we shared our pain with this good Patroness, asking that God's flock should not be dispersed by the ravaging wolf. Two days later we received a letter which allowed our teachers to remain at least for a month, to make the separation less painful, and in the meantime to be replaced by other priests. Indeed, we already have other teachers, and particularly Fr La Marche who is a man of the greatest merit in virtue and in knowledge. What should console you, very dear Parents, is to see that we will be able to continue our studies here. Sadly we no longer have Fr Le Blanc any more and Fr Sellier will soon also leave: now we will see the treasure that we are going to lose! How blind the human mind is; it does not make us treasure anything until it is gone! It is a terrifying thought and one that makes me tremble when I think what will be the torment of damned when they see that it was so easy for them to gain their salvation having Jesus Christ among them on earth that offering them His gifts for their eternal happiness. Here is a copy of the letter that the good Fr Le Blanc wrote to us some days after his departure. I will transcribe it word for word from the original that I have in my hands, and which I will preserve preciousy; you will see in it, very dear Parents, his tenderness for his pupils and his complete submission to God's will.

J.M.J. 10th November 1807

You know my love for you all, my very dear children, and you will have all guessed the reason why I did not see you before my departure. Thanks be to God, I am resigned to His holy will; I adore Him, I bless Him and submit to Him without complaint; but I didn't have the strength to

make my final adieus to you, and I felt this blow so strongly that I was unable even to see you without feeling the most violent tearing of my heart.

Now, my dear Children, I have the consolation of tell those who will remain at the School that they will have in Mr de la Marche a Father who will fully replace everything that they have lost, and I advise them to give him their trust entirely. I say to all that they should never forget that the earth is only a place of exile, and therefore of misery and pain, but that this exile is only a moment, it is only a dream; in the blink of an eye we will no longer be there. This exile is given to us to prepare us for an eternity of serving God. Let us attach ourselves, therefore, dear children, to God, and to Him alone, especially when we are abandoned by the supports that He has given us but which were not Himself. Remember that you have never been happy, and be sure that you will never be happy, except in serving God. You will have difficulties and obstacles, that is true, but God will give you grace, and will be faithful to all those that do not abandon him.

There is nothing left to me, my very dear children, but to implore you to forgive me all the harm that I have done to you, everything that was an obstacle to God's graces in you: ask God to judge me according to His mercy. In short, do not forget that no one loved you more than me, and that everywhere I go I will carry you in my heart until eternity. Pray therefore for me as I will for you, every day of my life; I embrace you all and stay united with you in Christ our Lord, our only real friend whom no one can remove from us.

(Signed) Fr Le Blanc

He also wrote to me in particular the most edifying letter possible, and in which his humility seems no less than in this one. Ah! who could not admit that one is happy when one serves God? Nothing could happen to Fr Le Blanc that would be more painful to him, even death, as he admitted himself; and however he submits to God's will that he sees in the orders of the Emperor. Nature suffers, but the soul enjoys the greater peace in seeing God's hand that strikes as a Father here below in order to forgive in the other world.

I received the day before yesterday a letter from my dear Uncle Huleu which caused me the greatest joy. Ah! How much we should praise the Good Lord for having given us such an uncle! He does not know anything of what has happened here, and I did not dare to write to him about it, considering the circumstances. Please, very dear Parents, write to him about it, and even if possible send him Fr Le Blanc's letter. I owe him much and I assure you that after you there is no-one who is dearer to me in Our Lord. He takes the greatest interest in my happiness, and wants nothing from me save my advancement in God's will. I will write to him shortly, however, when there is nothing more to fear.

It only remains for me to ask you to write to me as soon as possible, in order for me to understand the reason for your long silence. Do not be afraid, my very dear Parents, to tell me if I am reason for it. I beg you to tell me if I have caused you pain, and, with God's grace, I will repair my mistake. You know the proverb "errare humanum est; errorem agnoscere, angelicum." Please, therefore, satisfy my request as soon as possible.

I pray also my dear brother Jean to think of me, proving that he does so by writing to me from time to time; he must admit that a letter is written easily, and yet it would give me great pleasure. What reason can he have for not doing so?

What I say to my brother Jean I also say to my dear sisters; they would give me a lot of pleasure in telling me that they are applying themselves, but especially that they love the Good Lord, and that they believe the poet who writes: "esteem and respect are just tributes that in the strongest enemies attract virtues".

In short, they should be more grateful for a mistake that someone points out to them than for the compliments that the world pays so much. As Boileau says: "He who seems to applaud you is laughing at you and playing with you;" and again; "love the one who counsels you and not the one who praises you". I finish, very dear Parents, in commending myself to your prayers.

Your devoted son

C Van Crombrughe

PS: Please pay no attention to the mistakes which have crept up in my letter; you would be right in guessing that I didn't write it all at once, and it is very easy to make mistakes that way. Besides, you know well that it is dictated by my feelings for you, and does not have any other source than my heart. I embrace you cordially, as does François. Receive our respects.

hg

P50

28th November 1807

To Mr G Van Crombrughe, Businessman in Grammont, Dept of Escout.

Montdidier, 28th November 1807

Very dear Father and Mother

I received with great joy your letter of the 16th of this month. The family's good state, the recovery of my cousin Albert; all this surprised me pleasantly in my concern that always tends to anticipate the worst. The death of Miss Anne Beyhqu(?) is a new trial for me at a moment when there are many trials to endure. May it please God, dear Parents, that we young people should benefit from these examples, to remain always ready to appear before the judgement of this supreme Judge, where even the just appear trembling. You tell me that my dear Father has been nearly unable to sleep; I hope that the baths will be beneficial, and I believe as you do that it was an overheating of the blood. Only I should say to you that you waited too long: because remember, dear Father, the precept of Ovid: "principiis obsta". The letter which you mention, as well as the remedy from Mr De la Marre, did not arrive here. If it were possible to benefit from the opportunity of Mrs Byl's visit to send me a small box of it I would very grateful, not that my eyes hurt but they are not entirely healed.

We have just learned that all our old teachers will remain, with the exception of the priests; this is a great comfort. Farewell, very dear Parents, I will strive, with God's grace, to satisfy your wishes concerning François. It is true that for some while he has lost some of his good will; I am very pained to see it, because he never comes to me to speak about himself. I believe that it would not be useless for you to write him a little letter. More recently he has been better and he makes me the most beautiful promises.

I finish in commending us to your prayers, whilst embracing you as well as all the family.

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrughe

PS: Please present my respects to my Aunts Huleu and De Bakker. I benefit from this opportunity, very dear Mother, to wish you a happy feast: it is true that duty requires that I should have written to you, but you know well that I don't have the time, and besides, you know my feelings towards you. Do not doubt that I asked Saint Cécile for the graces you need. I know, very dear Mother, that this is the best thing I could do for you.

hg

P51

6th January 1808

Mr G Van Crombrughe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept. Escout

Montdidier, 6th January 1808

L.J.C.

Very dear Father and Mother

I arrived safely in Montdidier last Monday when I should have arrived on Saturday; in Gent I was delayed one day and in Amiens another. I wanted to tell Mr Langevin that my brother would be worried and other things inspired by the desire that I had to be in School, but it was useless as he didn't want me to leave the same day. During the day I went to see Mr De Sambucy and told him about the good success of my affairs. I told him that I was leaving the following day for Montdidier; fortunately Fr Cottu (Vicar General) was also going and offered me a place in his carriage and I accepted it gladly. I have spoken to you before about Sister Julie, who has been miraculously healed of a paralysis that had taken the use of her legs for twenty-two years. I admired God's power while reflecting that this person, already quite aged, now walked with so much ease, and four years previously could not even move a leg. You will easily guess, dear Parents, what was the topic of conversation between these two respectable people. While speaking of the different houses of Sister Julie's order, the thought came to me that there is in Grammont the house of orphans that is now in a good state through the care of Mrs Myer, but that there is the fear that after her this house could lose a lot of the beautiful order that reigns there today. It is also a real fear that Mrs Myer will not be able to take care of it much longer. I spoke to the Sister about the good that would result if she could send two of her Flemish sisters there. She liked this proposition a great deal, as did Fr Cottu, especially as there is a question of establishing a Convent in Gent through the good offices of the venerable Prelate whom the Good Lord in His mercy gave to the Diocese of Gent. She even asked me to write to you, dear Father, to ask what you think of my proposition (which I had put, in truth, without thinking that it might be effected so quickly). I hasten therefore, dear Father, to satisfy her desires on this topic; please let me know how it seems to you as well as to Mrs Myer. If

you judge it good, Sister Julie will come to Grammont; God, she said to me, gave me back the use of my legs, it is right that I should use them in His service. The establishments of this Sister Julie are approved by the Government. As for me, it seems to me that it would be the only way to make so useful a school for indigent youth last forever. Further, it would become better if at all times one were able perfect it: because the Sisters formed by one so holy are indeed uniquely qualified to educate children. Please, therefore, dear Father, think on it and let me know what you and Mrs Myer think about it; what happiness it would be, dear Father, if the Good Lord were to use us as the first instruments for so beautiful a work. If you believe it necessary that she should address herself to the Mayor or any other person please tell me.

The year that has just begun is a time when I particularly address my wishes to the All Powerful to obtain for you the necessary graces to spend it in God's friendship, that is to say in the accomplishment of His holy will so that this year will be the beginning of a purer happiness than that of previous years. This, dear Parents, is the first of the wishes that I most especially form for you on this day customarily dedicated to this topic.

The prayers that I address to the Good Lord for my dear sisters are that they should be always virtuous, always friends of (one illegible word), still dear to their Parents and all the family; in a word that they should grow in virtue as in years. This is the most ardent desire of my heart and I ask them to accept it while receiving my tender embraces.

I have the same prayers for our dear Aunt Huleu, and our loving Aunt De Backer and her family.

My dear brother Jean should believe that I have not forgotten him, but that present circumstances make me particularly pray for him, and my most sincere desire for his happiness both temporal and eternal would not permit me to forget him for one instant. I ask him to tell Mr Van Haeverbeke that I found the book about which he spoke to me; a beautiful edition. I will write to him as soon as I know the price, which should not be too high.

Very dear Parents, I have the honour to be forever

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: The number of boarders has declined sharply, but perhaps that is necessary to put the School on a firmer footing. Today Fr Sellier preached to us as a good Father, and in such a way as to call back to the straight and narrow those that are the least well disposed. François is well; he is now placed next to me in the study. Farewell, dear Parents; only ten days ago I was close to you and now I am so distant: we could not be less closer in the heart of Our Lord. Please embrace my dear sisters, and tell my brother Jean that I will write to him shortly. As for his business in Gent I do not doubt at all that it will go well if he puts himself entirely between God's hands. What I found out after his departure makes me think this way.

hg

P52

29th January 1808

Mr G Van Crombrugghe in Grammont, Dept. Escaut  
Montdidier, 29th January 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

My report provides me with the opportunity of asking about the state of your health, and to ask you the reason for your long silence; I cannot imagine what could be the reason for it. It is true that an answer to my last letter is not of a nature to be made immediately, but I don't believe that it requires so much time: because indeed, it seems to me that it is a long time since I left you, and I wrote to you few days after my return to the School. Please, therefore, dear Parents, write to me more often. I had proposed, before going to see you, to ask this of you, but I did not know how to, and it seems to me that I receive less news now than before.

I have been to see Fr S.R. with Verhaeghe, how pleasant the day and a half that we spent with him was! He has already changed the face of his entire village (in matters of the soul). Also he takes so much care: you have often heard me speak of his zeal, but you would have to see just how much good he is doing in order to get an accurate idea of it. Time does not permit me to converse longer with you. I embrace you.

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to all the family and commend me in your prayers; I have much need of it.

hg

P53

12th February 1808

Mr G Van Crombrughe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept. Escaut  
Montdidier, 12th February 1808.

Very dear Father and Mother

For a long time I have been waiting for your answer to my first letter. The happiness which the poor children of this city enjoy at Sister Julie's establishment makes me want the same thing for the poor children of Grammont. There would even be a more considerable advantage for these last in that that they would be always with their mistresses, an advantage that the Montdidier children don't have, being only day boys. But one way or another I leave it to Divine Providence to take care of this business; if it succeed or not I will still bless the Good Lord, He knows what is to His greater glory. Please, therefore, very dear Father, let me know as soon as possible what you think so that I can inform Sister Julie.

Here we have seen the Parish Priest of Plainval; in vain would I try to describe our joy at his arrival. Now more than ever we regard him as a man of the greatest merit, in a word, a saint. I do not believe that we are deceived in this. He has a sweetness, a humility which are very rare in this time of pride. Here is proof of it: he told me that it was with an inexpressible pleasure that he saw that the School was beginning to re-establish itself. What joy, my dear child, he added, it would be if I could see, the next time that I come here, that the Good Lord is loved in a house where he has been offended so much. Oh then, I could be made curate, a domestic servant, anything: I would agree gladly. Do not think, dear Parents, that it was just a figure of speech; no, I am persuaded that he if were to be made cook, or put into the most base, most humiliating job, he would be satisfied.

François and I are very well. It must be that the mode of life in this area matches my temperament, because I am more well than in Flanders and my eyes, which I am often obliged to tire, could not be better. I can say the same of François. But you will tell me that I am selfish, so I will finish this picture of our health! It would be better that I should enquire after your health; please let me know if this humid weather is more harmful to you than to us. I give thanks to the Good Lord for the restoration of my cousin Albert's health: it is a particular favour for his lovely children. They are blessed in having as good a Christian as a father as he is. I am not surprised that he is a good Christian, he has too much common sense; he has too sensitive a heart not to give to God the worship and the love that are due Him.

He spoke of conscription; it seems that there will be little delay in the lottery and I would be happy if you would let me things turn out for me, if you have to write to His Eminence, and what he will do. For the rest I am not worried; I put it in the hands of Providence.

I would be very happy to learn how my uncle, the Regent, is, not only physically but, and even more especially, in relation to his moral standing. Ah! very dear Parents, let us not fail to commend him to the Lord through the intercession of St Joseph, that great saint. What glory could he not give to God, if he were to give himself entirely to Him, as befits a minister of God's altar, who is so good, so kind, and so generous towards those that want to serve Him in the simplicity of their souls.

Please tell my dear brother Jean that I do not fail to satisfy his wishes and to commend him to God in my poor prayers. He has too great a place in my heart, especially since I know his good feelings, for me to spend a single day without thinking of him. He is right to put himself in the hands of the Good Lord in such an important matter, in a matter on which largely depends man's only concern, I mean salvation; the one thing that indeed merits all our cares; all the rest is only vanity! "Vanitas vanitatum est omnia vanitas praeter Deum amare est illi soli servire".

Farewell, very dear Parents, please remember me in your prayers, I have much need of them. François asks you the same thing. He is working quite well, and if his successes do not live up to his effort then I believe that his application is not the cause. I have a very poor memory but I can see that his is the more so.

Please be the messenger of my feelings to my dear brother and my dear sisters. I embrace them cordially, and ask them not to forget a brother who feels how much it costs his nature not to be able to tell them face to face all that his heart feels. Please tell my dear sisters, of (one illegible word) that of all my possessions, the most pure, the most lasting and in short the only one of value, is the love of God, it is charity towards the suffering members of Jesus Christ who did not hesitate to give His blood for us.

Please also commend me to my Aunt Huleu, my Aunt De Backer and to all the family and all our friends.

Very dear Father and Mother  
Your very devoted and obedient son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P54

2nd March 1808

Mr G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont, Dept. Escout  
Montdidier, 2nd March 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

I received with great pleasure the letter that you wrote to me in answer to my letter on the question of the orphanage. I see, not without a certain pain, that the project cannot take place at present, but God knows better than we do what is to His greater glory. I bless His unfathomable intentions and submit myself to His holy will. I will conform, very dear Father, to what you tell me, and put this business aside till a more suitable time; besides, God who holds all between His hands will sustain this shelter for the orphan poor.

It appears more and more to you that verse will not be of any great use to me, and therefore you do not wish me to apply myself too much to it. If it were not a rule of the School to do it you would not have to tell me. The difficulty that I continually find in making verses would make me abandon this subject, but you will understand, very dear Father, that it is not possible for me to follow your wishes and my personal inclination since the rules do not permit it. You probably believe that Latin poetry occupies all my time and that I do anything else than verse, like in Flanders! No, it only takes a small amount of my time and is simply to give me an idea of what is called Poetry. We see in second Virgil and in Horatio that to discover the beauty of these authors one needs at least to be able to put a verse together. The other Latin authors that we are studying in my class are Cicero and Titus Livius.

The lottery for conscription was done here today, and I suppose that if it has not been done in Grammont it will be before long. I don't know how I will come out of it: I wrote some time ago to my Aunt De Scheppere so that she could find out and write about it to you. I don't think that there is anything to fear; however I would be very happy to know something, the more so since my Uncle Huleu wrote to me that the person for whom His Eminence had asked for exemption had already got it.

Please, I pray you, present my respects to all the family, and embrace my dear sisters for me. The time is not far off when Rosalie will be obliged to leave you for some time; please tell me if you are decided on where you will send her. My good wishes as well to my dear brother, and I would be very happy to receive his. I embrace cordially, while asking you for your blessing. François is well and commends himself, as do I, to your prayers. While waiting for your news I finish by calling myself forever

Your very obedient and devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P55

15th March 1808

Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept. Escout  
Montdidier, 15th March 1808

Very dear Father

I have just received your letter which fully but briefly tells me about all my business. I give thanks to the All Powerful for the good things that He does for me. I am surprised that the number 101 doesn't put one out of all fear; here they ask for about 25, and 40 has nothing to fear; but whatever happens I hope, given the precautions that you have taken, that God will rid us of this burden which continually bears on us.

I congratulate my dear brother Jean on the luck that he had in drawing a so advantageous number for me, he should have had as much good fortune for himself, and he would have accomplished this proverb then: true charity starts with oneself. He would at least save himself much expense.

I learned at the same time that the news of the death of my Grandmother and that of Mr Vanderwegen(?) of Malines was only a false alarm. However, the news made me consider my own self. Death is a passage that we need all to pass through; happy the one who has the joy of hoping by his conduct that this fatal moment will not bring him to another more terrifying

fate, that of being separated forever from the sight of God. One should want to live well in order not to dread death, but one does not think enough about it, and very often one loses entirely from view this fundamental point. Such were the truths that struck me at the moment when I learned the sad news, but I said to myself that it is not sufficient to accept the truth of these reflections, it is necessary to put them into practice, that is to say to conform to the truth in everything. It is therefore true that "omnes una manet nox"! I am only eighteen and how many people have been lost in our family? "Eheu fugace... labuntur anni", but far from believing that death was a misfortune for them, I pray on the contrary that it was only the end of their miseries, the beginning of their happiness. I do not hesitate to apply these words of an ancient: "vive memor (one illegible word) fugit hora, hoc quod loquor inde est".  
Adieu, very dear Father, I embrace you cordially as well as all the family. François is well and sends you a thousand good wishes and embraces you.  
Your very devoted and obedient son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P56

1st April 1808

Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept. Escaut  
Montdidier, 1st April 1808

Very dear Father

You must have received two letters from me in answer to yours. In the first you spoke to me about the impossibility of the project which I had written to you about; in the second you told me in few words, but in a manner which made me very happy, that my brother had surpassed himself that day in drawing for me. I hope that we can flatter ourselves on being calm in that matter. I am astonished that you didn't speak to me about François; I am sure, however, that you are hardly happy to see him still in the same class, almost at the same point where he was three years ago. For some time Fr De la Marche has wanted to investigate the reasons for it. It seems that François doesn't have a taste for Latin, and that it will be necessary for him to drop it if you want him to come out of this sort of nonchalance that he has. It is not that he does not work at all; he does what he can, but he does it with a certain apathy, I would almost say disgust, which prevents him from making progress. If you agree that he should drop Latin, Mr De la Farche will be good enough to look after him personally, and to push him in French. If I may take the liberty of telling you my opinion, I believe that this is the best means of getting him back to work; I can tell you that he would spend his time uselessly in the study of Latin. If he is destined for trade, as seems likely, he will know enough with French, a little History and a little Mathematics. This, dear Father, is what strikes me about François, but this is only my opinion and it is up to you to decide. I will await your answer with impatience, so that I can arrange things in consequence of your decision. It would be a pity for François to remain in this idleness; he is a good child, but laziness is the mother of all vices.

I have a great desire to know how my Uncle, the Regent, is. It would be a joy to hear that he is well! I would also like to know if you are decided on the School where you will place my sister. In short there are a thousand things which I would like to know about. I don't know if you have been sent our account? I had said that I would send it myself.

Please present my respects to all the family. I would want to converse a little more with you but time does not allow. I embrace my dear sisters; tell my brother that he must send me another letter.

Adieu, very dear Father, I finish by asking you for your blessing.

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please give my warmest good wishes to my dear Mother.

hg

P57

12th April 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut  
Montdidier, 12th April 1808

Very dear Father and very dear Mother

Referring to my previous letters, I take the opportunity of a devout and laudable custom to

write to you for the great feast that we are going to celebrate. May we all, very dear Parents, be revived on this day with our adorable Saviour; this is probably the main wish that you have, as it is also the most ardent of my heart. May the Almighty grant it according to merits of His dear son! Today is the triumph of our holy Religion, ah! this feast must be dear to all Christians! Is it not a pity that all men do not want to take part in it? By what privilege therefore did the Good Lord make known this divine Religion that we have the happiness of practising in preference to so many others? How much it is to be wished that those who have been seduced by unfounded prejudices against her may have their eyes opened today, and may recognise the kindness that God did to the world in making this Religion known here! Indeed, dear Parents, is it not this Religion that brings society closer together by attaching the rich to the poor by charity, and the poor to the rich in gratitude? Is it not she who rushes to comfort to the grief stricken or who defends the orphan and the widow? Is it not this Religion that raised up these numerous buildings where the sick go to look for the help that they do not find anywhere else, where the indigent old find rest after their work and spend painful days in peace, where the abandoned child receives the milk that his Mother refuses him? Who could find, except in this Religion, men generous enough to risk at every instant contagion and death. Would one find among the Philosophers, those fine arguers who do all through their speeches, men who would sacrifice their cares, their tiredness, their very life, to relieve their equals? Ah no, it is only Religion that can promise them a reward worthy of their labour, therefore she alone can form these generous souls. If only one could imagine a society where the precept of brotherly charity would be observed in all its extent; the time did exist where this happy idea was achieved. In the first century of the church the faithful only had one heart and one mind, all was held in common, the good and the bad, pain and pleasure. It is not necessary to go so far back to find this happy time, this lucky age; the Paragai offered us the same sight a few years ago; the enemies of Religion themselves were not able to stop themselves from giving this witness. And one finds today men who do not love this religion; this I find extraordinary, this is the greatest wonder imaginable. Oh! my dear Parents, how happy we are to see clearly in this century of darkness; God be praised that it is to Him that we owe this inestimable kindness. I want and pray to the Good Lord that this letter might inspire in my dear sisters a love for our Religion. The time will come when they will need it to keep themselves from corruption. They should not forget God's kindness towards them. I commend myself as well as François to your holy prayers and to those of my dear sisters so that, delivered one day from everything that stops us from knowing and perfectly loving the Good Lord, we will see ourselves in Heaven, our real homeland, to know Him and to love Him for all the eternity.

I end, very dear Parents, in asking you to accept my good wishes and those of my dear brother François; he continues to go on his little way, but I hope that your answer to my previous letter will put him in a position to be able to make you fully satisfied with him. For myself, with God's grace, I will take all possible care of him and will gladly give him albeit only a quarter hour a day to make him understand through Flemish the meaning of French words. This is absolutely what he needs; he only knows French by rote and without rules.

My good wishes also to my brother Jean, my Aunts Huleu and De Backer and to all the family. I pray you to be my messenger to them.

I call myself with the greatest respect, forever

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrughe

hg

P58

6th June 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrughe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout  
Montdidier, 6th June 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

Certain information that I was waiting for from you, and that I have not yet received, has deprived me of the pleasure of writing to you. You know what information I am waiting for: a long time ago you told me that you were considering the choice of School for my dear sister. I am sure you have by now made your decision, and I ask you to tell me.

I received yesterday a letter from my Aunt De Scheppere in Gent; she described to me the celebrations in St Bavon on the occasion of the canonisation of Saint Colette. She told me the result of my brother Jean's journey. I bless God, seeing that his business is in the hands of the Good Father who does all for our greater good, provided only that we wish to consult Him. I confess that I was charmed by his interview, so all will be done without haste and with great

perfection. Cécile must have been happy with her trip to Gent; it was, at least, quite long. If she continues to grow she will be the tallest of her sisters, and if she grows in the same way in wisdom she will be very attractive. Is Charlotte still small? She is probably not happy to see that all her sisters are overtaking her in size, but I suppose that she can console herself, as she often tells her dear sisters, that fine herbs are kept in small boxes. I love to imagine all the family; it seems to me that I am there also, that I can hear them speak without being able to answer them. We often speak of you, François and I, and you can be sure that we do not fail to address our prayers to the All Powerful to ask for the graces which you need. François has for a long time had a pain in his foot but it is more or less healed. For the rest he is well and is working harder.

The Feast of Pentecost is such a great day, that I would not be able to let it pass without wishing you all the gifts of the Holy Spirit; may the Good Lord hear me and grant them to you in abundance. I know that is what you would wish for, my dear Parents, since it is the most pleasant thing in the world that I can wish you. Please accept my wishes therefore and very sincerely believe me

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P59

11th June 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut  
Montdidier, 11th June 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

I have just this minute received your letter bearing good and sad news. To please you, I will leave to another time all that I have to tell you, in order to have the time to answer you on only one matter. Sister Julie, whom you mention, is not at all attached to this house, as her institute especially looks after the poor. I am delighted to see my wishes accomplished so well. Mrs Beaumont's house is the best that I know for young girls. As for your asking me if I will have time to see you in Amiens, it is for you to decide; for myself I will always have the time to enjoy seeing you. There is only one slight problem; Verhaeghe would want also to see you and I do not know if it will be possible for him to come with us to Amiens. But whatever your decision, please write to me, not the day that you leave Grammont, but the day when you intend to leave Gent, and we will sort things out from there. Farewell, dear Parents, time is on the wing and I am obliged to be brief, so I ask you to give my good wishes to all the family. Forgive my scrawl.

Your devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P60

22nd July 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut  
Mondidier, 22nd July 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

I learned with joy about the happy return of my dear Mother and all the family's good health. This is a brief letter to tell you that I received your remittance and passed it to Fr De la Marche. As for the account I found all to be in order.

I have still not had news of my sister. Fr De la Marche, who is in Amiens, will see her and will give me the news. Perhaps she has already written to you, and you know more than I do about her? I hope to give you some details the next time I write to you, as I would know everything in a surer manner than by letter. François is well; he is applying himself and I hope that you will be perfectly satisfied with his report. There, dear Parents, is everything that I have to tell you at present; I reserve for another time what my present occupations do not permit me to tell you now. Farewell.

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my customary respects.

hg

P61

28th August 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont, Escaut  
Mondidier, 28th August 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

I am writing to you to tell you that I hope to enjoy your embrace on Friday or next Saturday. The great quantity of work of all sorts that I have had for the past three weeks has prevented me from writing to you, but I intend to compensate for this with everything that I could have told you by letter. Farewell, I must finish; time and tiredness oblige me to take a few hours of rest. I am writing to you behind my bed very late at night, and I have taken the scrap of paper that was in my hands to tell you these few words. We are well, as is Verhaeghe who will travel with us. Please believe me

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P62

29th September 1808

To Sister Beaudemont, Superior of the Sisters of the Faith, Rue de l'Oratoire, to forward to Mr Van Crombrugghe in Amiens.  
Grammont, 29th September 1808

Very dear Father and Mother

I hope that you arrived safely to see our dear sister, whom we know to be better. However the nature of her illness, according to what has been written to me, is a catalepsy, and worries me because it is a type of apoplexy. Nevertheless I have much hope; today's letter tells me that she is more or less in the same state as on Saturday, and I hope things will be better tomorrow.

All goes well here; nothing extraordinary has happened; up to now we have managed everything. We wait for your news with impatience. Be sure, very dear Parents, that we will try to acquit ourselves as best we can of our duties, and that we won't cease to pray to God for our dear sister.

Not having anything else to tell you at present, we ask you to take care of yourselves and to give us your blessing. Our Aunts Huleu and De Bakker come to see us often, as do all the family; the whole town is concerned for our dear sister.

Farewell, very dear Parents, I call myself for always

Your devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P63

11th October 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut

Very dear Father and Mother

I arrived this morning in Lille where I hoped to take the coach but there was no room so I will leave tomorrow. This morning I went to see Mr Malmazet, who was anxious for me to dine with him, and it is from his house that I write to you. I did not leave Gent on Saturday as we had planned, a mild indisposition, and especially the difficulties that I saw in satisfying my parents with only a short stay, obliged me to delay leaving until Monday. I went with François to Roulers; I was very happy with the method used in the School: it is a copy of ours. François seemed very happy and showed a great desire to work there, there is much competition which will do him good. This morning at half-past seven I was in Menin where Mr Vercruysse offered me a place in his coach which I accepted gladly.

You will find the account of what I paid in Roulers enclosed; the total as you will see is six hundred francs, but I believe that other advantages there will make it no dearer than Montdidier. There is not a fixed price as in France for supplying ink and paper; the pupils buy all these articles themselves. This will not come to more than fifty francs. There is no fixed price for washing and linen; each quarter you will be told the cost and it will not exceed fifty

francs, just as at Mondidier. As for the food and cleanliness they are better there, and will contribute not a little to his health. I was very happy to find a large number of my old friends there, of whom three are teachers. I do not doubt that these Fathers will take the greatest care of François. He seemed convinced of it, if I could judge by the satisfactory manner in which he left me and promised me to redouble his efforts to respond to all your sacrifices.

Farewell, very dear Parents; I am far from you in body, but I am close to you in spirit. Do not worry too much, I beg you, about the replacement for my brother Jean, the Lord will provide. Please tell Charlotte and Cecille that they must not forget their brothers, and we will not forget them before God. Rosalie must have been astonished not to see us arrive, it is too long since I have seen her; Thursday morning I hope to see her in good health. Accept, if it pleases you, my feelings of the greatest gratitude that I feel in my heart for all the care that you have for us all.

My very dear Father and Mother  
Your very devoted and submissive son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
Lille 11th October 1808  
hg

P64

16th October 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

I could have told you last Friday where I was going to stay but there was no time; I needed to go to Mondidier and deal with our trunks. I can tell you with the greatest pleasure that I will stay in Amiens at Fr De Sambucy's. I took this route instead of the one from Paris because of my sister Rosalie and because you seemed to want it. Rosalie is well; she went out with me last Thursday and she was very happy that I was staying near her. I saw with joy that she is still happy, but she is not allowed to work very much and she sometimes gets bored in the infirmary. She did not show any difficulty in returning my watch.

M. Langévin was happy with his mirror. Mr Théophile would love to have one for his office. I told him that we had one that I had thought to bring with me, but that it was unpleasant, and that I left it behind because of its ugliness. He said that I would have given him the greatest pleasure in bringing it for him, that he did not pay attention to beauty, but only to utility. I told him that I would ask you to send it. You would give him, dear Parents, very great pleasure; please send it as soon as possible. You would also please me if you would send me an umbrella, because the house where I will work is quite far from the place where I will live with Mr De Sambucy. I reserve to another time to tell you more. Please give me your blessing and believe me forever, very dear Father and Mother,

Your very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
Plainval 16th October 1808.  
PS: Please give my good wishes to my dear brother and tell me how his business is going; kiss also my dear sisters.  
hg

P65

30th October 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

I saw in the letter that you wrote to my dear sister that you are well; I give thanks to the Lord; I wish could tell you that we are well, but God, whose intentions are impenetrable, has not granted this wish; the day before yesterday I saw my sister and I found her unable to speak; she recognised me, heard me, but could not answer me. Yesterday she was better; she spoke and even walked in the garden. I went to see her again today, and found her in a worse state than that of the preceding days. She is being looked after, not without pain, and the doctor who sees her two or three times a day wants us to make her make a lot of movement as soon as she comes out of her present state. I will be going to see her tomorrow and will see what the doctor wants. As for coffee, the doctor is not of your opinion, and you should accept his

decision. It would be useless for me to describe the care that these respectable Sisters lavish on her; you know it, you have witnessed it. I can only tell you that this care does not decrease; today like the first day of her illness, the Sisters are around her bed as assiduously as the most tender mother. This must comfort you a lot in the pain that my sister's illness necessarily causes you. As soon as there is any change I will tell you, unless she remains some days in the same state, and I will also inform you if this is the case.

Please, dear Parents, do not let yourselves be too shaken by this test which wise Providence is inflicting on you; what do we have, after all, to complain about? Is it not better to obey what God who is our Father wants, than to become bitter and to increase, by our useless complaints, the pain that we feel? I know, very dear Parents, that it is very natural that you should suffer when your child suffers, but doesn't Religion come to your help in these moments of distress? Does not God himself tell us "happy those who mourn for they will be comforted"? Let us therefore see these tribulations with eyes of faith, but let us pray to God through the intercession of the Holy Virgin who is never invoked in vain. Yes, Mary is all-powerful next to her Son. Fr De Sambucy preached a sermon on the Holy Virgin; I have never heard anything more touching, more likely to inspire love for and confidence in God's Mother! What a man is Fr De Sambucy! What a pity that you have not seen him, as you would be greatly re-assured.

Finally I ask you to give me your news as soon as possible and to assure my brother Jean of the friendship that I have for him. I also embrace my dear sisters. I end by asking you to give me and Rosalie your blessing and to remember us in your prayers. Please accept these signs of my filial love and please believe that I am forever, very dear Father and Mother

Your very devoted and submissive son

Amiens, 30th October 1808

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P66

3rd November 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

I told you in my last letter that Rosalie had had an extraordinary crisis. On Monday in the evening she recovered her speech and all other uses of her body. On Tuesday morning I saw her and she spoke to me. Since this time she is well enough, but the doctor insists that she should travel and be physically occupied. I spoke with Sister De Beaudemont and Fr De Sambucy; it will hurt them to see my sister leave, but they consulted other doctors and all say the same thing. They even insisted that she will not recover otherwise, and that after she has tired her body she will be completely healed. Having sought the opinions of the two people that I have just mentioned, and having had a long conference with the doctor who knows my sister and her illness extremely well, I realise that I must bring her back to you as it is a matter of life and death. It is a rude blow, very dear Parents, I know, but be sure that God will provide. Last Monday I did not think that I would be able to give you any good news; she has recovered against the expectations of the doctor, the surgeon and all the Sisters who surround her. Even Sister Beaudemont, who was looking after her that day, appeared to me to have the greatest concern, and that in someone who does not become afraid easily. We must therefore take advantage of the only means available to save my sister's life, and consequently next Monday I will leave here with Rosalie and her carers who want to come with her; the doctor will give me a list of all that will be necessary; not for the journey, because the movement of the carriage will be the first remedy and will even prevent her from relapsing, but to inform you as to how you will have to treat her at home - my sister will be healed without you worrying about it. Do not get any more worried. There is only one thing that pains me for Rosalie, and that is being forced to interrupt her studies for a time. The doctor pities the young Sisters of Flanders because we make them study too late, and indeed this is a big defect in our country. After all, is it not better to enjoy a child's presence at the age of fifteen rather than to send them to boarding school at this age? It is not rare to see here with the Sisters girls who at the age of fifteen or sixteen would be ready to render the greatest services to their Parents. And I will observe to you, not according to my own judgement (although I know this School perfectly well), but rather according to the judgement of people who know about these things, that this establishment of Sisters is one of the premier Schools in Europe for the formation of young girls. I go there often and seldom leave without wishing to see one of my sisters there again. Please, very dear Father and Mother, be calm and believe me with all my respect and love to

be,

Your devoted son

Amiens, 3rd November 1808.

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please assure all the family of my love. We will leave here on Monday at the latest, because the moon is advancing and this has a great effect on the sick, and we will be in Grammont on Wednesday or Thursday.

hg

P67

11th December 1808

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe in Grammont, Department of the Escout

My very dear Parents

I have just received the bill for Rosalie's treatment. I thought I should send it to you immediately so that you can arrange to send me some money. First I ask you to notice that the two journeys and my term's fees deducted from the sum that I received in Lille will not leave me with very much. The bill frightened me, but however I see that it would amount to little if one deducts everything which is not to do with my School fees, which proves that the Sisters did not charge much for their expenses. The apothecary's account is well detailed, but the surgeon's bill surprises me; there is no detail and it is very brief. As Sister Beaudemont notes, it is true that these men are well paid.

Charlotte is very well; I am very happy about that and she gives great hope for her study of the sciences and of virtue; I found her changed for the better the last time I saw her. She is modest, gracious and extremely affable; she only wants what I want and always accepts my reasons for what might be useful or useless to her. Finally, my dear Parents, she makes me happy and is increasingly pleasing to the Good Lord. She will be a consolation to you one day and will make you forget the pain that so dear an education caused you, given the circumstances of the past few months. As for me, I will strive, in gratitude for God's grace, to benefit from this year, while taking advantage of every moment whose price I know and which passes always too quickly. Up to now all goes well for my Rhetoric; I would not do better even in the best School. I find advantages here that I would not find if I followed the courses in a School, in that here I can adapt the objects of my studies to my state.

François wrote to me that he is not making as much progress as he would wish because he is not strong enough in principles of the French language; Fr Simple even advised him to drop a class in French; I answered him that he should tell you, and that I didn't doubt that you would agree to him applying himself especially in French. This was based on your decision, my dear Father, that he should concentrate on French if he was not to benefit from Latin. If you have not yet received Rosalie's trunk it must be in Gent at the place where you get off the coach.

I am very happy at my dear sister's recovery and her desire to continue her education; this is beyond all my hopes. I hope she will do well in Gent; she had already received the crown of the School in Amiens. I am sure that this new school is so well ordered (surely it could not be otherwise) that she will lose little by the move, certainly less than others who have not been there all the time. It is incredible to see the love that these Sisters have for her; her return would give them true pleasure, as it would to me, but I see the impossibility of bringing her back here. Besides her teachers are in Gent, and therefore she naturally prefers this last city. I have not yet received the mirror and I am keen to have it. Mr Langevin must be astonished that so long after my journey it still hasn't arrived.

A letter was to be sent to you from Sister De Beaudemont, but to save the postage I am sending it in my letter which will only be a little bit more full.

Please assure my dear sisters and especially my dear brother Jean of my friendship; tell them that I do not forget them in my prayers and that I ask the same thing of them. I hope that Rosalie and Cecile will write to Charlotte who would be happy to learn their news.

Please receive my very sincere respects and remember me in your prayers. I call myself with the sweetest feeling of the filial love, my very dear Father and Mother

Your very-loving and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

Amiens, 11th December 1808

PS: I ask my brother Jean to remember me to my friend J. Verhaeghe.

hg

P68

11th January 1809

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe in Grammont, Department of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

It has been a long time since I heard your news, and three or four of my letters have been without answer. However I suspect that it is the delay of Mrs Byl's journey that is the reason for it; at least I hope that there is not another reason. It has been a long time, however, since I have heard anything definite, and I am not without a certain worry. Firstly, how are you? Is Rosalie entirely recovered; will she soon go to School? Charlotte very much wants to know; she is greatly benefiting from the sacrifice you have made. About three weeks ago when I went to see her, Sister Beaudemont made me say to Mrs Sambucy in front of a certain number of strangers in the reception room, that my sister was very good and very happy. Eight days ago whilst returning from Mass she stopped me and told that she could wish for nothing better, she is cheerful, devout and clever; without decrying Rosalie, this one surpasses her in everything. This must give you pleasure, dear Parents, but what will astonish you even more is that she would have won several prizes if she had been longer at the school. To win a prize it is necessary to have been at the School at least two months before the end of the term when the prizes are distributed.

I have a thing to ask you; I do not like luxury, but I do like cleanliness, and my green coat is less than clean. I will say more, it is nearly unwearable. I cannot wear my light brown coat every day as I would have nothing left for the summer. I ask you therefore to send me via Mrs Byl a coat of my brother's if he has any that he does not wear any more. I am obliged to dress reasonably well because we often receive His Eminence the Bishop, Vicars General or Canons, and it is not right to appear before them with a dirty and stained coat like mine. Please answer me as soon as possible and very sincerely believe me, my very dear Father and Mother,

Your very submissive son

Amiens, 11th January 1809

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to all the family and assure my brother Jean, Rosalie and Cecile of my love. I commend myself to your prayers and ask you to give me your blessing.  
hg

P69

23rd April 1809

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe in Grammont, Department of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

I received a letter from François in which he told me something that astonished me a lot: it is that he has had an attack of gravel. At Mondidier he never complained about this and therefore food must be the reason for it, butter for example, and cheese; one should act accordingly.

I am sending you the accounts for Charlotte's School. She continues always to apply herself in an extremely satisfactory manner, may God be praised!

Time does not permit me to write a lot today; I will write to you at greater length after my retreat which is going to begin tomorrow. I ask you to commend me to God so that I may benefit from this time of salvation.

Condescend to remember me to the family and believe me to be very sincerely

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

Amiens, 23rd April 1809.

hg

P70

28th July 1809

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Department of the Escout

Very dear Father

Your letter gave me in general the greatest pleasure; the restoration of your health pleased

both Charlotte and me, and we give thanks to the Lord. I really did not know that my dear Uncle had been named President of the Seminary of Malines. This news does not have greatly surprise me, since he had for some time been performing all the functions of the position. You are right when you said that it is a second sacrifice for me. The reasons that you propose are too flattering for me to hesitate even one instant in following your orders. I will think more about it therefore; Providence will bring things to pass in such a way that I can spend some time with this worthy Ecclesiastic whose praises are heard throughout these regions where there are few good priests who don't know him. Perhaps more justice is done to his merit here than in certain parts of Flanders.

May I say that I was delighted with your post scriptum? But do you accuse me of indifference towards a sister whom I would have had the satisfaction of seeing close to me in Gent? If it was thus, dear Father, please see that this is not the case; it would have been wonderful to see my dear and agreeable Cecile as much as I saw Charlotte, but considering the advantages that will result for Cécile and even for Rosalie, who was pained to see that her little sister (or rather youngest of her sisters) was overtaking her, I happily sacrifice a natural pleasure to the greater good. Charlotte and Cecile will be a powerful spur one for the other which will constantly nourish the competition between them. At Gent the opposite would have happened: Cécile would probably have disconcerted and entirely discouraged her eldest sister, while the latter would not have been much help to the former. Where does all this reasoning lead? To repeat your own reflections, if I am not mistaken; but forgive me, I pray you, because my intention is to prove to you that my joy is excusable. I have learned that Rosalie is well and applies herself as best she can. I want my arrival in Gent to give her pleasure and hope that my cassock will not frighten her. In Amiens she heard it said one day that I was wearing a black habit and she didn't want to see me again until I had taken it off. I received recently a letter from François which pleased me; I have not seen him for a long time and might not know him well because I imagine that he will be changed in different ways. I pray you, dear Father, to assure my very dear Mother, whom I see with great joy to be well, of my respect and my filial love. Please also assure Jean, Cecile, our cousin Lauwers of my friendship.

The effect on Mr. Richier(?) arrived here on the 27th.

Receive, my very dear Father, my respectful and very sincere feelings, and please give me your paternal blessing. I await eagerly the achievement of your "postea latius".

Your very submissive and very devoted son

Amiens, 28th July 1809.

C Van Crombrughe

hg

P71

14th August 1809

To Mr G Van Crombrughe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut

My very dear Father and Mother

I am writing to you to pass on an observation that Charlotte made in her last letter, and which she thought I should tell you: Cecile won't need a bed and anything that concerns it (excepts sheets, which are not of good quality), nor napkins, nor towels, nor mâle, nor table setting except a goblet, as she will inherit everything from me. Something else that we thought to tell you is that it seems that Sister Beaudemont is waiting for your answer to her letter and it would therefore be a good thing to write to her. It seems that you are not sure of how to arrange the journey; that is what my Cousin Vandenhende wrote? If I may give you my opinion, I believe that it would be necessary that my dear Father should make the journey. Several reasons make me think this way: first it is the best way to restore his health; he is pretty much of the same temperament as me and every year the journey from Flanders does wonders for me. Then it will hardly be possible for me to enter the seminary without anyone seeing my Parents. He would need, therefore, to travel to Gent at the end of the holidays if he does not do so now. Knowing his taste for the beautiful monuments to the taste and piety of our Fathers, I will show him in detail the magnificence of the cathedral. Everything is in better order than last year; the divine office is celebrated with an imposing majesty, especially since the establishment of a boys' choir. You will see that the useful and the pleasant are united in this plan which is shared by Charlotte. Please, I pray you, dear Father, tell me your wishes; I hesitate to say this but I feel I have a certain right to ask you this more than anything else; I have to tell you, somewhat naively that it seems to me that you could not refuse this request, the first that you can grant this year.

I wrote to the Superior of the Seminary in Gent to ask for a room in the old building. I also asked for and got my certificate of exemption from military conscription as the one that His Eminence the Bishop had given me was not on stamped paper and was not adequate. So I will be ready at the end of this month. If it were possible that you could be in Amiens from the 27th to the 30th that would be marvellous. I would be able to see Fr Sambucy, who is not yet back, and you know that I would want to make him my adieus face to face. I must not omit here that you should see Sister Beaudemont; she is a unique person, but a Lady without pretension; it is a pleasure to speak with her and her merit is unquestioned. While waiting for the pleasure of seeing you, my dear Father, in Amiens and my dear Mother in Grammont I call myself with the greatest respect and the most tender devotion

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

Amiens, 14th August 1809

PS: Please remember me particularly during this octave; tomorrow is the anniversary of my first communion. May Jean find here an assurance of my love, and the same for Cecile.

Forgive the disorder of my letter, my enthusiasm has driven me too far.

hg

P72

11th October 1809

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

I hasten to give you some details of my present situation. I am already settled in the Seminary. I am well and happier than I would have imagined possible. I am entirely at home; up to now I am tolerating the cold weather well enough, but I would not refuse the offer of a jacket of wool or another material. The food here is very good, the bread excellent and the beer that I am obliged to drink four times a day tastes very good. So much for the corporal; as for the spiritual, I am also satisfied. We are forbidden to occupy ourselves with worldly business, that is to say that they do not want such things to occupy the young people's minds; this gives me the greatest pleasure. Besides, the idea that I had formed of this seminary is ungrounded, proof that it is not necessary to judge a body by the conduct of some of its members. I will continue on my way, and if it is pleasing to the Good Lord to use His divine grace I will strive to spend my time at my seminary well, and I know it already to be the happiest, or at least the most peaceful, of a Clergyman's life.

I would be very happy if Mrs Byl could bring me from Paris a dozen small rabbits, they are cheaper there and are double the quality of those in this country.

My Aunt Scheppere asked me to ask you to send her her bottle of... the name escapes me, I hope that you will guess what it is, I remember that it is a medicine.

I will be going to see Rosalie tomorrow; as far as I know she is well. Time does not permit me, at present, to write to my dear sisters in Amiens, it will have to wait until the end of the month.

In the meantime, please assure them of my love! I ask you the same thing for Jean and my cousin Lauwers, please also present my respects to my Aunt Huleu and my aunt Van Crombrugghe whom I believe to be with you at home.

I would ask you to send me the sermons, a rudiment and some other books that you think I might need from those that were in my chest. However there is nothing urgent; you can wait for the next opportunity, but I recommend you to wrap them well.

I finish in assuring you of my respect and asking you to give me your blessing.

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

Gent 11th October 1809.

hg

P73

11th November 1809

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

The small packet that you had the goodness to send me arrived the day before yesterday. I hoped it might contain my sermon books but I see that you did not send them. I would ask you to send me a rudiment and "Theology of the Christian" in one volume. I also need tobacco,

and if you think it necessary, another blanket for Rosalie as she told me she really needed one. For the rest she needs nothing, although she always asks for things. Sister Venaranda told me that no boarder is better provided for than my sister. I told her that we would make do the laundry at home in Grammont every four months; she believes that she can not wait so long, but I answered her, because I treat her very tactfully, that we would do it whenever necessary, even if it were every two months. I hope, however, that she will become more thrifty. She is doing well in her studies; our cousin Annette will be useful when she is more settled at the school.

Mimie Van Crombrugghe is going to live with Sister Venaranda for fifty florins a year, more or less for nothing, but it will be difficult for her Parents, so it will be necessary for my Aunt Huleu to exercise charity to this effect. I tell you this in the greatest secrecy, as there could be some aggravation if the matter came to be known about. The three eldest children of my Uncle Van Crombrugghe have the measles and are very sick, but Mimie is better.

I received a letter from François in which he makes me some fine promises; I dare to believe that his efforts will achieve them and that he will give you more satisfaction this year.

I have to finish, dear Parents, this rambling letter as I am very short of time. I cannot give myself entirely to what I am doing, and you would not believe how much having to go out removes from me all the precious moments that would I like to dedicate to conversing with you. But things will improve as I will not always be at the beginning of Logic so it should not occupy me always as seriously. I will not be always be new to knowledge, but I have to abandon my precious time to it, just as now.

Receive, if it pleases you, my respectful sentiments and believe me sincerely to be

Your very devoted and submissive son

Gent, 11th November 1809.

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please assure our cousin Lauwers, whom I believe to be healthy, since you say nothing about her, of my devotion. My cousin Vandenhende also asks you to receive his respects.

A major distraction made me forget to start my letter by telling you about the prayers I addressed to the Heavens for you in this octave of All Saints. I ask you to forgive me this oversight and to believe that I didn't fail in my duty to God and His Saints, for the Parents who hold me in this world, and who would not wish to be rewarded for their care for us except by eternal rewards, after having enjoyed here below the fruit that the plants which they tended with so much care have borne.

hg

P74

1st January 1810 (date added later by a confrère)

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

My very dear Father and Mother

The New Year provides me with the opportunity of witnessing to the sentiments of gratitude which I bear towards you, my worthy Parents, who are so deserving of the most tender love of their children. I pour out my heart to you today and show you the wishes that it never stops making, but rather redoubles at this time through a trust inspired by the mystery of a God Child through His love for us. May you therefore spend many happy days of heavenly blessings which alleviate the inevitable pains of man's life, and enjoy the happiness of the Saints in the next life! May we above all join together in admiring for all eternity the extraordinary love of our God for His poor creatures! This, probably, is the most ardent of my desires; may the Good Lord grant a wish that His goodness made me form, and give us the necessary graces to arrive at this hoped-for goal, a goal which is the unique object of my cares and the summit of my ambitions.

I received the sheet that you were kind enough to send me. I thank you with all my heart; I was ashamed to ask you for it, but I really believe that I cannot do without it, as it is a great comfort against the cold weather, and in short it is very nice for me. I will strive more and more to show you my gratitude by my application to my duties. May the Good Lord bless my efforts.

Rosalie progresses normally; Annette De Bakker surpasses all her companions in study and Religion. She can hardly express her contentment at being in so good a School. It is true that one does not love Religion and its practices because one does not know them, because one does not think about them as the Holy Spirit teaches us. I do not cease to give thanks the all-powerful and merciful God for the kindness that he has done to my brother Jean. His Religion must show his gratitude, because he must believe that the change that has occurred in himself comes from the free goodness of our Saviour, and there was never any attempt, as is

the case in so many others young people, to persevere in their unhappy state. Ah! how many of this type, without committing serious crimes, spend their lives in this ignorance of their salvation and when they appear before God they will be empty handed and will regret, but in vain, their past blindness! May he disregard nothing therefore to maintain and to feed his worthy sentiments.

May my Aunt Huleu, Jean, my Aunt De Backer and my cousin Lauwers etc. find in this letter my good wishes of the season and the assurance of my devotion. Please, dear Parents, believe in my sentiments and give your blessing to the one that will always call himself with a tender satisfaction,

Your very devoted and very submissive son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P75

26th January 1810

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut

Very dear Father and Mother

The happy state of your health and the blessings that the Lord is pleased to scatter with so much profusion on all the family fill me with a very gentle joy and inspire me to write to you. What will I tell you about Charlotte and Cecile first? What happiness, what consolation, what hope for the future! How charming these two good children are! I am delighted in advance with the services that you will soon receive from them. The religion with which they decorate their beautiful natural qualities will return those qualities to you in a much more precious form; it will form true children of the sort of which our age only knows the name! Please God that this reversal of sacred duty might go no farther! The letter that Charlotte wrote to her cousin De Bakker cousin is full of happy sentiments and the fruits of piety; she congratulates herself by congratulating her cousin in having in her a real friend who will help her in the world to safeguard herself from the dangers that one meets at every step; she bases what she says on what is strongest and most precious in friendship. She is indeed not mistaken; I believe that these friends will be very useful and very attached one to the other. What sentiments of gratitude this extraordinary gift of God must inspire in us! This is the most precious thing that parents can receive from the beneficent hand of the best of Fathers; may He be always praised, loved and served by all our family, so that He can crown these kindnesses one day by receiving us together into His eternal tabernacle.

I believe that dear François won't give you any less satisfaction, that he remembers the wise advice that he has so often received in his Schools; these happy memories will make him every more attentive to his duties and will make a good son of him. I never cease to pray for this tender friend, and I ask the same thing of him. I would ask you, dear Parents, to send me a few more nightcaps and some canvas slippers at the first opportunity that presents itself. I end in asking you to give me your blessing, to pray the to the Lord that He might condescend to grant me the necessary graces to remain faithful to Him in all the trials that He is pleased in His Holy Providence to send me. Finally I ask you accept my sentiments of the liveliest gratitude and the most tender love

Gent, 26th January 1810.

Your very devoted and submissive son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P76

27th February 1810

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escaut  
Gent, 27th February 1810

Very dear Father and Mother

I saw in the letter that my Aunt Schepper received from you that you are well. I give thanks to God and assure you that the air and the food of this region are making me stronger from day to day. I am in perfect health, my cold has gone. Please God that I could give the same testimony for my spiritual side as for the body! However it seems that my circumstances are well designed to resuscitate my devotion; may the Lord divert the storm that is ready to pour on us! May His Holy Will be done nevertheless. He is as much our good Father in the

moments when He makes us feel His just anger as when we are at peace, because all is useful to those who love Him. I will not stop addressing prayers to the Heavens for you, especially at this holy time of fasting that we are about to enter. I ask you also to commend me to the One who is pleased to grant the prayers that Fathers and Mothers make to Him for their children.

I pray Jean to receive the assurances of my love and François to be persuaded that a short letter, which would only take him a little time, would give me great pleasure. Please also present my respects to my Aunt Huleu and assure my cousin Lauwers and all the family of my devotion.

My Aunt Schepper and her nice family, Rosalie, Annette De Backer and our other friends are well; permit me to remember them to you and to call myself with the liveliest respectful tenderness

Your very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

You will not be unhappy to hear that last Sunday I preached for the first time. I began in trembling but was soon reassured, although I could not return to the proper tone that my subject and the French language required.

hg

P77

13th April 1810

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother,

Not knowing what time Jean will leave from here, and needing some material to make a dressing-gown, I am writing to you to ask you immediately to send me some; I need four ells and an ell of casimir for a waistcoat.

I see with great pleasure the time approaching when I might see you. I cannot tell you the day of my arrival precisely, but it will be in Easter week. I hope to find you in good health, and to enjoy this pleasant time quietly.

Please receive my sentiments of respect and filial tenderness and believe that I sincerely call myself

Your very devoted and submissive son

Gent, 13th April 1810.

C Van Crombrugghe

I embrace François

hg

P78

2nd June 1810

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

Very dear Father and Mother

I hope that your return journey was happy, and that my dear Father's health continues to improve and that you are reconciled to the departure of my brother Jean, who is putting much effort into his business here and is ably assisted his Wife. I thank the Good Lord with all my heart, and do not doubt at all that He gives His blessing to this young Wife who hopefully will live happily under His law.

I have not heard for a while about my Uncle the Regent, and would be happy to receive some good news. I would like to think the news would be good but I fear... However I never cease to offer prayers for him to the Lord and I dare to believe that He will grant them some day; if he is in state to hear you, please convey my respectful sentiments to him.

Please, if it is possible, send me my night-cap and my bathrobe as soon as possible, and may I ask you to give my good wishes to my Aunts Huleu and De Backer, to François, to our cousin etc. Last Thursday I went to see the girls at the convent; they are well and present you their respects and Rosalie asks you for your blessing, as do I.

I have the honour to very sincerely call myself

Your very devoted son

Gent 2nd June 1810.

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P79

11th June 1810

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont, Dept of the Escout

My very dear Father and Mother

The feast of Pentecost gives me the opportunity to demonstrate again my sentiments of respect and gratitude. May the Good Lord grant my wishes and endow you with the precious gifts of the consolatory Spirit! This Spirit of wisdom will give you the illumination that He refuses to the proud and the great of the world so that you can appreciate the things of the Heavens and know the vanity of the things of the earth. He will give you the strength to support with patience the intrinsic pains of man's life and the gift of piety will make you find sweetness and consolation, where the children of the world will only find folly and smallness of mind.

I received through Mr Langevin some letters from my dear sisters in Amiens. They are well and seem to me to be making progress. I do not know if my dear Mother has written to Sister Beaudemont concerning Charlotte's class, as we had agreed. I believe that it would be good to do so. I also know that I could go and fetch Charlotte without it affecting her prizes.

I have nothing special to say; the bearers of this letter will tell you what I have not written. I finish therefore in asking you to give me your blessing and to believe that I will always have the most tender and most respectful sentiments.

Your very devoted and very submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

Gent, 11th June 1810.

hg

P80

3rd July 1810

To Mrs Van Crombrugghe, Grammont

My very dear Mother

Our journey was very pleasant but on our return yesterday we looked a little like the pilgrims at Mecca: we often turned our eyes towards the city that we had just left. However we arrived safely in Gent, where my first care was to put the final touch to the matter of my Uncle the Regent. It is now for you to act; here is what you should do as soon as possible:

1. There must be a family council of five made up of the closest people to discuss the writ of interdiction and the place of confinement.

2. We will establish the reasons for his arraignment before the magistrate and will proceed to the supervision of the person and possessions.

This is in substance what Mr Haek told me, with the exception of certain expressions beyond my competence. You must judge for yourself and if there are any problems you should tell me immediately. For the rest my Uncle is happy at his new home and saw with joy from the packet that he was sent that we thought about him and that we only wanted the best for him. I can tell you nothing more about the arrangements except to tell you that Mr. Haek's integrity must leave you in the greatest tranquillity in this matter.

I have the honour, my dear Mother, to tell you and to repeat with renewed pleasure that I am sincerely

Your very devoted and very submissive son

Gent 3 July 1810

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: Please present my respects to my dear Father, my Aunt De Bakker, my cousin Vandenhende, etc.

Before sending my letter, Jean and I went to seek fuller instructions; here they are. The family council must take place to discuss the writ of interdiction; you should send us some exact and most striking details of what our Uncle did in his illness; you should add any local testimony. We will arrange the business here in such a way that there will be nearly nothing left to do in Audenarde, Jean will take charge of serving the interdiction because the one who serves it doesn't have a deliberative voice in the family council and this could be awkward. Note also that you should choose, by preference, as the testimonies that I asked for above, actions which would seem to stem from our Uncle's weakness, such as those actions where he wished to seem rich, generous, etc. This is to facilitate the whole matter and the cross-examination that he will probably undergo. I leave it to your judgement to correct and to rectify

anything that is useless or deficient.  
hg

P81  
27th July 1810  
Mr G Van Crombrugge, Brewer in Grammont

Very dear Father and Mother

It has been a long time since I have spoken with you, but it will only be a few weeks before I can talk to you face to face. Having taken every possible step for our uncle, with the President of the civil court and with the Imperial District Attorney who had him arrested, and who put all this business in motion, it has finally been decided that the business will be pursued in Audenarde. It is the only way; it is absolutely impossible to proceed in any other manner. It would be much too long to tell you all the reasons here. Please believe that I have informed myself sufficiently about it. In the meantime our Uncle will remain in Gent where he is, and it will also be there that he will be questioned. I went to see him, excited by a letter that he had written to me; I hoped to find a change in him and I found this to be the case, and I became his great friend, but for the rest he is vivacious in manners and voluble in language in a manner quite inappropriate for those with whom he speaks, and when in talking he comes to the name of a person of his family in Grammont then he gets angry and says to me in Latin that we must work to convert them etc. He only cares for the foundations and other good works that he claims he is going to make: the seminary will have two scholarships and the Spitaels of Alost will be the first possessors of them etc. Mr Haek is named his receiver in place of my Aunt De Backer who is much too weak, he says, to force the issue... The watch that he had here and that Jean sent back belongs to Mr Damst who was to repair my Uncle's ... With the key that he sent by Mr Blondel you will find all his other keys and will be able to send him some urgently needed linen. For the rest I will write when he needs it. You can be perfectly calm and await the result of this business with confidence.

Finally I ask you to accept my sentiments of devotion and filial tenderness through which I call myself in all sincerity

Your very devoted and very obedient son

Gent, 27th July 1810

C Van Crombrugge

PS: Please remember me to my cousin Vandenhende, François and my cousin Annette. I think it would be a good idea to invite the Misses Langevin to come and see you.

hg

P82  
18th October 1810  
Mr G Van Crombrugge, Brewer in Grammont

My very dear Father and Mother

The basket arrived safely, if it were not for the fact that my bathrobe was missing I would now have everything back that I had taken on holiday. I see with great pleasure that you are beginning to get help from my two good sisters. However I am not particularly astonished as they are much too well born and carefully brought up not to feel justice and the happiness of helping the authors of their days, and repaying, if it were possible, by care, attention and the most tender love, all the concerns that they caused.

I am sending you Sister Beaudemont's account; I always forget to send them to you. I do not have the time right now to write to my dear sisters, but I will take the liberty of asking you to pass on my messages. Please say to Charlotte that there is nothing better for her to read than the epistolary art about which she spoke to me; from it she will learn conversation and style, two things of an utility and of a necessity that surpass everything that one might say; when she will have familiarised herself well with this little work I will tell her what she must do to give a final polish to her style. In the meantime I exhort her not to spend a day without some reading; what I say to Charlotte, I also say to Rosalie and more strongly to François.

All the family is well here; I intend to see many of them today. Accept my respects for you all, and please believe that I always call myself with renewed pleasure

Your very humble and very devoted son

Gent, 18th October 1810

C Van Crombrugge

hg

P83

27th October 1810

Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont

My very dear Father and Mother

From day to day I have been delaying writing to you for some time, in the hope of hearing from you, but I am very surprised to have heard nothing. If I had not been informed indirectly about your health I confess that I would be concerned; however I do not know anything about my cousin Lauwers; how is she? Is she recovered, or is she still sick and is that the reason for your silence? One way or another, I would be very happy to receive an answer to my questions. Please oblige me on this point and I will be ever grateful.

I had asked my dear Father to tell me if the ornaments that Fr Le Blanc saw at Ceutrik's during his stay in Grammont are still for sale and how much they would cost. I have not been able to write to Fr Sellier on this topic as I have not yet had an answer. I beg you therefore to let me know as soon as possible what the situation is regarding these ornaments.

I have been to see the Regent, my Uncle Spitaels; he is well, but I did not get any real details since I did not go alone. I count on visiting again shortly and will let you know what is happening.

I end in asking you to give me your blessing and to present my respects to my Aunts Huleu, De Bakker etc., and also to assure Rosalie, Charlotte, François, cousin Annette etc. of my sincere devotion. I have the honour to call myself, my very dear Father and Mother

Your very humble and very obedient son

C. Van Crombrugghe

Gent, 27th October 1810.

I ask you to deliver the enclosed to its address.

hg

P84

21st January 1811

Mrs Van Crombrugghe, Grammont, Escout

Gent, 21st January 1811

My very dear Mother

You will probably be very happy to hear something definite in relation to the state of Uncle Spitaels, the more so because of the notoriety of the matter which is spreading all sorts of untruths. Here is what is happening: two months ago already at the urgent demands of the worthy Fr Rykewaert it was decided that he should make a retreat with the Sisters of Charity. His Eminence the Bishop gave the necessary orders, but the Superior of the Convent appeared disposed to leave her establishment rather than to receive someone who might cause unpleasantness to herself or to her community. From our side we did everything that could inspire goodwill but it was useless. Fr Rykewaert however, who had unfortunately not been forewarned by the altogether too true reports he had received about my Uncle, changed his mind and decided that Fr Brusou should give him a retreat in a private house. Everything being arranged thus, I drove my uncle to my brother's house, and after some days Fr Rykewaert received a letter from the Diocese that informed him that Fr Brusou would not give the retreat, because there would be imprudence in this enterprise. I confessed in secret that all this was only too true, as if my Uncle were to fall again into his illness it could have had very a bad outcome for Fr Brusou. Pressed on all sides, and by my brother and by my Uncle to sort this business out, I was in a very difficult situation. Our efforts were going to fail, if I had not found from my Aunt De Scheppere (whose virtue I am only now beginning to know and to whom we will be eternally beholden) the help that everyone else refused me. She offered me her house for my Uncle Spitaels, and proclaiming my deep gratitude I accepted her offer on condition that she would accept payment for food. That very day my Uncle went there and Fr Rykewaert prepared to give the retreat himself, but the two classes that he has to give every day in our Seminary, and being besides considerably unwell himself made it impossible for him to live up to his initial enthusiasm. He looked therefore for new possibilities, and, by insisting, arranged that tomorrow evening he will begin his retreat with the Sisters of Charity. All being arranged, thanks to God and to the goodness of Fr Rykewaert, I saw with pain at dinner last Thursday that my Uncle was speaking with the vivacity and gestures symptomatic

of his illness, about his meetings during the Revolution, and about his burdens: in a word he was mad enough to give me great concern (proof that we can no longer rely on him). He proposed to go to see Fr Rykewaert if we could, and he wanted to force the Bishop to name some people to check his accounts. Fr Rykewaert, very charitably, told him that it was not in Bishop's competence and that he would not interfere in his temporal affairs. He insisted, saying that it was the stone of obstacle that this was the cornerstone of all his excesses. Fr Rykewaert said that this was only too true, as experience had shown, and advised him to write before his retreat to his (one word illegible) to send them his accounts and thus to prove how properly he had acted. After an hour of discussion, I took him back to my Aunt where he ranted for the whole evening. The following day I found him improved but after having demonstrated in what danger he put Fr Rykewaert and myself I didn't want to be involved in his business until he had promised me to pay more attention. He is persevering, and makes me believe that once the reason for his illness has disappeared the effects will not reappear. I recommend you to be the prudent with this letter and ask you to believe me to be very respectfully

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

Please give my respects to my dear Father.

hg

P85

12th February 1811

Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Grammont

My very dear Father and Mother

I am sorry to tell you that excesses of drink have obliged us to put my Uncle the Regent in a place of safety again. It is only with much pain and forced by his lunacies that I have resolved to take this decision: because everything that one has so often warned the respectable Fr Rykewaert about has come to pass, and his only reward will be the displeasure of seeing that he has put himself to a lot of trouble uselessly. Fortunately he is a man who aims higher and does not work for rewards of this world. After having tried every conceivable means to stop my Uncle, my brother Jean with Mestdag, worried by my delay, arranged the business rapidly, so that when I began this morning to procure the necessary powers for myself I learned with joy that Moerlooze had already been warned and was looking for what he needed to take his man in hand. In brief, this afternoon he came to show me that his rooms were in order and he was now looking for a way to get the Regent home without a lot of uproar. You now see definitely that, with the best will in the world, my uncle is no longer to be trusted; he is certainly brain injured. Without this presumption it would be impossible to understand. He makes a type of amalgam of his piety and the excesses which are entirely incompatible with it. He promises much and produces little. He makes resolutions and then doesn't see that his conduct is in continual opposition to what he has resolved; in a word, there is nothing left except patience and to submit to Divine Providence this cross that it has pleased Him to send us. We must be convinced that He cherishes those that He punishes in this world in order to give them grace in the next. Let us benefit from this easy means (if we want to) of satisfying Divine justice. Please share my letter with my Uncle the banker Spitaels and my Aunt De Bakker, asking them however to keep his detention secret as far as possible.

I end in asking you, very dear Father and Mother, for your blessing and asking you to assure François, Rosalie, Charlotte, my cousin Lauwers etc. of my devotion. Charlotte will be very happy to know that Sister Beaudemont is in Gent

I call myself very respectfully

Your very devoted and submissive son

Gent 12th February 1811

C Van Crombrugghe

hg

P86

6th March 1811

To Mrs Van Crombrugghe, Grammont, Escaut

Gent, 6th March 1811

Very dear Mother

I hope that you arrived in Grammont safely and that you found the family in good health. I am sending you Moerlooze's bill, and telling you that it is not necessary to send the amount of the bill which my Uncle the Regent had spoken to you about. It was what he had lost gambling and one does not want anything to do with that. You see how urgent it is that you settle his affairs and put him forever in a safe place!

I think that everybody is well here. I ask you to present my respects to my dear Father, and to all the family. Time doesn't permit me to write at length, so I finish by asking you to believe that I am with the most respectful sentiments

Your very humble and very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

PS: I forgot to tell you that it is my brother Jean who made me send back this (one illegible word).

hg

P87

13th June 1811

Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Brewer in Grammont

Very dear Father and Mother

You are probably astonished by my silence. You won't be astonished for long when I tell you that since the ordination I haven't had one moment so to speak, to myself; the recitation of my Office takes up a considerable part of my free time and other works take up the remainder of the day. Around the Feast of Pentecost, particularly, I was overwhelmed so that it was impossible for me to present you my customary wishes. It was the time of the departure of His Eminence the Bishop and I had a lot of writing to do here concerning the business that called him away, and all had to be ready for his departure. You know what the object of his journey is; please God that this worthy Prelate will be returned to us, and that we may be allowed the peaceful exercise of our Holy Religion. I hope that God will have pity on His Church.

I will not say anything of the sad disaster that happened to your maid, you know everything and time does not permit me to enter into details. She is better; I think she has been taken to his its village.

You would give me great pleasure if you would tell me if I am to have Fr Vanhoorde's breviary... As for the business of the Regent, all will go well, but we need to wait until the court in Audenarde is well established. He escaped a few days ago, did many stupid things and was taken back by coach to his usual residence. This circumstance will not be unfavourable to us as I had a statement taken.

Please give my respects to my Aunt Huleu and Aunt De Bakker and assure François, Charlotte and our cousins De Baker and Lauwers of all my devotion, all my friendship.

I have the honour to call myself very respectfully

Gent, 13th June 1811

Your very humble and very obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

Subdeacon

If the breviary I mentioned is older than the year 1760 or 70 and in 8° it is not necessary to send it; if it is in 12° or smaller it needs top date from at least 1780; older would not help me much.

Tell me what I should do with my dirty linen. I can keep it a certain time. My brother Jean asks that François says where he left his wife's umbrella. He will be annoyed if it were lost.

hg

P88

8th October 1811

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Grammont

My very dear Father

The day of your feast is too dear and too precious for me not to benefit from it to renew my sentiments of gratitude towards you. It would be useless for me to make a list of my duties and to express you the desire that I have to fulfil them towards you; suffice it to say that I address my prayers to the Heavens through the intercession of the Saint whose name you carry in order to get all sorts of prosperities, and especially those that will increase the eternal happiness of the one that stands in the place of God for me on earth, he through whom I am who I am and to whom I owe everything. So, dear Father, may your life, so dear and so

necessary to your children, be much prolonged and your health become from day to day better for the sake of the family as well as for as the poor and the orphan and for your own satisfaction. In a word, may Heaven fill you with its most distinguished favours and give you a rich crop of virtues for the moment of the final harvest which will be the summit of all our desires. Such are the wishes that I express every day, and that I express especially on this day when everyone hastens to offer you his good wishes according to his own way. Please be persuaded of the sincerity of my sentiments, and believe in the respectful devotion of the one who has the honour of calling himself, very dear Father

Your very submissive and very obedient son

Gent, 8th October 1811

C Van Crombrugghe

Subdeacon

Please present my respects to my dear Mother.

hg

P89

18th November 1811

To Mrs Van Crombrugghe, Grammont

Very dear Mother

If I am deprived of the sweet pleasure of being amongst my brothers and sisters to present our bouquet together on the day of your feast, and to renew together the sentiments which you know we have for you, I will put myself close to you at least in spirit, and share in their demonstrations of the most sincere filial love, and ask you in particular to receive the good wishes that I make to you at this time which is so dear to our hearts. May the Heavens, very dear Mother, grant that our wishes are granted; that you can for a long time make your family's happiness, and that after this life you may enjoy the happiness which this famous Virgin, this noble Roman, made greater by her Christian virtues than by her high birth, and whom you have the happiness to have for a Patron, already enjoys without fear of ever seeing an end to her happiness. This is my one desire; may it please the Lord to grant these wishes which are so in tune with His eternal intentions! This is the most ardent vow of one who calls himself with as much sincerity as of respect:

My very dear Mother,

Your very humble and very obedient son

Gent, 18th November 1811

C Van Crombrugghe

Subdeacon

PS: I would be very happy to have back shortly the linen that you will receive by coach; several things that you will find there must be sent back to me immediately. I will make a separate list of them. I would be happy to learn how my Uncle the Regent is, and the Curate of Zegelsem whom someone told me is ill in Grammont.

I will need other trousers unless I am sent the velvet ones that I have at home.

hg

P90

23rd May 1812

To Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Grammont

Very dear Father

Your letter gave me the greatest pleasure. I will work with much more confidence under your just and equitable conditions and, if the enterprise is unsuccessful, I will comfort myself very easily because we will have done what we needed to and the very Holy Virgin will reward us in another manner. I see, however, that it will hardly be possible, it would not be even something to hope for, to get something if the Curate is not for us. I have therefore written to him to know if he is against us and what are his reasons? You can use this for your conduct. If you can attract him to our party don't discount him, for when all will be won, you might, if a favourable opportunity presents himself, be able to make feel him that it will depend on him, that the objection of private property is not very strong, that I spoke for a long time with important people about this, and it is true what I say etc.

Time does not permit me to tell you more. I ask you, dear Father, to give me your blessing and to very sincerely believe me

Your very devoted son  
Gent, 23rd May 1812.  
C Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P91  
6th November 1812 (date indicated later by a confrère)  
To Mr Van Crombrugghe, Brewer, Grammont, Escout

My very dear Father and Mother

You are probably waiting for my news, I would like to be able to give to you but I will not be able to it for some days. I am very grateful for the interest that you take in my affairs and I see clearly that it is the great love that you have for me that makes you want to see me assigned to your part of the world. I am not against the idea but I will let Providence decide; it is the only way to be calm about the future, and to work fruitfully in the vineyard of the Lord. I ask you therefore to curb your desires for fear that if the matter doesn't proceed according to those desires you will have much pain in submitting yourselves to the will of my Superiors. Do not believe, though, that it is certain that I will go elsewhere; on the contrary there is more probability for Grammont than for any other place. I think that Parish Priest is not unfavourable to your wishes, but he fears that he would not get me if he asked for me. I think the opposite, but I would not want him to do anything in my favour, it would give me no pleasure and therefore I ask for no-one's intervention. I want solely that God's will be done, and not men's will if it is contrary. Farewell, very dear Parents, please pass on what I have told you to my Aunt Huleu and believe me to be very respectfully

Your very humble and very devoted son  
C Van Crombrugghe  
Priest

PS: I think that in fifteen days I will know my destination, unless some Parish Priest asks for me and gets me before that time.

hg

P92  
4th October 1813  
Mr G Van Crombrugghe in Grammont  
October 1813

Very dear Father and Mother

Your letter gave me much pleasure. I am annoyed not to be able to tell you the time of my journey: Mr Goethals cannot find the time for an absence of several days and is obliged to make several journeys before the winter and therefore cannot agree to your request, and is forced to put back to next year what he had promised us for this month. As for me, I will delay my journey to Grammont for some time and will take the liberty of writing to you again beforehand, unless I foresee difficulties for the future, in which case I could get to you in a few days. I am over my worries and the problems which followed them. May the Heavens permit us peaceful possession of the Religion of our Fathers. She has never hurt Empires; it is only the parvenus who, in the name of peace and public good, excite unrest, worry consciences and consider those who are not of their opinion to be fanatics and troublers of public order!... Let us be faithful to the Barque of Peter; hell may shake it, but will never overturn or destroy it; this is the promise of its Divine Head. For the rest we will have the pleasure, I hope, of meeting and discussing this important business. In waiting for this precious moment, I have the honour to call myself

Your very devoted and submissive son  
CVC  
hg

P93  
7th December 1813  
Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Businessman in Grammont, Escout

My very dear Father and Mother

I am so happy with my little journey that I cannot stop myself from renewing my thanks for all your goodness and the marks of kindness that you showed me. I was sensitive, more so than usual, on my departure from home, of our separation; but I make with pleasure a sacrifice of my most legitimate affections. Today that the Good Lord is pleased to punish us all in order to be able to forgive later. I am much better more than before my journey, for it is true that a journey, in refreshing one's ideas, calms the mind and thus considerably influences all one's being. I hope that my dear Father's indisposition will not have any consequences. If he feels the need to rest, from time to time, the fibres and muscles that too monotonous and too lengthy work has tired, I will hope more often enjoy seeing him in Mouscron.

I had the consolation of seeing several of my old friends in Gent, and their company increased my enjoyment of my little journey out of this region. They confirmed in me the comforting and pleasant hope that our troubles will not last long.

I received from my friend's Father 200 florins for this term's school fees and 25 francs for the washing of his linen for six months. I did not have the least difficulty in getting this sum, and indeed there was no reason to think that I might. If I am paid at the end of the month the 275 francs that I am promised, my affairs will be in good order and I will be able to proceed without being a burden on anyone.

Farewell, very dear Parents; receive, I beg you the assurance of my filial submission and the sincere respect with which I call myself

Your very devoted son

7th December 1813

C Van Crombrughe

My respects, please, to my Aunt Huleu and my regards to my dear sisters Rosalie, Charlotte and Cecile; also to François and his wife. The piece of cloth that I sent you cost me at least 32 florins the piece.

hg

P94

29th December 1813

Mr Van Crombrughe Senior in Grammont, Escout

My very dear Father and Mother

I am happy to see the New Year arrive because it gives me the opportunity of renewing the sentiments that I hold towards you and the prayers that I offer for your happiness. So it is less to conform to a laudable usage and more to follow the impulse of my heart that I am writing to you. May your years be as numerous before the Lord as are goodnesses that you have shown me! I won't enlarge on this to give you a longer explanation of the prayers that I offer for you; I think I have said enough in this one sentence and I will be content with telling you again that I never let a day go by without commending you to the Lamb without Stain whom I offer to God the Father every day of the year. Today I will only, dear Parents, express to you the sentiments by which I am always penetrated. I would be very happy if the Good Lord were to condescends to hear me.

I learned of the loss that we suffered in our good cousin Vandenhende. I am mistaken, this is not a loss for him or for us; his generous constancy in defending, at the price of his life, the sacred Laws of the Church, has earned for him an ineffable happiness and has procured for us a powerful protector for all the family close to our God. This death, precious before God, should comfort us and make us rejoice and should afflict us: *pro Dei lege certavit usque ad mortem et a verbis impiorum non timuit; fundatus enim erat supra firmam petram*. He fought to the death for God's Law, and, based on firm rock, he did not dread the word of the impious. See the reward that the Lord promised him: *Vos qui reliquistis omnia et secuti estis me, centuplum accipietis and vitam aeternam possidebitis*. You who have abandoned everything and followed me, you will receive a hundredfold and you will possess eternal life.

I dare to hope that the Good Lord, appeased by the prayers and sacrifices of these brave confessors, will be touched, and will give men His ancient mercies; let us join ourselves to them and by dint of good works make violence to the Heavens that we will be able to disarm His just anger and enjoy a double peace in the Church and in the State. May the ending year be the last of the unhappy years and the one that will begin to make us forget all our pains, and make us entirely submissive to the Laws of God and reason! Accept the good wishes that I form for you and please believe me to be sincere.

I have the honour to be with respect

29th December 1813

Your very devoted and submissive son

C Van Crombrugghe

Please give my compliments of the season to my dear Sisters Rosalie, Charlotte and Cecile, and to François and his Wife. I cannot adequately commend to my sisters and also to my brothers charity towards the poor in these unhappy times; God will have, I believe, consideration and particular care for those who rescue, for love of Him, the suffering poor. It seems to me it is part of the economy of His paternal Providence to give more to those who make better use of goods of the earth; because why do these goods exist? For what end did God create them? So that men could live and glorify Him in using these goods.  
hg

P95

22nd January 1815

Mr Van Crombrugghe in Grammont

My very dear Father and Mother

I would have loved to have seen you here if you had been able to benefit from the opportunity that you had, but since you decided to defer your journey I hope that you will compensate me for this deprivation by a longer stay the next time.

I have the honour of sending you 400 francs 220 frs. 10.

I paid in Malines to your account 102 frs. 18.4

I paid to my Aunt Spitaels 13 frs. 16.7

-----  
116.13.11

My account with you stands at 290 frs. 15

116.13.11

-----  
174.1.1

I therefore have 46.9.11 out of which please François, and as I have just remembered that sum is insufficient, I am adding 100 francs whose surplus will serve to pay for the butter you buy me.

As I have no time to write at length I ask you to believe that I am

Your thankful son

Alost, 22nd January 1815.

C Van Crombrugghe

Priest, Superior of the College

hg

P96

29th April 1816

Mr Van Crombrugghe Senior in Grammont

My very dear Parents

I am very appreciative of the signs of affection that you give me; I would have felt our separation more if I did not have the hope of seeing you here before the end of the holidays. I am even happier that some of my teachers will see you again before the beginning of classes. If someone could come with them back here, I would be very happy. Please do not delay them from being here for their classes next Friday; I know how you will lavish them with hospitality, but do not let this be to the detriment of the good order of the College.

While waiting to see you again I call myself gladly

Your very humble and submissive son

29th April 1816

C Van Crombrugghe

I forgot to say that I received my dear Father's letter and that I will do as he asks.

hg

P97

15th July 1816

Mrs Van Crombrugghe, Grammont

My dear Parents

I received for you a box of lace and 364 francs for which I gave a receipt; I will send you these things on the coach next Thursday unless I find another opportunity.

It is a pity that my business in Grammont did not go as quickly as I would have wished. God's will be done in everything! In any case the matter is not desperate. We will talk about it during the holidays. I would be happy to know how Jean's enterprise is going.

Farewell, dear Parents, I am very sincerely

Your very humble and obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe

Alost, 15th July 1816

hg

P98

26th March 1817

Mr Van Crombrugghe, Dealer in Lace, in Grammont

My very dear Parents

It is really too long since I wrote to you; although I was able to present you with my compliments through the good offices of my two brothers from Grammont, I am going to speak to you briefly by letter until I can do so face to face during the holidays. I first thank you for the help that you gave my Aunt Spitaels; I assure you that your gift was very welcome. I will also ask to want to pay for this term at our cousin's boarding School in Hunneghem; I will repay the money at Easter with great gratitude. I am happy to see that I will shortly have a few free days and I will be able to come and enjoy your company and take a rest in the family home. Although the six months of the school year appeared very short this year, I confess nevertheless that a little recreation will be useful and pleasant. I plan therefore, if it is pleasing to God, to come to you on the Wednesday of Easter in order to have the longest stay possible. While waiting for this happy moment I wish you every blessing for the end of Lent and for the august Feast of the Resurrection. Please accept, dear Parents, the respectful and sincere sentiments of

Your very devoted and submissive son

Alost, 26th March 1817

C Van Crombrugghe, Priest and Director of the College

My regards, I pray you, to Rosalie, Charlotte and to my brothers. Please also be the messenger of my good wishes to my Aunt Huleu.

hg

P99

30th May 1817

Mr Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont

Very dear Parents

I am sending you via my commissionnaire the money of your which I had as follows::

Your balance fr 939,25 I left at home 100 frs

You paid 90,70 paid pr your account 55 to M Spitaels

5 double Louis 236

155

1265,95 for the school 89,5

155

Left for you therefore 1110,95 and what remains of the 1200 francs will be for the school.

89,05

Consignment 1250,00

The bearer of my letter is charged to tell you what time doesn't permit me to write to you. I limit myself therefore to assuring you that I am very sincerely

Your very devoted son

30th May 1817

C Van Crombrugghe, Priest  
hg

P100  
17th November 1817  
Mr G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont

My very dear Father

The interest that you are taking in the small establishment that God has given me the grace to found for poor boys would seem to allow me to ask you, in my absence, to arrange the work that I am obliged to have done at the Convent of the Carmelites to make it clean for the school that I want to establish there. This is not, I confess, a glamorous job in the eyes of the world, but it is none the less precious to the eyes of faith: it will give more joy at the moment when the illusions of the earth vanish, than anything which excites the desires of earthly ambition; but I know your disposition in this respect and it would be superfluous of me to wax lyrical about the utility and the excellence of a work which is solely for indigent youth and God's glory. I rely therefore on your goodwill to help my plans and on your knowledge of these sorts of works; you know what I have in mind. Mr Godefroy and Mr Bridart will assist you in everything that they can. They will tell you my rights and my resources. I will only ask you to begin as soon as possible so that all will be ready to receive the children and their good masters in the new year.

Accept, I beg you, the sincere expression of the respect and the filial piety with which I have the honour to be, very dear Father,

Your very devoted and submissive son

Alost, 17th November 1817.

C G Van Crombrugghe, Priest

Please make sure that my dear Mother finds here the assurance of my respectful love and the most tender devotion.

hg

P101  
31st December 1817  
Mr G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont

My very dear Parents

The excellent custom which permits me once a year to present you with an expression of the sentiments which always animate me is upon us once more! I hasten, therefore, to offer you the homage of prayers that I offer for your happiness: I pray God that He will condescend to grant you His continued goodness; may you taste the sweetness of good health and the good use that you will make of it the employ of His Divine Providence for the happiness of your children and the consolation of those many poor wretches that you seek to relieve! May you especially enjoy the great consolation of finding in your children sentiments of equity, of application to their duties and particularly to the Religion that you instilled in them and whom age makes more precious to you than ever! I hope on our part that we will not deprive you of the efforts that we owe you for your happiness: it is a sacred debt that we will try to repay and if there is one among us who doesn't feel this gentle duty, may the prayers of his brothers and sisters attract on him God's merciful regard in order to obtain his return thus to these good principles; by this happy miracle may he compensate you for the pains that you had felt up to that moment. Such is, dear Parents, the most ardent prayer that I offer on this day particularly. May the Lord grant it and grant to all of us that we may constantly advance in the love of our respective duties and arrive at that spotless and endless happiness which cannot be in this world.

Accept again the expression my tender and respectful devotion with which I have the honour to be, very dear Father and Mother,

Your all devoted and submissive son

Alost 31st December 1817.

C G Van Crombrugghe

Please give my best wishes to my Aunt Huleu and to Rosalie

hg

P102

18th June 1818  
Mrs G Van Crombrugghe, in Grammont

Very dear Parents

The details that you gave about the business Sophie V.C. were very pleasant. I am very happy that she can spend a few more months in such good company.

Mr. Praces would have liked to render you the service that you hoped for, but he does not know enough German to decipher writings where the rules of the language have been disregarded. Please, therefore, excuse him and to receive our regrets that we cannot be of use to you in this matter. As for your letters, he will translate them gladly into German any time that you require.

My Father will be, maybe, astonished by the obvious casualness with which I am answering him about the marble; this is not casualness, but rather my burden of work is the reason of my delay in giving him the information that he wants.

You could, dear Mother, come to Alost with my Aunt De Scheppere whom I know to be still in to Grammont. Charlotte could deal with her business and my Aunt the Beguine could also come with you. You could make the journey in one day in this season, and thus your absence would not be felt. Try to arrange it and as many of you come as possible.

Farewell, dear Parents, please present my respects to my Aunt De Scheppere and believe me  
Your most devoted son

Alost, 26th June 1818  
C G Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P103

15th February 1819  
Mr G Van Crombrugghe, Lace Distributor, Grammont

Very dear Father and Mother

I have been informed of the safe return of my Father and the good state of your health.

I am very happy that my Father wants to take on my Aunt Huleu's affairs with me. I am sending him the necessary proxy to this effect.

Henry is still here, he will leave Thursday; he is a high spirited child, but one whose education, both moral and physical, will be very difficult

I have the honour to be your very devoted and submissive son

15th February 1819  
C G Van Crombrugghe, Priest  
hg

P104

25th December 1819  
Mr G Van Crombrugghe-Spitaels, Businessman in Grammont

Very dear Father and Mother

Mr Goethals of Courtray asked me to ask you to receive the enclosed cheque: please have the goodness to present it on receipt. If it is credited to you, a week after clearance it will be drawn on without you being warned. If on the contrary it is not credited you should complain and deal with it with Mrs Vermylen, near the Boatmen's chapel, in Antwerp.

Miss Brand seemed happy with her journey and is not entirely without hope for the school in Grammont.

I have the honour to be  
Your very humble servant  
25th December 1819  
C G Van Crombrugghe  
hg

P105

7th August 1820  
Mrs Van Crombrugghe-Spitaels, Grammont

Dear Mother

I have just learned that Theresa, one of your schoolmistresses, is very sick. I would be very happy to know what she has and to what extent we should be concerned for the outcome. I ask you therefore to have the goodness to write to me by return post to give me the details I ask for.

While waiting for your news I pray you and my dear Father to accept the respectful sentiments with which I have the honour to be,

Your very devoted son

Alost, 7th August 1820

C G Van Crombrugghe

Our distribution of prizes will take place on the 22nd of this month.

hg

P106

30th January 1825 (date indicated later by a confrère)

Mr Van Crombrugghe-Spitaels in Grammont

Very dear Father and Mother

I am benefiting from the opportunity presented by Charles Spitaels to write you a few words. I hope to learn on his return that you continue to be well, that Rosalie is getting stronger and stronger and that François and all his numerous family are in good health. For myself I am healthy.

I am sending you four hundred francs ex gratia, not knowing the state of my account at home. Please accept the expression of my respectful and sincere devotion

Your devoted and submissive son

C G Van Crombrugghe

hg

P107

No date

No address

Very dear Father and Mother

This morning I went to Bishop's House where I had the happiness of being introduced to His Eminence and his Vicar General (the French one) and another Clergyman who I took to be Fr Martens. His Eminence told me that all things considered he would prefer that I returned to Mondidier because, he said, you will learn better French there than here and I wish you to apply yourself to it greatly, not only to be able to speak it and to write it, but even to be able to preach in this language, if God gives you the grace to persevere. But I add, he said, that you will still have to come to me if I ask you. I answered him that I would always consider myself happy to be able to be at his command. I asked him then what I should do if I immediately drew a low number. He explained that in this case someone should write to him from Grammont so that he could write to the Ministry of Religion if necessary. First he told me to come to him, but then that it was not necessary. For myself, my dear Parents, I believe that it would be better for you to send my letter to Matante's; they will be able to forward it via my cousin Bernard and you will then know what you will have to do pending the Minister's answer. You can remain calm; if you write to me when you hear that the lottery is to be drawn I be able, maybe, to help you by writing myself to His Eminence. I offered my services there and then to His Eminence; he asked me who my superior was, and I told him, and he gave me a letter for him. Then he gave me a small exhortation advising me to benefit from the lessons of our masters in both virtue and knowledge since it is all in God's order. So, dear Parents, not having anything to tell you that my brother Jean cannot easily tell you, I embrace you cordially and recommend myself to your prayers.

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe