

***NOTES CONCERNING
THE INSTITUTE OF JOSEPHITES
BY ME,
GUILLAUME VAN DEN BOSSCHE,
SUPERIOR.***

1814-1850

1814

On the 6th. August 1814 Monseigneur De Broglie, Bishop of Ghent, named Father Constantin Van Crombrugge to the curacy of Heusden, near Ghent. The Father's delicate health benefited from the fresh and pure air of the countryside. The new Curate saw me often, showed great interest in me, and spoke with me often about devotion to the Sacred Heart and other pious matters.

1815

The next year, on the 8th. September, the young Curate, on being summoned to the Bishop's Palace, learned of his appointment as Superior of the College of Alost.

The trust I had in him made me wish to accompany him to his new residence, and he readily agreed.

Classes at the College commenced at the beginning of October 1815. I followed the classes in the junior section. For a year and a half I studied Latin, and, for a year, French. The difficult times in which we lived, and my lack of aptitude for studies - given my age of almost thirty - made Fr Superior change his mind concerning my future. He was fully in accord with my own wish, that is to make myself capable, at a later date, of teaching at primary level or giving catechism classes to poor children.

1816

In 1816, the Superior was feeling ever more strongly the need for a good education for the young people of his College. He also wanted poor children to be able to share in this joy, especially since he saw this class of outcasts completely ignorant of Christian Doctrine and exposed by conscription to the danger of losing completely their Religion and morals. That is why he often sought ways of helping them. He spoke to me often on this matter, and quite soon we came to the point where we wished to found a congregation of religious called to instruct poor children in the knowledge of the good God. The goal of this foundation would be, following the example of Christ, to show His heavenly Father to the young and especially to the young poor, so that they would not lose their souls because of the ignorance of their parents. Children asked their parents for spiritual bread in vain, and it was not broken for them.

1817

Our Reverend Founder took as the Patron of the Institute St Joseph, foster father of Jesus, so that the religious of the congregation, as foster fathers of the young members of Christ would model their lives on that of the glorious patriarch. He gave us some principles of religious life which were the cornerstones of the rule which we later received.

Our first Community was started on the 12th. May 1817 by two religious: myself, Guillaume Van den Bossche¹, and Joseph Verkinder², in a house in the Rue des Pierres (Steenstraat) called Jerusalem.

At that time a great famine was raging, and the poor were suffering particularly from it. The earth's fruits had been damaged by the wet weather of 1816. To dissuade the children from begging, and to give them a taste for work, we taught them weaving and sewing. The children were given a meal, which we had ourselves received from the well-off, by the Community. I must mention here in particular the venerable mother of our Founder, who spared no effort to help us. Mr François Spitaels, also very dedicated to our work, provided a uniform - a long coat - for our young people so that they could be presentable at worship and on walks. They were taught Christian Doctrine on weekday evenings and in the afternoon on Sundays and Feastdays. The other young people of the town could follow these lessons for free, but they were above all for the poor children. The children we cared for would arrive at five o'clock in the morning in order to line up under the direction of the religious to go to the first Mass of the day at St. Barthélemy³. The inhabitants of the town were very edified by these proceedings.

On the 2nd. November, Father Bredau and Mr Godefroid, a lawyer, rented on the Founder's behalf a section of the Carmelite convent so that we could establish our school there.

We took possession of the buildings on the 1st December. At that moment the Institute had four religious⁴.

¹Mr. Ignace, Guillaume Van den Bossche, b. Ghent 24-05-1784, e. 01-05-1817, d. Geraardsbergen 14-06-1851.

²This must be Br. François, Albert Verkinder, b. Geluwe 22-12-1781, e. 01-05-1817, d. Rooborst 04-10-1847.

³The Parish Church of Grammont.

⁴Ignace, François, A.N. Other who is not recorded in the necrology, and possibly Mr. Bernard, Adrien Liottier, b. Geraardsbergen 22-5-1798, e. 25-12-1817, d. Melle 16-05-1874.

I must, for the greater glory of God, mention here the impression that our Josephite religious made on the minds of the people of Grammont. After having watched us, and even spied on us, for some months, they ended up by giving us marks of esteem; many prejudices against religious disappeared and, with the exception of some functionaries of the heretical Dutch government, the Josephites were respected and loved by the whole town. Many people insisted that the humble and devoted lives and the good reputation of the members of the new Institute contributed to the renewal of a religious spirit among the Grammontois, and that our Confreres were a tool in the hands of Providence to increase the frequentation of the Sacraments in the town. All glory and honour to God!

1818

At the beginning of 1818 our Founder instructed two of our Religious to go to Alost to set up a weaving school and to teach Christian Doctrine.

The Town Council of Alost had asked Father Van Crombrugge to look after the running of the school. He made up a set of rules which the Dean, Father Dert, came and read to the children. The improvement in behaviour was so marked among the young people that the town dignitaries and other distinguished people spoke of it with admiration.

That same year a contagious disease broke out in Alost because of the great poverty which was prevalent, and soon one of our Religious was struck down⁵ by the terrible illness. In his place, the Founder accepted a postulant who, at the beginning dealt very well with the pupils but soon had to be sent away because of his scandalous behaviour. Thus, as Superior at Grammont, I was obliged to spend two or three days each week in Alost attending to the running of the school. The rest of the week I had to see to the running of our Convent in Grammont. Generally I made the journey on foot; we were obliged to live very parsimoniously. Sometimes even our revered Founder made the long journey from Alost to Grammont with me.

The number of pupils and our work load at Grammont increased so much that we were forced to give up the running of the school in Alost, which we gave over to a very pious man by the name of Daniel Blys. He had an extraordinary talent for the teaching of religion. This school was later changed into an boys' orphanage; a rich and charitable person donated a considerable sum to purchase the building and to guarantee a living for the Priest who was director of the town's orphanage. Thus it was that our Alost enterprise was blessed by the charitable establishment which developed from it. In the month of February 1818 one of the town's notables, Mr Germanus, asked the poor children of our school to attend the funeral of his daughter and from that time on they went to all the funerals of the notables of Grammont. The Religious accompanied the family of the deceased and so began the custom in the town of accompanying the bodies of the dead. The Religious and the pupils received a payment on this occasion.

That same year, in April, an agreement was concluded between the town of Grammont and the Reverend Founder. Children from the children's' homes were confided to our care. The authorities wanted to spare these young people the pain of being placed with families who might not always give a good example. For a small payment, we were to give to these unfortunates a good education, training in a trade, and the correct level of knowledge for their class. To comply with this agreement the Founder had a dormitory set up out of his own funds. Sadly the arrangements met with difficulties, and the arrival of the children was halted by the Poor Officers who said they were unable to pay us. In fact they were acting out of spite since they had not been consulted when the agreement was signed. That same year, in the month of May, we received our Rule from our revered Founder. It was at about this time that two novices dared to criticise the Rule in public. Our Founder, having carefully considered the matter, sent away the most guilty of them in order to avoid such a bad example in the future.

⁵This does not mean that he died; at the silver jubilee celebrations referred to later Ignace notes that non member of the Institute died in the first twenty five years.

In May 1818 Father Van Crombrugge purchased the Convent, the garden, the land in front of the Church and the lake out as far as the fields. At the same time he acquired an organ, a chalice, a monstrance and a magnificent ciborium, all of which he gave us for the celebration of divine worship in our Church.

The next month, June, he bought two-thirds of the fields as well as a wood belonging to the former Carmelites. Around that time I was obliged to make more than one journey in the company of our beloved father and Founder.

One of the Carmelites did not sell the portion of the Convent that he owned; unfortunately he had left it to a lay person, Mr Van Damme. This caused us many difficulties at a later date.

1819

At the beginning of the year 1819 the town administration made a second agreement with us: it agreed to pay our school one thousand francs a year, but this arrangement was no more adhered to than the first.

Our Founder allowed charitable persons to place young people with us for ten francs a month. For this they received food and clothing, learned a trade and received an elementary education. In spite of the expense that the upkeep of our Community caused our revered Founder, he placed in the school at his own expense about twenty children, with the agreement of their parents that they would remain with us until the age of eighteen. At this time we had about thirty boarding apprentices.

To encourage the poor children of the town to come to school daily as well as to the Sunday school, our Founder established a prize distribution consisting of clothing and books; this too was at his own expense.

The first distribution of prizes was on the 18th. April 1819 and cost 60 florins. The Dean, Father Leuvrau, presided at the solemnity, surrounded by all the Priests and notables of the town. It was at this moment that Father Van Crombrugge asked the Dean to institute the confraternity of St Joseph in our Church; the Reverend Father agreed with pleasure. Since that day it has never ceased to flourish. To be a member, one paid twelve centimes a year. The goal of this pious association was to obtain the protection of St Joseph for our fatherland and to provide a funeral for the poor when they died. At that time, it must be remembered, many people were buried with a simple absolution. Furthermore, the second Wednesday of each month a Mass was sung for the living members of the confraternity. The poor were very happy with this institution because they were thereby assured of a solemn Requiem Mass after their death

At the end of September 1810 we had the joy of our first annual retreat, given by the Founder. The truths which were preached there, and the fruits which were produced by it, awoke our zeal to conform ourselves more and more with the goal of our Institute and to put up joyfully with even greater difficulties than those which we had already experienced.

The zeal which inspired Father Van Crombrugge towards the education of the young, and especially for the instruction of those destined for the Priesthood - something so important for the conservation of the Faith and righteous conduct - led him to establish a second college, known as the little college, in Alost in 1819. The boarders were for the most part from the middle class; only those were accepted who showed the certain signs of a Priestly vocation. They followed the classes at the original college, known as the big college, and were directed appropriately for the dignity of their calling. Soon there were one hundred and twenty of them. Many zealous and distinguished Priests were the products of this establishment. One of our Religious was named as supervisor of these students.

1820

In 1820 our Founder bought and gave to us a Church clock which had come from the English Jesuit Church in Ghent. This clock sounded the hours, half hours and quarter hours. It contained three bells. The first was hung in the tower of our Church and is the smallest of our set; the second was placed on the roof of the pupils' study; and the third was added to the carillon of the Parish Church. The same year, Mr Van Wymelbeke⁶, our Founder's brother-in-law, along with several members of his family, erected the crucifix at the top of the mountain. It was a replacement for the cross which had been destroyed during the French Revolution and which had been there for centuries. This cross is also the origin of the coat of arms of the town of Grammont. It was with enormous joy that the Grammontois saw their town dominated by the sacred sign of the Saviour.

It is also to this same Mr Van Wymelbeke that we owe the processional stations⁷ for the Blessed Sacrament. For years there had only been one, in the Rue des Minimes (Rue du Collège) and soon we had five or six in

⁶Principal of College Melle prior to the Josephites.

⁷Temporary altars.

different parts of the town. We ourselves, with the financial help of our neighbours, had one in the Rue des Carmes. Later on we had a finer one made by Mr François Liottier⁸ for two hundred francs. The clergy and the people were equally happy about it. At the end of July 1820, we introduced into our classrooms the methods of simultaneous instruction. I went to Brussels with the founder in order to see this method in action with the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Remarks on the origins of the girls' Sunday School in Grammont.

Our Founder, with the co-operation of his mother, had founded a girls' workshop in the Convent of the Minimes (college). At the same time he hoped to institute a Sunday School there. To this effect, at the beginning of 1820 he asked the Sisters of Mary and Joseph, who were already running the workshop, to start a Sunday School with their children at the Minimes' Convent. Mrs Van Crombrugghe, directress of the workshop, seeing that the number of girls coming to the Sunday School was steadily increasing, asked a number of young ladies to help the sisters with the instruction of the girls. This was done with the approval of the Dean who was extremely happy with this new undertaking. At the invitation of our Founder's revered mother, Father Vander Haegen (the Curate) gave catechism classes. All these classes were given in the Minimes' Church. With the goal of encouraging more girls to come to the classes, our Founder established a further prize distribution, out of his won pocket. The Curate took the Sunday School to his heart and after the first year more than three hundred prizes were distributed. The ceremony was preceded by a speech by Mr Joseph de Smet⁹, a teacher from the college at Alost, and on leaving the hall everyone acclaimed with one voice all the good that our Founder had done in establishing this school.

1821

At the beginning of 1821 there was such a major flood in Grammont that we were obliged to construct a dike at the door of our Church; had that not been done the water would have come right up to the High Altar, as had been the case in the time of the Carmelites. We were forced to go to town by boat to buy food for the pupils and for the Community.

Mr Van Wymelbeke left the town in the summer of 1821 in order to direct the famous boarding school at Melle to the advantage of many young people of the best families of the land. The Institute, and I in particular, owe an enormous amount to this distinguished Gentleman.

The same year we had the great joy of a retreat given by the Jesuit Father Van Kerkhove. It was given in the form of a mission, because the pupils and some of our best friends from the town took part. The exercises were undertaken behind locked doors for fear of the Dutch government who had forbidden the giving of retreats and missions. The Reverend Father's sermons had an extraordinary effect on those present and lent themselves to the development of religious fervour. However, certain bad Catholics denounced us to the Governor, the Count de Lens; he made some comments to our Reverend Founder, as if we had committed some enormous crime against the orders of the heretic King William, but we paid little attention to these complaints.

In May 1821 the town council warned me, on behalf of the government, to get teachers' certificates, but our Founder saw fit not to present us for the examination.

At the end of the same year, two members of the town council arrived at our school to examine the pupils' books. They took away two of them: a small book called "For use at St. Joseph's School" and the "history of the Church" by Mr Gevaert, teacher at the college of Alost.

In June 1821 the Grammont Commissioner of Police, acting for Governor de Lens, arrived with the (governmental) order to lock the classrooms to prevent day pupils from coming to our school. Furthermore, they ordered the Mayor to ensure that our classes were not given in other houses in the town. From that moment on we had to limit ourselves to teaching the boarders only. The Commissioner had also received instructions to seize all the copies of the "History of the Church"; he took nine of them.

In August 1821, our Reverend Founder had the honour of dining with the Governor of Ghent and, talking of our Grammont community, said to him amongst other things that he had very much at heart the instruction of poor children in his native town and that he was surprised to see this teaching suppressed by order of His Excellency. The Governor, on hearing this, seemed very annoyed and told Father Van Crombrugghe to send him a report on the need for this education. After the Founder had carefully considered the matter with me, we sent a long report to Ghent. This had the desired effect since, in October, the Mayor received the order to re-open our school. Classes were resumed on a Sunday in November with a Solemn Mass

⁸Possibly a relative of Mr Bernard?

⁹Maybe a Priest?

celebrated by the Founder assisted by two teachers from the college of Alost. Many people were present, as happy as ourselves to see our school re-instated, and without diplomas at that.

1822

In January 1822 the Governor of Flanders asked our Reverend Father to have our Institute approved by the government. We sought advice from Bishop's House who approved this step and Father Bousen, the Bishop's secretary, drafted some rules which were added to a petition and sent to the government in order to gain Royal approbation and civil status for our dear Institute.

Our petition having been received, the local administration were asked about our Congregation. The response was that no-one knew anything about such an Institute, although probably they know very well that it was our establishment that was being referred to. The Governor replied to them that he was very surprised to find that they knew nothing of an Institute which was doing so much good in the town.

Note: The Governor was the Count de Lens, a Catholic and a Fleming but not a very clever man and very eager to please the King.

When the second letter from the Governor was received, I was called to the Town Hall where I asked the following questions: What is the aim of your Institute? What is the name of your Superior General? Do the Religious have any means of supporting themselves? Is it true that you have a second school at Alost? Do the members of the Institute take vows? How many boarders are there? How many pupils are accepted free?

I replied: The goal of our Institute is to give a good education to young people, and especially the poor. Our Superior is Father Van Crombrughe, Principal of the Collège d'Alost and we rely on gifts and help from him. I started a school at Alost; the town council had allotted me a budget of 600 francs a year, but, in order to give myself completely to the Institute in Grammont I gave over that school to someone else. As for the Josephites, they take the simple vows which are approved by the government. At the moment we have forty boarders of whom seventeen have free places; some others pay between ten and fifteen francs a month. For that sum they receive clothing, food, instruction, and an apprenticeship to a trade. Finally, more than two hundred young day pupils come to class for one hour a day and come to Sunday School as well.

The members of the Town Council gave their reply to the Governor based on their opinions and they added that the Religious were begging in the town. Hearing this, I went immediately to the Town Hall to protest to the Council and to say that this "begging" had simply been a collection for the upkeep of the Church lighting. This really had nothing to do with our establishment and, to get rid of the very idea that our Religious might be financially dependent on the town no further similar collections would be taken.

In June 1822 the Governor, the Count de Lens, arrived in Grammont, and a member of the Council accused the Parish Priest of obstinacy in the matter of rescinding the oath to the constitution. He said that in spite of the permission given by the Bishop to revoke the oath in Confession, Father De Craeker had insisted on it in the presence of two witnesses and, so he said, the Josephites functioned as witnesses. All this was said to make life difficult for the Parish Priest and for our Community as it was all completely untrue.

The fifth prize distribution took place on the 25th. October 1822 and cost about 260 francs. The public were not invited as we did not have a government teaching diploma: we didn't care much about the examination.

That same year the Rule of our Institute was presented to His Majesty the King of the Netherlands for approval; this took place at the request, and on the advice of, Bishop's House.

In November 1822 the Founder and I went to Brussels to see Minister Goubau, to enquire about approval for our Institute. We were initially received by his secretary, Mr Lioti who, on learning of the goal of our Congregation said that he had no doubt that we would get approval. Then we had an audience with the Minister who asked about the number of Religious, our means of subsistence and about any property we owned. He seemed very satisfied with what he heard and assured us that the Institute would soon be approved. He added that he was very flattered to meet Father Van Crombrughe, Principal of the famous Collège d'Alost.

1823

On the 22nd. June 1823 we received from the Governor, through the local Council, an order not to retain any children who had not been vaccinated. We were threatened with a large fine and several days in prison, so we complied with the order to the best of our ability.

In June 1823, on the Third Sunday after Pentecost, the professed Religious donned the Religious habit for the first time. Previously we had worn what we wore in Church and the teachers wore it to class. The townspeople were very edified to see the Religious habit re-appear in the streets.

In 1823 we had great difficulties with a certain Buyscher, from Ninove, and Philippe Servais, of Grammont, because of a certain Father Charles, a long dead Carmelite of Grammont; they laid a claim to his inheritance. The Reverend Founder, who had bought two thirds of the property with the consent of Bishop's House and with the Pope's authorisation, in order to keep the property in religious hands, strongly rejected the claim. The two claimants initiated a civil suit against us which we lost in Audenaarde to start with, and we were held liable for the costs. We went to appeal in Brussels and the result of that case will be seen later.

King William arrived in Grammont on the 26th. June 1823. The Community and the pupils were invited by the local Council to attend His Majesty's reception. We accepted the invitation and went to the market in front of the Town Hall. The children were preceded by a wooden banner, in the form of a heart, on which was written: St Joseph's School.

This inscription seemed to please the King since on leaving, as he came out of the Town Hall, he made for the Josephites, asking them how many children they had in their care. One of our Confreres took advantage of the moment to remind His Majesty that we had presented the statutes of our Congregation to the government and had asked for approval. The King replied: "I will remember that." The people spoke with amazement and admiration about our conversation with the King

The sixth prize distribution was held, for the first time, in our Church on the 29th. September 1823 with great solemnity. The Dean, Father Van Dorselaer (who had succeeded Father Levrau), Father de Craecker (parish Priest of Grammont) and other distinguished people were present. The public learned with satisfaction that we were once again allowed to celebrate this occasion freely and with all possible pomp and circumstance. More than three hundred children received prizes according to their merits. Almost all the prizes were bought in town and the cost was three hundred francs. Far from being a burden to our fellow citizens, we were giving them another godsend.

On the 1st. October 1823 I walked to Ghent, myself as Superior with another Josephite, in order to open a school in St Peter's Parish. This was at the request of the Parish Priest and the Provost of the Parish of Schreiboorn and with the consent of the Reverend Founder and the Vicar General¹⁰, Father Goethals. Classes began with twenty-six children who came in the morning for breakfast and meditation; in the evening they had lessons and stayed to eat supper. The beginnings of this enterprise gave great satisfaction to the Parish Priest and the Provost as well as the directors, and we were particularly admired for our success with the simultaneous method¹¹.

1824

On the 26th. February 1824 our Founder received a letter from Bishop's House telling him that our name did not appear on the list of Religious Orders of the Diocese sent by the Governor. Our Father Founder went to Brussels with me to see Minister Goubau, who told us to tell Bishop's House immediately to add our Congregation to the Religious Orders residing in the Diocese. Whilst we were in the capital we went to see the Governor of Brabant, Mr de Bus, to ask him about the matter. As soon as he heard the name of Father Van Crombrugge he received us with great affability. After the Governor had heard about our problem, he advised us to do what the Minister had told us and promised to support our case with Mr Goubau. He invited us to dine with him, and we accepted out of politeness. At Bishop's House they were amazed and very happy to learn that, in spite of Governor de Lens, we had succeeded in getting ourselves put on the list of Congregations of the Diocese.

The Religious who had been sent to Ghent ran the school in St Peter's Parish for a while, but developed a spirit of insubordination against their Superior and, in spite of several warnings, persisted in their waywardness. The Founder was obliged to dispense them from their vows. Subsequently they made an arrangement with the directors of the school and continued to run it independently of the Institute. The lesson to be learned from that is that prudence is required when sending Religious to found a new house. God punished their disobedience and ceased to bless the school; shortly it ceased to exist and the two wretches went out to wander the world, bitterly regretting having abandoned their religious vocation.

On the 15th. May 1854 we received, just like all the other Communities in the country, an order from the government whereby we were to account annually for income from property rent, gifts received by the Community, donations and charity, as well as our expenses for food, clothing, furniture, repairs and running expenses for the house and the land. They were even going to demand to know our Chapel expenses and

¹⁰Of the Diocese

¹¹As per the Christian Brothers.

the cost of funerals for the Religious. Our Founder, on reading this, was most perplexed and very concerned about the consequences of submitting our Community accounts. Although Bishop's House said we could submit them, our Founder thought it wiser to write a letter to the government in which he pointed out that we were not yet recognised by the King as a Congregation, that through our work and other means we just managed to survive and that we wished to continue in this manner, without becoming a financial burden to the public and that we ourselves were providing subsistence for poor children. This letter had a good effect since from that moment on we heard no more on the subject.

On the 10th. June 1824 one of our Religious successfully passed the Governmental exam and obtained a teachers' certificate. He passed the exam before the Governor, wearing the Religious habit, at the second attempt. The diploma was valid for two years. It was only after consulting certain highly placed people that the Founder decided to recognise the examination in question, since without it our schools was doomed. Even the Prioress of Hunneghem went in a closed carriage to Ghent to pass the examination.

In August 1824 the Founder decided to have the Prospectus, for both day and boarding, of our house printed for the first time. The annual fees for a boarder were one hundred florins, or 181.4 francs: for the day pupils the monthly fees ranged from ten to fifteen francs. Poor children were taken for nothing. In this way our House became more and more well-known; the number of pupils rose considerably; the parents received a report every term concerning the application of their children. Their bill was included.

The seventh prize distribution took place on the 6th. September 1824 and cost about five hundred francs. The solemnity was extraordinarily well celebrated; besides the Dean and many Priests, the Mayor, an Alderman and many other distinguished people were among the guests. Great praise was expressed for our good order and the way that the children were controlled by signals. Some three hundred and twenty children received prizes. For the most part the costs were covered by the Founder and the resulting business created in the town pleased several of the people.

1825

At the end of March 1825 the Mayor sent us some school regulations from the Education Commission, but we paid scant heed to these regulations and they were not put into practice.

On the 28th June the Magistrate passed on to us a letter from the Governor in which he asked us to reply to the following questions: The date and place of birth of each Religious; the date of their entry into the Community; their occupation; their diploma, if any.

As we had a Josephite who had passed the examination we were in order and contented about our Institute in spite of all the continual messing about we had to put up with.

The eighth prize distribution took place on the 5th. September 1825, costing about five hundred francs, and was held in our church. Father De Craecker, the Parish Priest, gave a speech in the presence of many Priests and other distinguished townspeople. He spoke of the advantages of a christian education, of good behaviour and the benefit that resulted from them for the children in the free school. There were about three hundred children.

That same year, at the end of the holidays, we had a big increase in the number of boarders, their number rising to more than seventy; we also had ninety day pupils and about forty poor children. The good Lord deigned to bless our efforts.

In September 1825 the Collège d'Alost was suppressed. The heretical Dutch government, which had been spreading its religious hatred through our Catholic provinces, could no longer tolerate the famous College founded by our Founder in 1814. More than three hundred young people from the best families of the country were educated there into Catholic principles, good behaviour, science and arts. This hatred of our holy religion had some very serious consequences. The children of the noblest families of Belgium were sent to France and elsewhere, giving evidence of their lack of confidence in government education. The ruling classes became more and more unhappy and the Catholics, in general, turned against the government.

Immediately after the suppression of the Collège d'Alost our Founder sent us a barge loaded with furniture, beds, chests, tables and benches, bedding, copper cauldrons and other kitchen utensils, and a large number of pewter plates. Furthermore there were church decorations, especially some magnificent altar candlesticks and a large silver covered Missal (this Missal is at Melle).

In November 1825, also after the suppression of the Collège d'Alost, a young student of the College arrived with us. His name was Corneille Baeyens, and his knowledge made him very capable of teaching our children and especially the young Religious. He came to us not as a postulant but rather to help us, because his only

aim was the good of our Community. To protect our school he submitted himself to examination and received his permanent diploma, probably because he had, for a while, worked with a Dutch school master holding a government appointment. Some months later his brother arrived to help us with teaching; an equally good student, he was very familiar with French and taught that subject to the pupils.

1826

In May 1826 we received an order from the Governor asking us to give the exact number of boarders, day boys and free scholars. The total number of pupils was at that time around three hundred. There were only thirteen staff. Manual work, daily classes, evening and Sunday school; all this was done by this small group. The good Lord maintained my health so that I could bear this heavy load. For my part I had to give religious instruction to more than three hundred young people and to keep the pupils' accounts; their number increased daily. The running of the house was totally my responsibility so I was, on more than once occasion, forced to keep working into the night. I also had to look after the accounts of Mr Charles Van Damme; this Gentlemen owned through his uncle, a Carmelite, a part of our property and could harm us greatly. Thus I was forced to be obliging to him and to dedicate part of the night to running his affairs. In the morning I was always the first up at four o'clock in the morning to preside at meditation, first with the Religious, then with the pupils. Furthermore I was continually preoccupied with our civil suit which was still pending at court and for which I had to make several journeys with our Founder.

On the 28th. July 1826 the government asked us the same questions as on 28th. July 1825. Additionally we were asked what the aim of our Institute was and how many Religious we intended accepting. We replied that our goal was the instruction of young people and that we would accept any number of Religious.

After serving the heretical Dutch government and King William with a zeal worthy of a better cause, and having been a persecutor of religion and principally of the Collège d'Alost, the Count De Lens lost the confidence of the government and of the King and was dismissed from his post as Governor of East Flanders. Mr De Lens was in fact in Alost when he heard the unpleasant news. He was devastated by the news and could not hide his regrets.

On the 5th. July 1826 the Inspector General of Education, Mr Walter, arrived. We had been accused to the Inspector of several misdeeds: that we were giving a course of humanities; that our Community was a nest of Jesuits; that our school was damaging other schools in the town - most probably the state college which was run by lay teachers and had few pupils. Then we were accused of offering hospitality to Father Van Crombrughe after the suppression of his college. Finally, it was said that the Parish Priest and his Curates were always ready to help us and showed no willingness to help at the state college. All these accusations stemmed from hatred for our Holy Religion.

The Inspector asked us questions about the number of pupils, diplomas, boarders, what food we gave them and the cost of boarding. He was astonished to find that for only one hundred florins we were able to provide middle-class food. He was even more surprised to find the number of poor boarders we had, and that for the modest sum of thirty-five to fifty-five Brabant florins we were able to feed and clothe them. The final surprise was the number of day pupils who received a free education. Having heard and examined everything, he said that our Institute was magnificent and of great service. Although the Inspector seemed very happy, it was said in the town that our establishment and even our Institute were doomed. In spite of these gossipers we were able to continue teaching as previously thanks to the good report which the Inspector gave to the government. The enemies of our Congregation were confounded and the good Lord changed bad will into a great esteem for our Institute.

On the 10th. August 1826 our Founder's venerable mother, Mrs Van Crombrughe née Cécile Spitaels, died. It was a great loss for the town of Grammont, for us and for me in particular. The all-embracing spirit, virtue and affability of this incomparable woman would remain a long time in the memories of her fellow citizens. Often following her death I realised how much I missed the help of this precious counsellor in difficult circumstances.

The prize distribution of 1826 was strictly private following a governmental order concerning prize distributions. It cost one hundred and sixty francs for the poor children who were about two hundred in number.

At the end of the 1826 holidays we were obliged to change our boarding fees; from 108.12 Dutch florins it was raised to 104. For this price each child was provided with a mattress, a palliasse and a chest. The number of boarders was about seventy and day pupils ninety, not counting the evening and Sunday schools. On the 6th December 1826 the Magistrate forwarded to us a letter from the Governor instructing us to close our Church to the public. From then on our services were held behind closed doors, admitting only the inhabitants of the Convent and a few friends who came in through the main door of the house. At the time it

was also said in town that we were going to close the school, and this caused much concern to the parents; they thought they would have to find another school for their children. Nevertheless our classes continued and we were trusted more and more by good Catholics.

1827

On the 3rd. January 1827 we received an order from the Governor through the Town Council; the ordered us, in the name of the King, to send away within a fortnight all those professed and novices accepted since 1823. To avoid this disaster I went to see His Excellency the Governor, Mr Van Doorn, an wily protestant Dutchman, to see of our Religious could stay in Community under the name of domestic servants. This was refused. Even Mr Baeyens, in spite of his diploma and his position as a lay teacher, had to leave along with three young Religious. After they had been away for some weeks, we looked for ways of keeping them at least partially in Community. Mr Pierre Spitaels, a relative of the Founder, took in two of them at his mansion in Nederboulare. Brother Joseph¹² was welcomed into the house of the Parish Priest of Deftinge, where he taught catechism to the children. The Religious returned to the Convent every day to have their meals and to help us. As they were away for quite a while, the government believed that they had gone for good. Mr Baeyens lodged with the Widow de Portement née De Backer, and our Religious went there to follow courses with him since he had come specifically to teach the young Josephites.

In April 1827 the Mayor and his secretary, Mr Rens, arrived to establish the number of pupils we had, boarding, day, and poor boarders, the cost of boarding, and the fees for day pupils. They also inspected the degree to which the instruction of the children was taken in French, Flemish and Maths.

In May 1827 we were ordered by the Governor to give the age, date of entry, date of profession and renewal of vows of our Confreres. We replied to the first questions. As to the vows, we were able to say, with the permission of Bishop's House, that we did not take vows. This was because the government only recognised solemn vows taken in the presence of a member of the Town Council and for a period of five years. In that sense it could be said that we had never taken vows.

Our civil suit which had been going on in Brussels since 1823 was finally resolved; we won the suit and the other party had to pay the costs. This news was communicated to us from Brussels by Mr Verhaegen, our lawyer, on the 17th May 1827. As soon as we heard the good news we were overjoyed. At nine o'clock in the evening we went to the Church to sing the "Te Deum"; all the candles on the three altars were lit and having made our thanksgiving we were hardly able to eat, so great was our joy! The next day we began a novena to St Joseph to whose protection we attributed our success in court. To obtain this protection we had for a long time been saying the Little Office of our Patron.

Our adversary had the even greater embarrassment of having to come to the Convent himself to pay the court fees; especially embarrassing since he had boasted in the cafés that we had lost our cause.

That same year our Reverend Founder's aunt, the Widow De Bakker née Spitaels, died. This good woman was fond of our Institute; she had established a foundation Mass for twenty years in our Church for the repose of her soul. During her life she helped us in many ways.

During a meeting of the Provincial Estates of which he was a member, Mr François Spitaels died in Ghent. He was a banker in Grammont and a distant cousin of the Founder. In him our Institute lost a great benefactor and an excellent counsellor. More and more the number of the first benefactors and friends of our Congregation was diminishing.

In July 1827 there was a meeting at the town hall, under the chairmanship of the Mayor, of all the teachers in the district. Our certificated Confrere was also invited. It was a question of following, once a fortnight, a course in the teaching method adopted by the government. Having consulted Bishop's House, the Reverend Founder allowed our confrere to go, in order not to expose our school to the danger of suppression. At the same time, we had no intention of applying this new method in our classrooms.

On the 16th. September 1827 we once again had the pleasure of a retreat. It was preached by Father Boone. We had been deprived of this worthwhile exercise for two and a half years. Fear of the government, who had forbidden missions and retreats, had prevented us from allowing ourselves this great satisfaction. The last mission had been given in 1825 by Father Van Kerkhove who, in his opening sermon, assured us that the heretical Dutch government was seeking every means possible to hinder the free exercise of our holy religion.

¹²Br. Joseph, Egide Stevens, b. Deftinge 08-04-1796, e. 29-03-1824, d. Tienen 25-04-1881.

On September 1827 the prize distribution took place again completely privately in order to avoid difficulties with the government; in order to hold a public distribution one had to get permission.

1828

Just before New Year 1828 there arrived a new instruction: holidays were to be Saturdays and Sundays each week, all the civil and religious feasts; the Easter holidays would run from Holy Thursday to Easter Tuesday, and the summer holidays from the first to the fifteenth of September. Furthermore it was no longer permitted to give prizes except books, and these had to have been previously approved by the Inspector. We paid scant heed to this instruction and only followed part of it. We were continually harassed by the Dutch government. In spite of all the difficulties we had to recognise that the good Lord was obviously protecting us and that we were under the protection of our powerful Patron St Joseph. So many orders had been issued by the government and we had followed so few of them, but nevertheless we continued to exist as a teaching order.

1829

At the beginning of 1829 the civil guard was established at Grammont and, sad to report, two of our Religious were obliged to go in military uniform to the military exercise ground. They could however, be a power for good there, countering blasphemy and other evils and thereby winning more merit by conducting themselves as true Religious. That is precisely what they did, to the great edification of their companions. In this way we changed to roses the troublesome thorns caused by the government; by practising charity and edifying our neighbours.

In June 1829 King William of the Netherlands arrived in Grammont. We were not invited by the local administration to attend His Majesty's reception. We went anyhow of our own accord with all our young people. The King visited the college¹³ because it had been founded by the government after the suppression of the Catholic colleges. His Majesty did not come to our institute; this did not surprise us at all because at that time there were members of the town council who did not regard us with favour at all. The causes of this seemed to be the fact that we had many pupils whilst the Royal College had few, and our lack of relationship with the management of that college.

On the 5th. August 1829 I, as Superior, was invited by our Founder to go to his country house, Pausipone, near Alost, where there were gathered Monseigneur Van de Velde, the Bishop-elect of Ghent, and also Mr De Ram, soon to become the first Rector of the University of Louvain. Besides these, I also met Father Rijkewaert, President of the Ghent Seminary, and Father Helias d'Audeghem, professor at the Seminary. I had the honour of dining with them and to serve, the next morning, at His Lordship's Mass.

Some time later, it was decided that Monseigneur Van de Velde would take possession of his Diocese and His Lordship asked our Founder to stay near him as a counsellor. Father Van Crombrugghe agreed for the good of religion and for the Diocese, because he could, in the current difficult circumstances, offer His Lordship many services. On the 8th November 1829 the consecration took place and our Founder asked me, as Superior, to attend the ceremony. The next day I had the honour of taking lunch with His Lordship and two months later I stayed for several days at the Bishop's Palace and was our Bishop's table companion. This occurred at the express invitation of our Founder, who had just been named a Canon and member of the episcopal council.

In September our Community once again had the joy of a retreat preached by the Reverend Father Boone. This exercise had been judged necessary because several Religious had become somewhat lax in their zeal for perfection. The Reverend preacher obtained some consoling results, as was demonstrated by the good resolutions taken by our Religious to work not only for their own sanctification but for the good education of children. It was on this occasion that Father Boone encouraged the Religious to found a confraternity for the pupils under the title of the Immaculate Conception. This was established on the 21st September, the Feast of the Presentation of Mary. The inauguration was performed by the Curate, Father Dansaert, who became its director. We set up a chapel where every day the members would come together to perform their devotions to the Holy Virgin. It is through this confraternity that we have obtained several religious vocations to our dear Institute.

1830

After the 1830 prize distribution Father De Vos, Curate at Grammont, became, with our consent, the director of our Sunday School. The Curate himself collected funds from the middle classes to pay for the annual distribution of prizes. He decided that from then on the ceremony would be in the Parish Church. The number

¹³State college.

of pupils rose, at this time, to three hundred. Our Religious reserved the right to give a Sunday School in our Convent. I will no longer mention the cost of these prize distributions because they were now covered by the Curates' collections. The Sunday School in fact remained under our direction as will later be seen. At the beginning of 1830, Canon Van Crombrugghe was made responsible for the general supervision of all the Religious Communities of the Diocese. It was also our Founder who accompanied His Lordship on all his Confirmation journeys.

On the 5th September we had the joy of receiving Monseigneur Van de Velde on a visit to our Community. Accompanied by the Founder he came to confirm our pupils. The Religious, carrying candles, preceded His Lordship up to the entrance gate. The church and the Rue des Carmes were magnificently decorated. Inside our house we had erected three thrones; one in the cloister, one in the boarders' area and one in the poor children's area. He spoke paternally to them and was happy to learn about the efforts which were being made to give to each category a good Christian education. His Lordship deigned to talk at length with our Josephites in the presence of the Founder.

At the end of September 1830 a civil war broke out in our region, and especially in Brussels, to wrest the government of our country away from King William. The Belgians were victorious thanks to the prayers of their compatriots. Soon education became free¹⁴, we could accept postulants and re-open churches. We accepted several young men into our Community; we opened our church to public worship and, following these happy circumstances our Founder was able to present our Rule to the Bishop. The Rule was approved on the 15th October 1830. Our fatherland having been freed from foreign and heretical tyranny we were able freely to choose our representatives and the town council, at the first election, was forced to resign and was replaced by good Catholics.

Soon good order was re-established; we lost our fear of persecution and forgot the evils of the past to work with zeal for the good of souls.

In October 1830 Miss Huysmans d'Annecroix asked the Founder if he would establish a Community of Josephites in the Parish of Rooborst, near her mansion, for the education of youth. To this end she had had a Convent built. The Canon accepted the invitation and several Religious began the new foundation.

At the end of October His Excellency arrived with our Father in Rooborst to see the new Convent. Monseigneur Van de Velde was very happy and fully approved of the new foundation, especially since the young people of the countryside had been very neglected in the matter of a good education. I was called to Rooborst on that occasion. I had the honour of speaking to His Lordship of the future of our house, and I was instructed by the Canon to remain temporarily in the new Community as Superior. Our Confrere Augustin, who had been Superior for a short while, was to replace me at Grammont. The new school was a great success since after two months it had more than one hundred and fifty day pupils.

1831

In 1831 we established in the town of Rooborst, a Sunday School run by the Josephites. At first we had about one hundred young people, but we were forced to accept girls; some young ladies were asked to teach them

On the 26th April 1831 our Reverend Father arrived in Rooborst to bless, with Monseigneur Van de Velde's authorisation, the Convent, the Chapel, the tabernacle and the bell tower. The Convent was dedicated to the Holy Guardian Angels; this was done with much solemnity. Besides the Parish Priests of Rooborst and Velsique, there were present Miss Huysman d'Annecroix and other distinguished people. The ceremony excited the zeal of our Religious to persevere with greater devotion in the education of the wild young people of the region.

1832

On Easter Monday 1832 we began a retreat to mark the occasion of the renewal of vows. The confreres from Rooborst were also present. At the end of the retreat, on the 1st May, our Reverend Founder came to preside for the first time at the ceremonies of Profession and of Clothing. Ten Josephites made their vows, and three postulants took the habit. The habit was a cassock and belt with a small blue collar which protruded slightly above the cassock, a blue scapular and a collarless cloak. The Founder decided that we would go out in a cassock and black scapular. The scapular came to the bottom of the chest at the front, and was the length of the cassock at the back. In winter we would go out wearing cloaks and three cornered hats.

¹⁴Of government intervention,

Note. The Founder, for reasons better known to himself than to us, had later to suppress the blue collar and scapular. He decided that those who taught French would always go out in a cassock with a mantelet¹⁵ like those worn by Priests in the summer and in winter they would wear the big cloaks. Those who worked at manual labour would wear a cassock and scapular in church, but at work they would wear a black coat. Going out they would wear, in summer, a black cassock and, in winter, a black capote¹⁶ and round hat.

In May 1832, with the consent of the Bishop of Ghent and the Founder, and at the wish of Father Mathys, Parish Priest of Boucle St Blaise, a Sunday School was established in the Chapel of Wyleghem under the direction of the Josephites. The teaching was done by the boarders under the direction of their masters. Several young ladies taught the girls. The classes started on Sunday at three thirty. There were about two hundred and fifty pupils. The children came from all the surrounding villages and were taught to read and write etc. Usually the Superior of the house taught the adult catechism to adults and even to old people. Personally it gave me great satisfaction to do this teaching, especially seeing the fruits which grew from it. Usually Father Mathys would come to inspect the school and he often showed his satisfaction on seeing all the good things our Religious were achieving.

In May 1832 Monseigneur Van de Velde came with our Founder to the mansion at Rooborst. The Religious had the great joy of attending His Lordships Mass and then having lunch with him. The Canon visited the Sunday Schools at Rooborst and Wyleghem and spoke to the children and to our co-workers. He expressed his happiness to His Lordship who was himself so pleased that he accorded a 40 days indulgence to all the teachers for every time they gave a class. For us it was a valuable encouragement in this fine undertaking which was so useful to the cause of religion.

1833

During the year 1833 it was decided in Council, together with the Founder, to change the time of the evening school for the poor children, in order to avoid the dreadful things the children got up to in the evenings in the street and in the houses. Furthermore, we decided no longer to accept the less well-off children who came into town to learn a trade; we would only keep those who followed all the lessons of which they were capable on a daily basis, with the condition that their parents or benefactors would provide clothing themselves and would pay the sum of one hundred and forty francs instead of the previous one hundred and twenty. This type of pupil would be called the "second table" of the boarding school. The point of the change was for us to be able to work more fruitfully for the education of the lower middle class.

In November 1833 Father Walle S.J. asked our Founder, on behalf of The Dean of Hal, to send some Josephites to Hal to start an educational establishment. The Dean himself wrote to the Canon on the matter. The Canon was very taken with the idea of founding a Community of our Religious under the protection of the Holy Virgin. He allowed me and Mr Stanislas to go to the Dean to come to an arrangement. I proposed that the Dean should provide us with a house, furniture and three hundred francs per teacher to start the Convent with three Josephites and to deduct our living¹⁷ from that sum. The Dean would also pay our living expenses until we were able to support ourselves. These conditions were accepted and the Community was established at Hal on the 18th. December with two professed Religious, Mr Ambroise (Superior), Mr Louis¹⁸ and a novice, Mr Alphonse¹⁹. Once the Community had moved in, the school began on the 7th. January 1834.

1834

At the beginning in Hal we had twenty pupils for the French class and about seventy poor children who had their lessons at the Deanery from eleven till two. Our Convent was not very big and we wanted to keep them separate from the middle-class children. The citizens of Hal showed their satisfaction through the marks of respect and affection which they gave the Josephites, and the number of children, both poor and middle-class, grew considerably. There were, however, some exceptions. This opposition on the part of some people stemmed from the fact that there was already a school in the town before our arrival and that school tried, even by dishonourable means, to remove children from our school. But this was in vain since the citizens were outraged by this outrageous behaviour and put even more trust in our Religious and their teaching. It was a strong encouragement for us to place our trust in God and in the protection of Our Lady of Hal to continue our work with greater zeal.

In May 1834 the Dean asked the Religious to set up Sunday School at Breethoud, a hamlet three quarters of an hour away from the town. We would have to give catechism to the children and older people and to say

¹⁵Shoulderless cloak.

¹⁶Full length overcoat.

¹⁷Or "profits".

¹⁸Not mentioned in the necrology.

¹⁹Not mentioned in the necrology.

the Rosary to replace the Sunday afternoon devotions, seeing that these people lived too far away from the Parish Church. I started this class with Mr Louis. Later on it was decided by the Superior of the house that two Religious would go there each Sunday, which they did with generosity, especially on seeing the zeal with which the children and even old people arrived for this instruction and the extraordinary resulting benefits from religion

In that same May a second Sunday School was set up in the town of Hal. The classes were given in the Church of the Recollects. Some young ladies promised to teach the young girls. The Dean and his Curates helped us with the teaching as the classes were only given in the afternoon, after devotions in the Parish Church and when the Josephites had returned from Breethoud. These two schools were attended by about four hundred and fifty children and old people.

On the 16th. May 1834 the Mayor, Mr Adrien Spitaels, another of our benefactors, died suddenly at the Town Hall in Grammont. He had particularly helped us at the beginning of the Institute in obtaining clothing and food for the poor children. It is thanks to the generosity of him and his widow, Mrs Spitaels née Bijl, that we have the iron gate that forms the entry to the house; we will see more about this later.

The month of May, consecrated to the Holy Virgin, was celebrated that year for the first time in our Church. Every day the pupils sing their Litanies in front of the wonderfully decorated statue. Several years later we saw with great satisfaction that this devotion was practiced in almost all the Parishes of the Diocese.

In September 1834 we started, on the Founder's orders, a Convent in Maldeghem to replace that of the Sisters of St Joseph who had a girls' school there. Their house was a long way from the Church; it was therefore very difficult for the Sisters to get there and for the children to come to class. It was for this reason that the Canon was drawn to found a school for boys under the direction of the Josephites. Girls would be allowed to come to the Sunday School, where some young ladies gave lessons. There were about six hundred children. In November 1834, at the request of the Parish Priest of Rooborst, we started a Sunday School in the Church itself. It was held from one till two o'clock and was soon attended by more than two hundred children. Our Religious had to give lessons in three Sunday Schools.

1835

At the end of 1834 and the beginning of 1835 various people asked the Josephites to establish Convents: Baron Sécus at Ath; the Parish Priest and Mayor of Rhode-Sainte-Genève between Brussels and Waterloo; the Parish Priest of Worp, near Hal; the Parish Priest of Somergem; Father Doignon, in a Parish near Tournai; the owners of the Abbey of Cambre near Brussels; the Parish Priest of Waerloos near Antwerp. All these requests had to be refused because of a lack of Religious.

In 1835 we celebrated the month of March, dedicated to St Joseph, in a special way, in order to obtain the protection of our Holy Patron on our Congregation. Every afternoon we said the Litany of St Joseph in our Church in the presence of all the pupils.

On the 15th. May 1835 Monseigneur Van de Velde came to Grammont for Confirmation. His visits to the various establishments in the town started at five in the evening. Happily we were the first to receive His Lordship who went to our Church first. All the pupils were lined up in the corridor right up to my room. One of them read a greeting to His Lordship; he was very pleased and replied to it.

At the beginning of July 1835 the heirs of Mr Charles Van Damme, deceased, came to see me to come to an agreement concerning 12/40 part that their uncle owned of the property. I went with them to Mr Godefroy, our lawyer, and we began negotiations. The worth of the Convent, the Church, the fields and the woods had been put at seventy-seven thousand francs; this is the sum which had been arrived at when the heirs went to pay their inheritance tax. Mr Godefroy and I tried to buy the whole parcel for fifty-five thousand francs, but to no avail. They said they were prepared to give me the property for seventy seven thousand, no more, no less; I had a half-hour to consider the matter. Mr Godefroy advised me not to buy at that price. I was very perplexed. On the one hand I was inclined to follow his advice; on the other, the idea of losing our Convent put me in a very awkward position. Finally they came to ask the result of our discussion. Mr Godefroy spoke up, congratulated the heirs and arranged to draw up the documents with him the next day. I went home at eight o'clock with the sad news. All the Religious were plunged into the greatest distress on learning that the house had to be sold. I was advised to leave that same night for Ghent in order to consult the Founder on this grave matter. I left at ten o'clock and arrived in Ghent at four o'clock in the morning. The Canon was very surprised to see me there so early and, having learned the reason for my journey, he consoled me and encouraged me to trust in God. Furthermore, he told me to go straight back and the Van Damme family that the matter had been too hastily concluded and that I had decided to buy the Convent for the sum established the previous evening, of for an extra thousand francs if they were not happy with the first offer. I returned to Grammont in good spirit and at all speed. All the Convent was very agitated and anxious to hear the news. The two heirs,

as soon as they came into my office, appeared very unhappy to have been made to wait to sign the documents. After I had given them my reasons and my proposal, they were prepared to sell me the whole parcel for the agreed price. Mr P. Spitaels immediately drew up the document and so, happily, we held on to our Convent. I often remember these happenings; the sadness and anguish I had to put up with from seven in the evening until the next morning. Nevertheless, God, who had so often protected us, came to our aid once more.

Note: At the beginning of 1833 it was remembered that the Forty Hours Devotion had been held in our Church on Quinquagesima in the time of the Carmelites. We took the liberty of writing to the Bishop of Ghent to ask him if he would re-establish this devotion in our Church because, since its suppression, it existed in no other Church or chapel in the town. The Canon decided to ask Father Buysse, a teacher at the state college who said the daily Mass in our Church, to write the request to His Lordship. Monseigneur Van de Velde immediately expressed his surprise to the Parish Priest of Grammont, Father De Craecker, that this religious exercise did not exist in any Church in the area. He wished for it to be established either at the Parish Church or the Josephite Church; Father De Craecker asked Monseigneur Van de Velde to establish it in St Barthélemy²⁰ and His Lordship agreed. So, through our efforts the Forty Hours was established in 1833 in the principal Church of the town. The Bishop was good enough to establish a day of adoration in our Church, on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, in order to give the faithful a way of better sanctifying the day which was profaned in the town by numerous excesses.

On the 6th. August 1835 a major mission started in Grammont. It was preached by the Jesuits, in the Parish Church, the College Church and our own. The number of the faithful was so great that a quarter of the people had to stay outside the churches. Of the thirty confessors eight or nine were in our Church. They heard confessions from four in the morning until late at night. I did everything I could to find confessors for the penitents, some of whom had not been to confession for twenty or thirty years. People came through the Church, through the main entrance of the Convent and across the fields. The mission was ended after a fortnight with a sermon on devotion to the Holy Virgin. In our Church, the statue of Mary was placed on a throne as high as the pulpit and under a red and blue canopy. The sermon was preached by Father Gilliodts who consecrated the people to the Holy Virgin. After two verses of the "Ave Maris Stella" the "Magnificat" was intoned. The missionary finished with a farewell which made many tears flow. The ceremony was closed with the singing of the "Te Deum" and with Benediction.

In September 1835 a General Chapter was held for the first time in Rooborst, presided over by the Canon. All the teachers and Superiors were there. The Founder made several points: what to teach the pupils; the knowledge to be acquired by the teachers. This was an attempt to arrive at a similarity of teaching in each house. Finally, after an examination conducted by the Canon, each teacher was graded according to his relative talents. We also busied ourselves with the rules of propriety in order to ingrain them into the pupils. The Chapter lasted three days and was very useful to the Institute.

In the same year 1835, in September, several pupils from the boarding school in Grammont felt a growing desire to enter our Institute. For the first time we accepted four of our pupils during the holidays. Mr Maes, under the name of Désiré, Mr Verhoft under the name of Isidore; Mr Van de Velde under the name of Albert; Mr Wytjngs under the name of Laurent²¹. Our Founder and all of us were very pleased with this entry which made us look forward to even greater divine blessings on our efforts to spread His reign. We also wished to gain more knowledge so as to be able to give secondary education. Many parents and ecclesiastics were of the opinion that the high level of culture which we were beginning to give our pupils was very useful and even necessary to our fatherland. This was subsequently proven to us by the approval of all the Belgian Bishops who wanted to have Josephites in their Dioceses.

1836

On the 25th. May 1836 I went with our Founder to Bruges to visit His Lordship²², Monseigneur Boussem. We had the honour of dining with him. The Bishop asked us to found a Josephite Convent at Bruges and others at Ypres and Ostend. I could not give him a definite answer because we were short of teachers. The next day, we accepted an invitation to dinner with Monseigneur Cornelis, the Visitor for male Religious in the Diocese. He spoke to us with great interest about our Institute. On the 17th June 1836 I left Hal for Brussels with the Canon. Our Founder had an hour's audience with the Papal Nuncio, Monseigneur Gizzi; then His Lordship was kind enough to receive me most affably. He encouraged me in the good formation of our Religious, saying that our Institute was very useful to the education of youth. This was because, he said, if young people have good principles they have the means to stay on the right path and to return to it if they deviate. If they have not received a good Christian education and fall into evil ways, they will not easily return

²⁰The Parish Church.

²¹Of these four, only two remained in the Institute for life: Mr Désiré, Armand Maes, b. Overmere 14-04-1818, e. 08-09-1835, d. Geraardsbergen 21-11-1902, and Mr Isidore, François Verofft, b. Antwerp 04-09-1818, e. 08-09-1835, d. Leuven 03-10-1884

²²The Bishop.

to the straight and narrow because they do not have the means. Such was the substance of my little discussion with His Lordship. He made me feel that he was very pleased to have met us and to get to know the goal of our Institute.

On the 29th. August 1836 the retreat was held in our Convent at Grammont; nearly all the Religious of the other houses were there. It was preached by Fathers Van Kerkhove and Vermeersch and lasted till the 2nd September after the renewal of vows. The preachers gave me many thoughts on the direction of the Religious and on other important points.

The second General Chapter was held on the 6th September 1836 in our Convent at Rooborst under the presidency of the Founder; all the teachers were present. We dealt with certain measures which were very useful to religious life and to the instruction of each teacher. We also decided that if there was abstinence on a Tuesday then we would eat meat the next day to celebrate the feast of the day.

During 1836 we received requests from all corners of Belgium to establish Josephite Convents; from the Curate of Enghien, Father Senave; from the Curate of Anderlecht near Brussels; from the Bishop of Ghent, Monseigneur Van de Velde; from Mrs Van der Straeten of Zwijndrecht near Antwerp; from the Parish Priest of Contech. Two years later we also received requests from: Monseigneur Delbecque, Bishop of Ghent, to take on a school at Gijzeghem; from Mr Wauters, teacher at the College in Grammont, to establish a boarding school at Saint-Nicolas. All these requests were turned down because we did not have the personnel.

1837

On New Year's Day 1837 we dedicated the month of January to the Holy Name of Jesus for the first time. The statue of the Infant King was exposed on a throne in our Church. Each evening after dinner the pupils and the Community recited the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus in order to obtain, for the young people, the virtue of purity and salvation of their souls. This exercise encouraged several people in the town to practice this devotion.

On the 26th. August 1837 we had our retreat in the Mother House preached by the Jesuit Fathers Boüaert and Vermeersch. Most of the Josephites from other houses were there. They made their annual confession to Father Boüaert. The retreat lasted a week and was closed with the renewal of vows. At the end of the retreat the Founder arrived to inform the Religious that all holidays previously permitted had been suppressed due to the prevailing circumstances. Most of the Religious were happy with this measure, but some were not. The Founder held to his decision, because he felt that it was the best way of maintaining a religious spirit.

Mr Van Wijmelbeke²³ left the boarding school of Melle during the year. In September he offered it to our Institute and the Founder accepted the offer.

On the 23rd September the Founder came to bless the tabernacle, chapel and Convent, which was dedicated to Saint Louis de Gonzague; at the same time he presided at the clothing of three novices²⁴. The Convent opened with four choir Religious; Messrs Xavier (Superior), Ambroise, Athanase and Albert: six Brothers; Liévin (Cook), Anselme, Séverin, Anastase and Adrien, plus a postulant called Van Antwerpen; there were also six choir novices²⁵. We kept the six lay teachers who were already working for Mr Van Wijmelbeke; four of them lived in the house: Messrs Van Nieuwenburg, Van Caneghem, Rogiers and Knijf; the two who lived out were Messrs De Bol and Van Turnhout. Father Valentijns²⁶, who had been there ten years as spiritual director, also stayed. This man, whilst belonging to the Jesuits, was allowed by his Superiors to continue his fruitful direction. After the beginning of the school year, the Superior, with the Canon's permission, made many changes in the Convent. He had the floor renewed in the corridor, the refectory and the chapel; the furniture re-painted and pretty well everywhere in the Convent whitewashed. There were also innovations at table: and extra plate, jugs, glasses and soup bowls. This was a radical innovation. Everyone who saw these changes spoke of them with satisfaction. But, as always, there were some dissenting voices caused no doubt by envy in some and by antagonism to the religious state in others. Yet others feared that the house may not have survived under our direction

Above all that, some Priests were saying openly that half the pupils would not return, that we were not a Congregation capable of running such a house etc. Our revered Founder asked for special prayers to obtain

²³The Founder's brother-in-law.

²⁴ The necrology does not list any confreres as having entered on that day. It may be presumed that none of the three persevered.

²⁵Of this list it would appear from the necrology that: Xavier - left; Ambroise - Ambroise Faux b. Lodeninsart 19-03-1812, e. 11-06-1831 d. Melle 08-02-1895; Athanase - left; Albert - left; Liévin - left; Anselme - Anselme Semerti, b. Aspelaere 26-12-1801, e. 01-05-1834, d. Melle 14-12-1876; Séverin - Séverin Blomme, b. Zwevegem 31-08-1804, e. 17-11-1835, d. Geraardsbergen 29-01-1878; Anastase - Anastase Rolus, b. St. Niklaas 18-11-1813, e. 01-10-1835, d. Melle 15-07-1876; Adrien - left. There is no "Van Antwerpen" in the necrology.

²⁶A Jesuit who had been on the staff at Alost during the Founder's time.

God's protection concerning the beginning of the school year. This took place on the 3rd October and we had more than ninety young people who seemed very happy with all the changes introduced into the boarding school concerning cleanliness, furnishing and service at table.

1838

In May 1838 we were invited to found an establishment in Brussels; we were also asked by the Vicar General of Tournai to found a house there. We could not agree to either request.

On the 3rd September the fourth General Chapter was held at Melle under the presidency of the Canon. The discussions at the Chapter bore great fruit for the Institute. On the 22nd of the month the retreat started in Grammont. I opened it and, two days later, Fathers Boüaert and Van Namen continued it. It finished on the morning of the 29th., having been followed by about fifty retreatants; Religious, novices and postulants. The results of the retreat were admirable; good resolutions and self-denial in accepting jobs were the principal result of this annual exercise.

In December 1838 the solemn installation of Father De Decker, new Parish Priest of Grammont, took place. The ceremony was presided over by Father Van Dorselaer, Dean and Parish Priest of Morbeke. All the confraternities, the College pupils and our boarders, together with our Religious, took part in the procession in order to show our respect to the new Pastor. As Superior General, I was invited by the Mayor of Nederboulaere to go with him to meet him. I was also asked by the town council to be present, with Mr Stanislas²⁷, at the reception and the tea offered by them to Father De Decker. We drank the health of the Parish Priest, the principal officers of the town, and to mine as founder of the Grammont Josephites. Towards eight o'clock in the evening Father De Decker thanked the administration and other persons present for the honour that had been done him, and then went to the presbytery. He visited us for the first time the next morning with Canon De Decker, his brother, and several other people. Shortly afterwards, on the advice of the Founder, Father De Decker was invited to become our ordinary confessor, and he willingly accepted. We were delighted that we no longer had to go to the Parish Church as we had had to do since 1821 under Father De Craecker. It had been very difficult for us, especially in winter, to go one after another starting at five o'clock in the morning to St Barthélemy's Church, because our functions with the children could not be interrupted.

1839

On the 1st September 1839 our annual retreat at the Mother House was preached by the Jesuit Fathers Koomen, Van der Meersch, Labie and Putsaert. Almost all the Religious and novices of the Institute, about sixty in number, were present. For the first time the preaching was in French for the choir Religious and in Flemish for the Brothers. The Fathers were very happy with the religious spirit of our Confreres and with the good which would come of our retreat. We asked Father De Decker to come and hear confessions with Father Kooman so that the Religious were free to chose. All these Priests dined with me at the end of the retreat.

On the 10th. September 1839 the General Chapter started in our Grammont Convent under the presidency of the Founder; all the Superiors and teachers, except three, were present. We dealt in particular with instruction, and the duties of the Religious according to the goals of the Institute. We were also read the "Règlement des Professeurs" that the Founder had produced. It was accepted as the guiding principle of all our boarding schools. The Chapter was closed on the afternoon of the 14th. September after the proclamation of personnel.

At the beginning of 1839 Father Timmerman, Parish Priest of the Parish of the Beguinage in Brussels, and his Curate, Father Van Genechten, asked our Founder to establish a Josephite Convent in their Parish. After remaining opposed to this foundation for almost a year, the Canon agreed once an agreement had been reached. The conditions were as follows: the rent for the house would be paid by the Parish Priest; the house and the classrooms were to be furnished; if fees from pupils were not enough for our subsistence the Parish Priest would subsidise us up to a maximum of four hundred francs per Religious for a maximum of four teachers. If, later on, it was found to be a good idea to buy the house the Parish Priest would contribute twenty five thousand francs, but all other charges would be borne by the Institute. After the legal documents had been signed, I installed our Religious in the capital on the 23rd. November 1839. The Convent was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. Mr Désiré²⁸ was the first Superior; the other Religious were Mr Grégoire²⁹, Mr Charles (novice)³⁰ and Brother Justin³¹. On the 30th September the Mass of the Holy Spirit

²⁷Mr Stanislas Dehaeck, b. Nieuwerkerke 02-09-1807, e. 31-05-1826, d. Geraardsbergen 18-10-1886. Second Superior General.

²⁸Maes; v.s. The first Josephite "old boy" to join and persist.

²⁹Not recorded in the necrology.

³⁰Not recorded in the necrology.

³¹Not recorded in the necrology.

was sung and the next day classes started with seven or eight pupils; at the end of the first term there were thirty. The Bruxellois were so happy with our teaching that we were obliged to send another teacher to begin a preparatory class in order to satisfy the wishes of the best families of the capital. The person chosen was Mr Victor de Mets, a novice³², and he was sent on the 16th. December. Mr Désiré, thanks to divine assistance and his own devotion, made our establishment so favourably known that at the end of the school year there were one hundred and eighty pupils and we were forced to turn as many away because of lack of space in the playground.

On the 6th. October 1839 Mr Benoît³³ was installed as Novice Master in order to be entirely at the disposal of the novices at Grammont. Although the Institute had been in existence twenty three years we had never appointed a Novice Master, with responsibility only for the young recruits, not only to guide them in the practice of religious virtues but also to give them the necessary knowledge for teaching. The experience taught us that it was the best way to have good Religious and capable teachers.

In October 1839 our Founder received a letter from His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines in which His Eminence asked the Founder to send a few Josephites to found a Convent in Tirlemont, for the instruction of the middle classes and particularly the poor. The Canon held a Council meeting and decided to ask for an audience with His Eminence. To this end, he went with me to Malines on the 21st October. We were cordially received by His Eminence. The Founder, having paid his respects, introduced me and told him that I was hoping that His Eminence would give me his blessing and that I was grateful to him for asking our Religious to come into his Diocese. He replied that he would be very grateful to me for sending Josephites to work for the Christian education of youth in his Archdiocese. Having dealt with the establishment of a Convent at Tirlemont, His Eminence invited us to dinner. I was surprised by the affection with which he treated me during the meal and by the esteem he had for our Congregation. After dinner, His Eminence gave us a signed letter to the Dean of Tirlemont, charging him with finding a suitable location in Tirlemont for the Josephites. The Dean, who was very anxious to see our Religious arrive, made a great effort to find us a house. Finally, after two months of looking, he was able to offer us the former Convent of the Grey Sisters, owned by and lived in by Mrs Coene. Learning this news, I went to Tirlemont with my Vicar, Mr Stanislas, and we bought the Convent to establish a boarding school, a poor school, and a Sunday school.

We immediately began the necessary repairs so that the building would be ready for classes the next year. The Curate, Father Crab, who was very devoted to us, took charge of the work. When the deed of sale had been signed by us, the Dean asked me to return to Malines with a letter from him to His Eminence. We arrived there at seven in the evening in mid-winter. We went to the Archiepiscopal Palace and asked to speak to His Eminence. The servant made some difficulties because of the late hour. Nevertheless, when the Cardinal learned that we wanted to speak with him, he came to see us and received us cordially without referring to the unseemly hour of our visit. After reading the letter, His Eminence seemed very happy that a house had been found and that classes would soon begin.

On the very day that the deeds for our Convent at Tirlemont were signed, i.e. the 11th December, there was a terrible occurrence at our house in Grammont. There was a major burglary which occurred about midnight. Someone broke in by breaking the garden gate and the two locks on the Superior's office. Three locks on a chest containing money were also broken. To see what he was doing the thief had stuck two small candles onto the wall. A bag containing one thousand six hundred and thirty francs was passed through the bars on the window to an accomplice who was in the garden. In the Superior's desk a sum of nine hundred francs in gold coin was also taken, bringing the total to two thousand five hundred francs. Brother Paul³⁴, roused by the noise, came down into the corridor behind the High Altar; he heard the noise of the money and ran to his room to get two guns, then went to the dormitory to awake the Confreres saying: "Come quickly, there are thieves in the Convent". Leaving them one gun he went back down with the other, seized the thief at the corner of the corridor and called for help from the other confreres: they did not arrive fast enough. When the thief saw that it was impossible to escape from the Brother's hold, he stabbed him the region of the heart with a knife stolen from the Superior's office. Brother Paul, believing himself to be mortally wounded, let go of the burglar who ran off towards the garden gate. Our Confrere shot at him, but he had already disappeared.

Note: The burglar acknowledged his guilt by letter and repaid the money within two years. His regrets seemed very sincere according to what he wrote. We never learned his name.

Note: I have often mentioned the famous Collège d'Alost, founded by the Canon in 1814 and directed by him until 1825 when it was suppressed by the Dutch government. I do not believe it will displease my beloved sons in Christ to hear some details of this great establishment. They will serve, I hope, as instruction and edification. In the year 1840 I discovered that the following old boys of Alost were at the Major Seminary in

³²Mr. Victor, Franciscus De Mets, b. Gouda, Holland, 27-08-1822, e. 31-08-1839, d. Geraardsbergen 15-01-1907.

³³This is probably the confrere who became the first Josephite Priest: Father. Benoit, Edouard Busschaert, b. Marke 29-06-1810, e. 27-06-1833, ord. 17-06-1848, d. Geraardsbergen 15-06-1869.

³⁴Not mentioned in necrology.

Ghent: Father De Mulder - President; Father Van Belle - Bursar; Father Bracq³⁵ - Professor of Sacred Scripture; Fathers Ost and De Witte, Professors of Theology; Father Sanden - Professor of Philosophy; three Canons of the Ghent Cathedral Chapter. Also old boys of Alost were the Rectors of: the Jesuit College in Alost, Father Mathijs; the College of Tournai, Father De Staerke; the College on the hill at Louvain, Father Putsaert³⁶; the College of Grammont Father Van Damme. Too numerous to mention are the important post-holders in the Colleges of Namur, Saint-Nicolas, Roulers and Bruges; many Priests in the Dioceses of Ghent, Malines, Bruges, Tournai and Namur, and many Religious. In the civil order I note: Mr Conway, the private secretary of His Majesty King Leopold I; Mr Hippolyte de la Faille, director of ecclesiastical affairs in the Ministry of the Interior; six members of the House of Representatives and one Senator; many judges, lawyers, doctors and other men in honourable positions.

1840

On the 31st March 1840 our Founder received a letter from the Vicar General of the Diocese of Tournai, inviting him to establish a college and a poor school in Charleroi; to this end he offered a house and land valued at fifty thousand francs. In Council we decided, with the Canon, not to accept this offer as we wished satisfactorily to fulfil our commitment to His Eminence the Cardinal at Tirlémont.

On the 13th. June 1840, the Feats of the Trinity, His Lordship Monseigneur Delbecque made his solemn entry into Grammont. Our Community was invited by the local administration and by the Parish Priest, Father De Decker, to take part with the boarders in the procession which would precede His Lordship from the Ghent road. When the Bishop arrived at the presbytery I went there with my Vicar, Mr Stanislas, to wish him welcome. I was invited to participate in the dinner. When we rose from table, the Bishop took me to one side and ask me, among other things, when our choir Religious would start to study theology, in order to have Priests in the Congregation as soon as possible. I replied that we also wished for this too happen and that we would set things in motion as soon as we could release some teachers from teaching. He also wished to have a Josephite house in Ghent and I replied that it would be very pleasant for us to be able to do so. On Sunday His Lordship administered Confirmation in the Parish Church, on Monday in the Episcopal College and on Tuesday at the Convent of Hunneghem. On Wednesday 17th. June he came on foot from the presbytery to our Convent, accompanied by the clergy of the town. The Community and the pupils were waiting at the end of the Rue des Carmes. All the streets from the Market Place to our Church were magnificently decorated. When the Bishop entered our street, the Confreres intoned the "Magnificat" to which all our pupils replied. Once in our Church, he celebrated Mass and administered Confirmation to more than fifty pupils. After the ceremony the Bishop, wearing his mitre and carrying his cross, talked to the young people: later he took a meal at which were present: the Parish Priest and all the town clergy; the Parish Priest of Deftinge in his capacity as our extraordinary confessor; the Mayor; Alderman Bogaert; Mr P. Spitaels, the confirmands' god-parent; and some of our oldest choir Religious. After the meal there was a reception in the playroom; the pupils read a greeting and the Bishop showed his satisfaction by granting three days' holiday. He then passed through the Community's dormitory and chapel and congratulated us on our fine Church. His Lordship seemed delighted with the reception we had given him.

In June 1840 the orchard next to the field behind my room was almost finished. This ground had been a lake in the time of the Carmelites and had, with the passage of time, become a swamp. To fill in this land we had paid about four francs a "verge"³⁷, but since then its value has increased by twenty six francs. It is most useful to the Convent. Taken together with the pupils' playground it covers about thirty "verges".

On the 30th August the retreat began at the Mother House preached by the Jesuit Fathers Bouvaert and Verbeke. The first preached in French to the choir Religious, the second in Flemish for the Brothers. More than sixty Religious took part with ten having stayed in the various Convents. The Jesuits were very pleased with the religious spirit of the retreatants. The Parish Priest, Father De Decker, was asked to hear confessions, and willingly agreed; he later ate with the Reverend Fathers and myself. The retreat finished on the 5th September, immediately followed by the General Chapter which was attended by all the Superiors and teachers. We dealt, as in previous years, with the instruction and education of the young and the accomplishment of religious duties. In the Chapter we had great difficulty in allocating the personnel for each house, because a) three lay teachers had left Melle, b) we had to name several Superiors and c) we had to name personnel for Tirlémont. After the proclamation of these changes, the Chapter ended on the 11th. September.

In mid September 1840 we discovered the need to have urGhent and dangerous work done on our Church tower; we had to replace three oak beams. Furthermore we had to spend a lot of money to renew the entire

³⁵? Is this anything to do with Bishop Bracq of Ghent - check.

³⁶? Keizersberg - check.

³⁷"Verge" - a measure of area. According to Larousse, a "verge" is .25 of an "arpent". An "arpent" is between 30 to 51 "ares" according to country. An "are" is 100 square metres. So a "verge" is between 750 and 1275 square metres.

interior of the belfry and the bell mechanism. Luckily we had an excellent handyman in Brother Herman³⁸ who had the tools, the knowledge and the courage to do this major work. Thank God everything was achieved without any problem.

Our Convent in Tirlemont being ready near the 15th. September to receive the first boarders, our Founder decided I would go with Mr Ambroise, Superior of the new House, Mr Bernard³⁹, Mr Victor and Mr Alphonse to ask for the Cardinal's blessing. On the 23rd September 1840 we arrived at Malines and, at about nine o'clock, we went to the Archiepiscopal Palace. The Founder, who was waiting for us there, introduced the new Community to His Eminence who gave us his blessing and received us with many signs of friendship. Having spoken of the foundation at Tirlemont he asked us to take lunch with him. The Canon apologised for the large number, but His Eminence replied that it would make things even more agreeable. At one o'clock the Founder met us at the Palace and we had lunch with His Eminence. During the meal, the Cardinal spoke to us like a father to his children and we could tell by his words that he held our Congregation in high esteem. The same day I left with my Confreres for Tirlemont and the 24th September there arrived Brothers Anastase⁴⁰, Albin⁴¹ and Joachim⁴². I installed all these Confreres in the new Convent which was named after Saint Stanislas Kostka. On the 6th. October classes started; on the previous evening the Mass of the Holy Spirit was sung. This had been announced by the Dean the previous week and at six in the evening the great bell was rung. Many people were present at the Mass, celebrated by the Dean assisted by five Priests. The Church could hardly contain the crowd. Later we made our preparations to receive, the next day, our sixteen boarders and thirty day boys. Two days later the Dean came to celebrate Mass in the new Chapel during which he addressed words of encouragement to the pupils, urging them to profit from the opportunity that the Lord had given them of receiving a good education etc.

Note: During 1807 Mr Van Crombrugge, the Founder's father, bought the Chapel of our Lady of the Old Mountain in order to preserve it from demolition. To conserve this venerable monument, a place of ancient devotion for the Grammontois, he left the Chapel to his son, the Canon, in 1822. In his turn, he formally ceded it to the Josephites in 1839 in order to fulfil his father's wishes. He was certain that by doing this the Chapel would remain dedicated after his death to the cult of our Blessed Mother.

At the end of that year 1840, meditating on the great goodness which the Lord had deigned to shower on our Institute since its foundation, I have to recognise that the Almighty used the weak to conquer the strong in order that no-one should glory in themselves. How small our religious family was at the start! How many difficulties we suffered with the Dutch government! But who is great before the Almighty? King William, his government, the magistrates and the other enemies of our Holy Religion, we made us tremble from 1817 to 1830, where are they now? See what God has deigned to do for his humble servants. We were only two when we started in 1817, and now I can count seventy members of our Religious family, of whom twenty received their education from our Institute. We started in a tiny and modest room where we gathered up to eighty children to break the bread of the divine Word with them, and now our Congregation has seven Convents. The Lord helped us to found Sunday Schools for boys in which there are more than three thousand children. Six school for the poor; our schools for the middle-class young, both boarding and day, where more than six hundred pupils are taught. This is where our Institute has got to today. Yes, the Lord is Almighty and, with Him, although we are weak we can do anything. To Him be honour and glory for ever.

Note: I forgot to mention for 1821 that the Dean and Parish Priest of Grammont, Father Levrau, died. This worthy Pastor, returning from a walk along the track from Overboulaere, not far from the Church at Hunneghem, fell into a field near a prickly bush and died suddenly. His body was taken to an inn just outside the Lessines Gate. All the town was upset and our Religious were desolate because, as our confessor, he had been devoted to us. Father Van Dorselaere, Parish Priest of Moerbeke, sang the funeral service. After the ceremony our Founder, in the name of the Bishop, appointed him Dean of Grammont, although he remained Parish Priest of Moerbeke.

On the 21st October 1821 Father De Craecker was installed as Parish Priest of Grammont. There was no reception. He became our ordinary confessor and was particularly grateful that I taught catechism to the first communicants in the town and taught them to approach the Holy Table with dignity. Father De Craecker remained in Grammont as Parish Priest until 1838, retired, and lived in a private house until his death in 1839.

1841

³⁸Brother Herman, Martin Mot, b. Heikruis 05-01-1808, e. 25-05-1835, d. Geraardsbergen 26-02-1891.

³⁹Mr. Bernard, Adrien Liottier, b. Geraardsbergen 22-5-1798, e.25-12-1817, d. Melle 16-05-1874.

⁴⁰Brother Anastase, Charles Louis Rolus b. St.Niklaas 18-11-1813 , d. Melle 15-07-1876.

⁴¹Not found in the necrology.

⁴²Brother Joachim, Charles L. Bekaert, b. St-Elisius Vijve 10-07-10, e. 05-10-1838, d. Tienen 13-02-1883.

At the beginning of 1841 Mr Désiré, Superior of Melle, published a prospectus for a commercial course; the prospectus was in three parts; English, German and Spanish. The pupils in the top division would pay seven hundred francs a year, in the lower division six hundred.

At the beginning of February we received a letter from a Priest in France, asking us for three Religious for a recently established boarding school. We were obliged to reply that we were unable to undertake this foundation. At the end of that same month, Father De Vos, Chaplain at the Hospital, was named by Bishop Delbecque at the Founder's request as spiritual director of our Grammont Convent. His duties included the Religious' and pupils' confessions, celebration of religious services, preaching, celebration of Mass, first Communion preparation for the boarders and day pupils, and the Religious' funerals. The Council had expressed a wish for this so that there would be a greater uniformity in the religious services in our Church.

On the 24th March 1841 Mr Egide Godefroy, lawyer, died in sanctity. He was one of my first acquaintances among the bourgeois of the town and he remained a faithful friend. At the beginning of the Institute he had rented to Carmelite convent for us for six years from Father Rombaut, a Carmelite who was still living there. I often consulted this Gentleman who was devoted to us and to other religious establishments. Every day he recited the Divine Office; a rare thing among lawyers.

On the 14th. April 1841 the government auctioned a small field with two houses on it. It measured 334 "verges"⁴³ and was near the wall of our garden and stretched as far as the Ghent Gate. We bought the land, which was the remainder of the former Carmelite property, for the extraordinary price of 38 francs the "verge". It was very useful to us, as we could close the path along our fields by planting a hedge along the small Rue des Carmes. For the purchase we gave power of attorney to Mr Norbert Flamant.

Two days before Pentecost, on the 28th. May 1841, first Communions were held at Melle. Monseigneur Delbecque, assisted by the Founder, came to preside at this moving ceremony. The first communicants had been prepared for this major step by the Jesuits. A protestant pupil, having abjured his errors, was baptised by the Bishop and made his first Communion with the other young people. The Religious and the pupils took Communion; then the Bishop administered confirmation and preached several times. These ceremonies had a profound effect on those present. It was mentioned in the newspapers, and this strengthened the parents' trust. The number of pupils rose so much that we were obliged, in June, to build two more classrooms next to the oldest pupils' study and to heighten the building to install a dormitory. The cost of all this was some ten thousand francs. In September we built a second study for the young pupils so as to separate them from the older ones.

In mid June it rained without stopping for seven or eight weeks, and the water rose to the level where our fields in Grammont were flooded from the 18th to the 24th June. Happily we had sold off the hay very early that year and the purchasers had had the time to remove it. In many other fields it was swept away by the floods.

In July 1841 we bought, in Brussels, a very spacious property one hundred and eighty one feet long by twenty nine wide, with about 50 "verges" of land. We had to be make this purchase because our original Convent was too small for the number of pupils, and we had been forced to refuse more than a hundred. We asked our great friend Mr Bogaert to deal with the purchase; he took the matter to his heart and, to our great surprise, obtained the property for much less than we had anticipated. Because of this a novena to Saint John the Baptist, patron of our Brussels Convent, in all our Convents.

On the 18th August the distribution of prizes took place at Grammont presided over for the first time by His Lordship, Monseigneur Delbecque, accompanied by the Founder. His Lordship spoke with great geniality to the young people who had the honour of receiving their prizes from his hands. Their parents were very proud of them. The ceremony took place in perfect order, and was in the pupils' study. This room was really too small to hold all the guests, among whom were the Dean, many Parish Priests and other Priests. After the distribution of prizes, the Bishop spoke for more than an hour with the members of his clergy. Accompanied by our Founder, he went to visit the Mayor, Mr Druwé, who had offered a dinner to His Lordship and all the clergy. I too, as Superior General, had the honour of being present. The next day, the Bishop went with the Founder to Melle, to preside at the prize distribution there.

On the 12th September 1841 at our Mother House there was a retreat preached by Fathers Bouvaert and Valentijns. Almost all the Religious were present. The Fathers were, in general, very satisfied with the results of these annual exercises.

On the 29th September 1841 we celebrated the twenty fifth anniversary of the existence of our dear Institute. This is what was published in "De Vlaming" on the occasion of this silver jubilee: "Last week in Grammont a touching celebration took place. In 1817 in the town, in the Rue des Pierres, a small group of pious men

⁴³"verges"

came together with the goal of helping young people by teaching them Christian doctrine and good behaviour. These charitable intentions were greatly blessed by the Lord and, under the wise guidance of the Very Reverend Canon Van Crombrughe, the little Institute grew rapidly and soon took over the spacious Carmelite Convent in Grammont where the boarding school founded by the Josephites continues to spread the benefits of a good education to the young people of the town and surrounding area. The former Dutch government, which closed many famous educational establishments, was embarrassed by the steady progress of St Joseph's Boarding School. In order to continue their work with zeal, the teachers at that school were obliged to pass the ridiculous examination demanded by the tyrannical government. The Josephites surmounted all difficulties and now, besides Grammont, the Congregation has houses in Melle, Tirlemont, Brussels, etc.

Thus on the 20th September the first jubilee of the Institute was celebrated with a solemn Mass of thanksgiving, celebrated by the Founder in the presence of the elite of the town and of the whole Congregation. The fact that no Religious had died during the first quarter century was attributed more to heavenly blessings than to the healthy situation of the Convents. With the grace of God, may the tireless efforts of the Josephites continue working for the benefit of the fatherland, the consolation of our holy Religion and the maintenance of moral standards! May this Institute, so useful, so salutary, celebrate many more jubilees in the joy of the Lord!

At two o'clock, after Vespers, the luncheon began. Brother François and I, as the senior Religious of the Institute, had the honour of being at table next to our revered Founder. At the same table were the members of the Council, the Superiors of our Convents, and Father Valentijns. Three other tables were lined up in the senior pupils' study (now their refectory). In total we were ninety Religious, novices and postulants. Every person was allowed two big glasses of wine. During lunch, our Religious read speeches in Flemish, French, Latin, Greek, Italian, English and German. They all celebrated the progress of the Institute through the grace of God and, under the wise guidance of our Founder, its gradual evolution from a weaving school to seven flourishing establishments in twenty five years of existence. Great was the joy of our Religious family in St Joseph during the meal. We will have happy memories of this jubilee for a long time.

The next Thursday, 23rd September, a second lunch was given to which were invited: the Dean, the Parish Priest and Curates of the town, the Mayor and the Aldermen, Mr Van Wymelbeke and his son, Charles, and several of our closest friends. The Superiors of the Convents and the choir Religious of the Mother House were also there. Our guests and friends expressed their satisfaction in hoping to see a similar celebration in twenty five years time.

Note: Four days before the celebration of the jubilee the first Confrere died: Mr Constant⁴⁴, a novice on the point of making his vows, died at Rooborst.

On the 14th. October 1841 our Founder received a letter from Mr Schrijven, a public prosecutor and a member of the House of Representatives. This letter was sent at the urging of Father Sessens, Dean of Bree in the Province of Limbourg, and asked us to found and run a boarding school. The town council would give us a property and land worth fifty thousand francs. Over and above the co-operation of all the local Parish Priests, and the protection of His Lordship the Bishop of Liège, we could make such conditions as we saw fit. Mr Schrijven begged us to accept the offer for the good of the young people of Limbourg. In spite of such favourable conditions the Founder was obliged to refuse as there were not enough Confreres.

On the 16th October 1841 the Founder received a letter from Father Slosse, Parish Priest of Ostend, who wrote on behalf of the town council to ask us to establish a boarding school there. We would be given a property and land. We had to refuse for the same reasons.

Several days afterwards we received a letter from the Mayor of Ostend asking the Canon at least to say if, in a few years, there might be any hope of a foundation in Ostend. He wrote that other Congregations had been considered but that if we were to say yes preparations would be made to receive us to the exclusion of any other Institute. The Founder replied in as friendly a tone as possible that he could not accept the proposal, in spite of the strongly expressed wish of the Parish Priest, the Mayor and the Aldermen.

In November 1841 the Canon received another request from the Parish Priest of Saint-Sauveur to establish a boarding school. It was refused just like the others. A few days later Mr Seynave, principal of the college at Enghien, wrote on behalf of the Parish Priest of Baileux with the same offer and on terms as favourable as the previous ones, but yet again we had to refuse. We could rightly quote the Gospel: the harvest is abundant but the workers are few".

1842

⁴⁴Mr. Constant Fasseur, b. Herksem 29-08-1818, e. 08-10-1839, d. Rooborst 16-09-1841.

In January 1842 we built the chapel at the Convent in Brussels. In May, as Superior General, I went with Mr Xavier, superior of Brussels, to see His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, in order to obtain his permission to hold religious services like those in our Convents in Flanders: confession for the Religious and the pupils, first Communion, Easter etc. His Eminence graciously promised to agree to everything and asked me to send him a copy of all the favours granted to our Convents in the Diocese of Ghent. He ended the audience by saying that he would grant us the same favours and perhaps more. Finally he spoke with great concern about our houses in Brussels and Tirlemont. In spite of the authorisation mentioned above, we did have problems with a Parish Priest in Brussels concerning first Communions in our chapel. Mr Xavier went back to the Cardinal to get written permissions. His Eminence replied: "Christ only told the apostles to found the Church verbally, so what I have promised you verbally should suffice", and the first Communion went ahead in our chapel in spite of the Priest's opposition.

In May 1842 the Founder hoped to be able one day to accept the offer made by the authorities in Bree. To this end I went there with Mr Stanislas. The Dean and the members of the town council received us with satisfaction on learning that we had come to see the former convent which had been put at our disposal: all were united in hoping that we could come to Bree soon. These were the conditions: the town would give us the Convent, formerly the property of the Augustinians, with a half "bonnier"⁴⁵ of land. We were to repair the building and make it suitable to receive boarders.

The convent was very run-down and would have cost twenty thousand francs to restore. This put us in an awkward position. Having examined the matter with the Founder we decided to abandon the idea of this foundation. The Dean was very disappointed and, some time later he wrote to us: "It seems to me that we will not be happy without Josephites in our town, even more so since it is the fond wish of Monseigneur Van Bommel, Bishop of Liège".

In October 1841 we decided to close down our boarding school in Hal; the future was uncertain since we did not have permanent accommodation and our rental contract was about to expire. The Dean and the Mayor, Mr Ancar, did all they could to retain our Religious to continue the good work which had been done for eight years. The Dean went to the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines to try and find a way of maintaining our Convent. It was decided that the parish council would buy a house and add the necessary buildings for a boarding school. We would make a small annual repayment to the council. The house was bought and a construction plan was drawn up for the additions. The cost would be about sixteen thousand francs. In May 1842 the Dean and the Mayor told us that the parish council could not afford this amount, but that they would lend us eight thousand francs and that we could do the alterations as we wished. We had already spent about eight thousand francs on our old Convent and we could foresee further expenditure of eight to the thousand francs for the new house which would remain, in effect, the property of the parish council. Having carefully considered everything, we decided to leave Hal. As a consequence, the school was closed and the Religious left the town on the 9th June 1842.

Many people in Hal were very sad to see us go and deplored the loss that the town would suffer. We had been teaching about sixty young middle class boys and about one hundred and fifty poor. Furthermore the Sunday School at Breehaut was attended by more than one hundred and fifty children and adults.

In May 1842 His Eminence Cardinal Sterckx, Archbishop of Malines, asked the Founder to take over a boarding school in Louvain run by a certain Father Arts. He had run the school for ten years and there were about one hundred and fifty day pupils. Father Arts had met with difficulties in his school as he was obliged to use lay teachers. He wished, therefore, to see the school pass into our hands with the aim of a greater stability in education in the town, On our side, we were very happy to have a house in Louvain so that we could send teachers to the University to prepare to be either Priests or secondary teachers. With the consent of His Eminence the Cardinal, we took over Father Arts' building in the Rue de Diest, which still exists. The first Superior was Mr Bruno⁴⁶, assisted by Messrs Bonaventure⁴⁷ and Camille⁴⁸ and two of Mr Arts' teachers, Mr Meeus and Mr Romdenne. There were three brothers, Eloi⁴⁹, Médard⁵⁰ and Mennas⁵¹ and a postulant, Brother Jean Van Thiegem, later Brother Ivan⁵². Classes opened on the 20th September 1842: from the beginning we had one hundred and forty day pupils and twenty boarders: soon the number of day pupils went up to one hundred and eighty.

On the 8th July 1842 our Founder received a letter from His Lordship Monseigneur Van Bommel, Bishop of Liège, and another from the Dean of Verviers, both enclosed in a letter from Monseigneur Delbecque, Bishop

⁴⁵"Bonnier" - a measure of area equivalent to 1.4 "ares"; approximately 14,000 square metres.

⁴⁶Not mentioned in the necrology.

⁴⁷Not mentioned in the necrology.

⁴⁸Mr. Camille, Clement Masselis, b. Geluwe 23-11-1813, e. 27-03-1841, d. Tienen 18-04-1859.

⁴⁹Brother Eloi, Edouard Vanden Kerkhoven, b. Leisele 4-02-1810, e. 07-02-1834, d. Leuven 20-11-1849.

⁵⁰⁵⁰Brother Medard, Karel Van Tyghem, b. Torhout 13-07-1820, e. 23-02-1840, d. Tienen 04-10-1884.

⁵¹Brother Menas, Jean Baptist Depauw, b. Ronsele 03-11-1808, e. 03-02-1835, d. Leuven 23-03-1889.

⁵²Brother Ivo, Jan Van Tyghem, b. Torhout 08-03-1819, e. 20-09-1842, d. Tongeren 23-07-1884.

of Ghent. In these letters our Founder was asked to found an educational establishment in Verviers. To this end, a lady would donate a property, furniture etc. Our Founder respectfully replied that it would be impossible to undertake another new foundation due to a shortage of personnel. Nevertheless we had eight months in which to decide. The same year the Founder received a letter from Monseigneur Cornelis, inviting him to let the Josephites run all the town schools in Bruges. The Founder immediately replied that the Institute could not accept such a foundation.

In August 1842 a fine iron gate was placed at the entry to the churchyard in Grammont and later at the exit onto the Ghent Gate so as to prevent free access to our fields; we could do this easily as we had bought from the town seventy one “verges” of fields next to our orchards beside the Ghent Gate.

That same year we made major changes in our Convent at Melle by building the big dormitory and a games room in order to separate the older pupils from the younger; then we established a fine museum of natural history above the large refectory. There were also major changes at Tirlemont where we constructed a fine chapel, a refectory, a study and a dormitory; furthermore we put the boarders in a separate playground.

On the 4th September 1842 the retreat began in our Convent in Grammont; it was given by the Jesuit Fathers Bouvaert and Valentijns. More than eighty Religious and postulants followed the exercises with the greatest recollection, which edified the Fathers. The retreat lasted eight full days.

Note: During this week, on the 7th September, the honourable and pious Mr Ghislain Van Crombrughe, father of our Founder, died. All the Religious did their utmost for the salvation of his soul, wishing to prove their gratitude for all that Mr Van Crombrughe had done for our Institute since 1817. The deceased had retained control of the Old Mountain until the end, although he had ceded the property in 1823 to his son, our Founder. After his death we took over control of the property.

We immediately made major changes to the chapel, in order to encourage the faithful to a greater devotion to Mary, refuge of all Christians and, in particular, of the Grammontois. At the same time it was an encouragement for us to see the number of pilgrims coming there, even during the night, to find help and protection from the tenderest of Mothers.

1843

A major political crisis occurred in our region in 1843 concerning the election of several member of the House of Representatives. The Liberal party was doing its best to have some of its candidates elected. The Catholics were fighting energetically to oppose the plan. Monseigneur Delbecque, Bishop of Ghent, side with them: in many cases the happiness and prosperity of the fatherland and of Religion depended on it. It was decided that I should go to Alost to take part in the vote. Mr Désiré, Superior of Melle, went to Ghent for the same reason. The elections resulted in a victory for the Catholics. The result at Alost was magnificent. His Lordship was very happy to learn that we had, although being Religious, contributed to the well-being of the country.

In July 1843 a most touching ceremony took place in our Convent at Melle: a protestant pupils abjured his errors and he was baptised by Monseigneur Pyke, assisted by the Founder. The prelate preached and the ceremony served to edify the pupils and those present. At around this time a new chapel was built which was finished at the end of the 1843 holidays and which won great admiration from the parents when the pupils returned. There were many other changes, with the result the old boys would hardly recognise the College of Melle. That same year we greeted a large number of foreign pupils, from Germany, from Holland and from England. The son of Mr Payis, governor of St Thomas Island, came as well. After he had been at the school for some while he was invited to an audience with His Majesty King Leopold I who, after talking with the young man, was astonished by his perfect knowledge of French given the short time he had been in our school.

Our house in Louvain, where we had started teaching in September 1842, had already become insufficient because of the large number of pupils; it became necessary to buy a larger Convent. We offered to buy the famous Holy Trinity College. Our offer was accepted and on the 31st July 1843, the Feast of Saint Ignace, we concluded the purchase with Mrs Mosselman for the sum of seventy thousand francs. There were two large buildings; the first was one hundred and seventy feet long by thirty six feet wide and had five floors; the second, on one floor only, was two hundred feet long by sixty six feet wide; the purchase included two houses in the Rue de Paris; the whole lot was of one hundred and sixty six “verges”⁵³ of twenty square feet/ In spite of the large dimensions of the buildings we had to add classrooms, a refectory, a chapel and a dormitory. Classes started in mid October with forty boarders and seventy day pupils. The inhabitants of Louvain were very happy with these changes and with the ease of sending their children to school, our house being situated

⁵³“verges”

in the middle of the town. The Dean and the clergy were particularly happy to see the house pass from lay to religious hands. We were obliged to take on a university student, a Mr Braff, who was in minor orders, to teach English and German, thereby giving a boost to our Commercial section. The Council decided that, in the 1843 holidays, we would not invite the Jesuits to give the annual retreat as the Religious should make these spiritual exercises in their own Communities. I gave a retreat to the Grammont Community and to the Brothers at Melle. Father Valentijns preached in French there for the choir Religious. The experience taught us that these retreats, undertaken separately, produced excellent fruits.

In 1843 major changes were made to the Mother House; the boarding section was enlarged and heightened and surrounded by a lattice. A new floor was installed on the ground floor, and wooden beds for the pupils. The General's and the Superior's rooms were carpeted and also re-floored.

At the request of Father De Decker, Parish Priest of Grammont, a mission was begun in the town in the 22nd November 1843. Three Jesuits, Fathers Van Kerkhove, Timmermans and Van den Stock, preached at the Parish Church; Fathers Hillegeer, Schoofs and Meulenaere in ours. The Churches were too small to hold the crowds of people. All the town was agitated; one heard of nothing else but the mission. On Sunday there took place the planting of the cross⁵⁴. The sermon preached on this occasions was concerned with penitence and the obtaining of forgiveness of sin through the merits of the Saviour. This ceremony further boosted the number of people. Thirty confessors, of whom twelve were in our Church, chapel and rooms, were at the disposal of the faithful. Many of our friends insisted we find them a confessor, preferably a Jesuit. We were obliged to open the Church from two o'clock in the morning. At Father De Decker's request, all the preachers and confessors had lunch and dinner with us, and he repaid us generously for this. The mission was also very lucrative for our church budget. In spite of all the disruption we were very happy to see the abundant fruits gathered during the mission⁵⁵. Monseigneur Delbecque came to close the mission on the 30th November, at four o'clock in the Parish Church and at six in ours. Our Church was so crowded that people were coming and offering four or five francs to come in through the main door of the Convent. The statue of the Holy Virgin was put on a very high throne in the choir. More than two hundred candles burned and seventeen lamps illuminated the Church.

The final sermon given by Father Hillegeer reduced all to tears. His Lordship then spoke to encourage all the faithful in the practice of their religion and to maintain the fruits of the mission. He then intoned the "Te Deum" and gave Benediction. This the mission was closed. His Lordship was very satisfied with the ornamentation of the statue of Mary and said that our Church looked like a small cathedral. He then went to the main parlour where he spoke with the Parish Priest and the Jesuits about the magnificent results of the mission; he thanked us for all our efforts. For years afterwards the changes in the population of the town were noted. Even in the cafés the mission continued to be talked about; those who had not seized the occasion for conversion were pitied.

1844

At the beginning of 1844 we concluded an agreement with the town council for the establishment of a boys' school as required by the government. The town wished to see the direction of this school given to the Josephites, not only to make it cheaper but also because this was the wish of the Bishop of Ghent and the Parish Priest. The Parish Priest had made many overtures to the Mayor on this point. The agreement was reached and approved by the Governor with the following conditions: 1: The Josephites would teach for free, so as to be independent of the government; 2: the town council would pay two hundred francs a year for the rent of two of our houses which would be used for the school; 3: they would pay one hundred and fifty francs a year for the interest on the costs of transforming the houses, as well as for the rental of school furniture.; 4: six francs a year per child for the provision of the usual items for the poor children. The transformation of two of our houses into one building seventy five feet long and twenty six feet wide with two stories cost us about six thousand francs. The costs were high, even considering the interest that the town would be paying, but our intention was to move our Sunday School, which since 1818 had been held in the corridors, into the new building. Furthermore we would also use these facilities for our prize distributions: the first one took place there in 1844. This ceremony took place with much pomp. Several songs were sung, applauded by a large and distinguished audience. The Sunday School was established with thirty children, a number which soon increased to five hundred. The council school started with the forty five children chosen by the town council.

In January 1844 His Lordship the Bishop of Ghent asked us to open a boarding school in Audenaerde. We could not agree to His Lordship's request, because we would have to buy a house at our own expense and because we did not have the necessary personnel. His Lordship turned to the Fathers of Mary⁵⁶, at the College of Termonde, who accepted the offer and founded the college.

⁵⁴Don't know?

⁵⁵Presumably he means "collections taken".

⁵⁶Marists?

On the 13th. April 1844 Count Hompesch arrived at the Founder's house in Ghent. The Count was responsible for Catholic immigration in America, St Thomas, and Guatemala. He asked for three Josephite teachers and two Brothers for St Thomas Island. The Count insisted on the immense good that could be done by our Congregation in teaching the abandoned youth of that island.

Although several Religious offered themselves, our Founder was obliged, against his own wishes, to refuse the foundations, saying that we did not have enough personnel for our Belgian colleges. He added that shortly before we had had to refuse the proposal of the Bishop of Ghent to establish a house in Audenaerde. At the end of the school year, in August 1844, there was the first prize distribution in the main hall of our college in Louvain. We had made a major expenditure on the stage, and Mr Désiré had painted the decorations. The distribution was presided over by Monseigneur De Ram, rector of the University; the Dean and many distinguished persons were present. The music and drama part of the occasion was so well presented that Monseigneur De Ram expressed his great satisfaction to Mr Stanislas, Superior of the college. Much was said in Louvain about this scholastic festival, the like of which had not existed before in the town.

During the 1844 holidays the Father General gave a retreat to all the Religious in the Mother House; Mr Xavier, Superior of Tirlemont, read several meditations. At Tirlemont, the retreat was given by two Jesuits. At Melle Father Valentijns gave the retreat for the choir Religious and the General for the Brothers. The retreats in the different houses produced much fruit; nevertheless one Religious, on whom these religious exercises made no impression, left the Institute shortly afterwards.

In October Mr Benoît received the tonsure in the private chapel of the Bishop of Ghent; for some time he had been following theology courses and, having passed an examination before His Lordship he was accepted as a cleric and admitted to the Seminary to continue his studies. He was the first Religious of our Institute to follow these studies to which we had long aspired. Mr Benoît lived with the Founder in order to follow the courses more easily.

Also in October 1844 we received another letter from the Dean of Bree concerning our Religious going there. The letter was so favourable to our Institute that I am transcribing it here.

Bree, 17th October 1844

Dear Superior,

More than two years ago we entered into discussions concerning the buildings of our Convent, with the idea that the Josephites might take it over. At that time you replied that because of a lack of personnel you were unable to agree with our wishes. You encouraged us to be patient. Two years have passed and the Convent is still empty. Is there still no hope of having Josephites there? Everyone is for the idea; the local council, the faithful, the Bishop and all the clergy. Until recently I had believed that the lack of personnel was the reason for your delay but, a few days ago, I received a letter from a friend in Brabant saying that the true reason for your refusal was not so much the lack of personnel but rather the adverse report made to Canon Van Crombrughe. It seemed to be a question of not being able to support yourselves. The Gentleman in question added that he had no doubt that the matter could succeed in the near future provided that we were to offer more favourable conditions. If that was indeed the reason for your refusal I will, with courage, ask you to set out your conditions. Our town council will make every effort to accept them and, as for myself, I promise not to spare any effort to see you succeed in this enterprise and will obtain from the Bishop everything possible. Tell me, then, if there is realistically any further hope of having Josephites here, now or in the future.

Whilst waiting for a favourable response, I remain with the greatest esteem,

Your humble servant,

P. Tissens, Dean and Parish Priest.

P.S. As a proof of the truth of what I am writing, about a year ago some Religious appeared in Bree wanting to buy the Convent. I informed the Bishop and this is what His Lordship replied: "Tell them that we want Josephites in Bree and no other Religious." This clearly indicates the great affection that His Lordship has for you. It seems to me that providence is keeping the opportunity open for the Josephites.

At the end of the school year 1844 we wanted to get some English postulants as we had great need of them for our colleges in Louvain and Tirlemont. Our Irish confrere Mr Patrick⁵⁷ had asked the Superior if he could go home to Ireland to see if he could find some young men for the Congregation. The Council examined his requester and gave permission to Mr Patrick, a good Religious, to make the journey in spite of the high cost of eight hundred francs.

He left for London, where he had the honour of often seeing the famous Father Matthew⁵⁸, the apostle of temperance, and being invited to his table. Father Matthew was very pleased to learn of our Institute and promised our Confrere that he would find postulants for us - this later proved to be the case. Mr Patrick left London for Ireland. There he had the honour of talking about the institute to several Bishops. Having stayed for a while, he returned in October with two postulants who had finished secondary school. After learning French, they were sent, one to Louvain, the other to Tirlemont, to teach English. These two postulants stayed with us for two years; they left the noviciate as they wanted to become Priests in their own country.

It was decided in November 1844 to install a billiard table at Melle to occupy the boys during the evening recreation. The Lord continued to bless this house. The number of boys rose so much we were obliged to use the guest rooms to accommodate them. There were one hundred and seventy five boys at the end of December and we had started the school with ninety.

At the end of the year, meditating on the number of children who receive spiritual bread in our various Convents, I can be sure, to the greatest glory of God, that more than two thousand five hundred young people are under our direction, counting the boarders, day pupils, poor children, and those who come to Sunday School. I can say with satisfaction that already a large number of our pupils have become Priests or Religious. The number of Religious in our seven houses, counting the novices and postulants, is at this moment one hundred and twelve. The good Lord deigns to protect our lives and health to work for His greater glory since, for the twenty seven years that the Institute has existed, not one professed Religious has died; Mr Constant was only a novice.

1845

At the beginning of 1845 we were in a state because of Father Valentijns who had to leave Melle and go and do his second noviciate. To save us from this loss our Founder asked Father Mathijs, who was going to see the Jesuit General in Rome, to do all he could to allow Father Valentijns to stay at Melle in view of the great good that he did for the boys, the great trust that the parents had in him and the great damage that his departure would cause our school. Finally, in view of the great esteem that the Jesuit General had for our Founder, it was decided in Rome that Father Valentijns could stay at Melle whilst doing his second noviciate. He would have to stay for a month at Tronchiennes, but this could be done during the school holidays. Thus we retained our good and faithful friend and spiritual director to the great joy of himself and the Religious.

During the night of the 20th March 1845, Holy Thursday, the Parish Priest of Rooborst, Father Hollewinckel, was murdered in his bed. The criminals had entered through the window. This horrendous crime made us fear for our school at Rooborst where the number of pupils had declined. Furthermore, the roads were muddy and useless for a great part of the year which made access to our Convent very difficult. The Council decided to close the school at Rooborst and to transfer the boys to Grammont. They arrived there on the 8th May. We kept the house and left several Brothers there to run the poor school and the Sunday School. Farming helped with their subsistence.

On the 9th May 1845 Mrs Mattus died; she had been the greatest benefactress of our house in Tirlemont. All the Religious were very upset at this loss and prayed for the repose of her soul. It is a shame that the news of her final illness did not come sooner because she had sent for me from Ghent several times before her death. My presence would certainly have been of great benefit to the Institute. She valued me highly and always followed my advice. She had spent between forty seven and forty eight thousand francs in buying the house at Tirlemont, installing the organ, the marble altar, twelve silvered candlesticks and many other gifts. At the present we do not know if she has left us anything in her will.

Note: On the 10th May 1845, the eve of Pentecost, Father Van Dorselaer died; he was the Parish Priest of Moerbeke and Dean of Grammont. This venerable Priest was one of my first acquaintances among the clergy. He often gave me advice. He had a great respect for our Founder and greatly admired our Institute. Several times I was invited to his table for meetings of the Priests of the Deanery.

On the 16th June 1845 we had the honour of receiving His Lordship Monseigneur Delbecque in Grammont to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to fifty three of our boys and to inspect the Church. His Lordship was accompanied by Canon Soudan, the Dean, several Curates, and Mr Ad. Bogaert, the confirmands' god-

⁵⁷Not mentioned in the necrology.

⁵⁸Talbot?

father. After the ceremony and the inspection of the Church and its decorations, His Lordship was welcomed to the Convent with a "vin d'honneur". The boys sung several songs and young Isidore Spitaels read a greeting in the name of the boys His Lordship granted a day's holiday. His Lordship then proceeded, through the garden, to the new council school. This pleased him greatly and he said to the boys that he was sure they were happy to go to school in such a fine building.

On the 21st June 1845 Father De Praeter, Parish Priest of Grimmingen, arrived in Grammont as Chaplain to our Church and confessor to the Religious and boys. As payment, he had free lodging in the house by the gate, bread and vegetables. It was out of affection for us that he resigned⁵⁹. This was only allowed thanks to the efforts made by the Founder with the Bishop of Ghent. He allowed us this favour so that we could have a Priest permanently attached to our Grammont house and so that the Religious would not be obliged to go into town, during the holidays, to attend services. We no longer needed a teacher from the college to celebrate Mass, nor of Father De Vos, the hospital chaplain, to hear confessions. His Lordship also decided that Father De Vos would remain our extraordinary confessor.

In July 1845 we build a playground for the day boys so as to separate them from the boarders: the cost was about twelve hundred francs. In doing this work we had problems with Mr Jacques Spitaels who was unhappy to see that the playground would be closed off by a lattice fence. He made me appear in front of the conciliation magistrate in order to force me to remove the fence and to allow free passage across the playground, as there had been for a year. The judge came to the site and became convinced that Mr Spitaels was being awkward; he laid down that the plaintiff could continue to pass along the side of our house, but only behind the fence and along the Dendre. In spite of the cost of this case, which were one hundred and two francs, we were happy to see that he could no longer pass through the day boys' playground.

At the end of July 1845 there was a potato disease. The stems dried out and became black. The first harvest was therefore negligible and the late season harvest produced a crop of such poor quality that it was fed to the animals. This vital basic food was now sold for fifteen to sixteen francs a hundred kilos. Beans and peas were sent from abroad and were sold at between forty and fifty francs a hectolitre. Cereals remained at a reasonable price: wheat at twenty five francs, rye at sixteen francs the hectolitre. At the start of the potato blight many villagers appealed to Saint Anthony the Hermit: people came from far away to venerate the relics of this Saint in the Churches where they were to be found, because the blight had been given the name of Saint Anthony's Fire. This scourge caused particular poverty in our country especially among the poor: furthermore the industries of the time, weaving and sewing, were at a standstill. The famine lasted longer than that of 1816, as we will later see.

In August 1845 His Lordship the Bishop of Ghent expressed to the Founder the wish to see the Josephites establish a day school in Ghent in order to attract pupils away from the Royal Athenaeum. The Bishop proposed to buy for us the former Episcopal Palace for the sum of eighty thousand francs. He asked for a reply within a fortnight.

The Founder held an immediate Council meeting to examine the request. The Council decided not to accept His Lordship's offer because we would have need to employ lay teachers, because the profit from a day school would not cover the cost of setting it up, and for other reasons. Messrs Albert and Bernardin⁶⁰ were charged with sending His Lordship a negative reply.

On the 4th. September 1845 the first prize distribution in the council school took place. The Dean, the Mayor and other distinguished people attended the ceremony. We explained the method of instruction we used: everyone, especially the Dean, admired our method and in particular the progress made by the boys in less than a year in maths, reading, geography and Christian doctrine. That first year there were sixty pupils.

On the 21st September 1845 the retreat began at Melle; it was given by the Jesuit Fathers Tissen and de Meulenaere. Some Religious from Rooborst and Grammont were present. At Tirlémont the retreat was given by Fathers Steyns and Broeckmans and was attended by the Religious of Louvain and Brussels. The other Confreres made their retreat in their own Convents.

On the 22nd December 1845 I went with Mr Stanislas to see His Eminence the Cardinal of Malines to discuss a matter concerning our establishment at Louvain. He received us amicably and asked about our Convents in his Archdiocese. We asked his permission for the Superiors of our Convents under his jurisdiction to dispense their Religious from fasting and, at the same time, permission for these Superiors to read forbidden books so that they could check those brought in by the boys. This permission was given with great good will and His Eminence even added that it was a necessary thing. He expressed the wish to see the Josephites expand in his Archdiocese with a view to the spread of the French language.

⁵⁹As Parish Priest,

⁶⁰Mr Bernardin, Jean-Jacques De Waele, b. Brugge 27-05-1817, e. 28-05-1838, d. Melle 30-08-1889.

At the beginning of 1846 our Founder received a signed letter from His Lordship Monseigneur Francis Neurick, Bishop of Philadelphia in America, asking if some Josephite teachers could go and found a college in the Cathedral city. These teachers were to be capable of teaching in English. We had only to state our conditions. As usual, our Founder was obliged to refuse the offer because of lack of personnel; he thanked His Lordship for the esteem he had shown towards the Josephites.

In January 1846 Monseigneur Heliani, Archbishop of Damas, arrived in Brussels. Having been to Malines to see the Cardinal and asked about finding lodgings in the capital, His Eminence suggested that he seek our hospitality. Thus we had the honour of receiving His Lordship and being present at the Holy Sacrifice celebrated by him in Syrian.

In the evening, during recreation, His Lordship had a long conversation with the Religious through his interpreter. He asked that the Brothers should also be present. He was a very sprightly character and showed great piety in the celebrate of Holy Mass. Having stayed ten or twelve days His Lordship left us with great gratitude, As a souvenir of his stay, the Archbishop of Damas wrote his name in Syrian on several books. His stay caused our establishment to be spoken about, and heightened the confidence of our parents. Very shortly the number of pupils rose to fifty.

On the 25th January another case began in front of the conciliation magistrate Mr De Clippele, concerning the hedge at the end of our fields, next to the driveway of the mansion. Mr Jacques Spitaels had issued a writ because we had planted trees next to the hedge. In spite of eight witnesses who could prove that these trees had been planted no more than eighteen inches from the hedge, that the hedge had been cut by the Carmelites and that the boundary of their Convent had been eighteen inches beyond the hedge; in spite of other witnesses who proved conclusively that the hedge belonged to us we were judged liable for the costs of the case, about one hundred francs, and the hedge was declared to be the property of Mr Jacques Spitaels because he had had it cut for more than a year. Nevertheless Mr Bogaert, our lawyer, had defended us brilliantly.

Many people were astonished at the judge's conclusion. If we had pursued the matter to the appeal court at Audenaerde we would certainly have won, but the hedge was not worth the likely cost and the matter stayed there.

Monseigneur Heliani returned in March 1846 to Brussels for two days and stayed with us again: his affection for the Josephites was remarkable. When he left for Antwerp he gave Mr Ambroise, Superior of the house, several pictures of himself and was very grateful for our hospitality. On the 2nd June of that year His Lordship Archbishop Heliani came to see our house at Melle, accompanied by our Founder and Mr Henri Van Crombrugge. All the boys lined up at the entry to the house; five canon shots rang out to welcome him. A boy read a greeting in French which was immediately translated by the interpreter. The Archbishop replied with several words of gratitude. Having examined the establishment, he had lunch. I had been invited by the Founder to be present. After the meal His Lordship sang grace and then went to the boys' studies. He thanked them saying: "I have seen the flowers in your garden; you are the flowers of the school and later you must produce good fruit." His Lordship had several lines written by his interpreter to express his satisfaction with everything that was being done in the establishment to educate the boys in arts and particularly in the Catholic Religion. He left for Ghent with our Founder having left some marks of his affectionate gratitude. The boys held a collection for the Archdiocese of Damas.

On the 22nd July 1846 Monseigneur Delbecque arrived at Melle with our Founder. He celebrated Mass in our chapel, preached, and confirmed fifty boys. After lunch His Lordship visited the Convent and talked casually with the Superior and the teachers. He listened carefully to what the Religious had to say. IT was about this time that Mr Florimond⁶¹ had begun to gild and silverise according to the method known as "galvanism" and to photograph according to the method of Daguerre. The Bishop seemed happy with all he saw and heard.

In August 1846 the potato blight began again. However, it was less serious than the previous year. The late reds were, for the most part, damaged; the whites fared better. Less had been planted this year for fear of the blight, and those which were planted were harvested very early for fear of totally losing them, but they rotted even more after they were put into cellars. Because of their rarity, they were sold for fifteen to sixteen francs a bag. The resulting famine was worsened by the hoarding of cereals by some people, to the extent that wheat was forty francs the hectolitre and rye thirty francs. The effects of all this were felt even in our establishments because the pupil numbers dropped. The worst misery was in the two Flanders, especially for the weavers who could no longer find work. People were dying of hunger and, in spite of the collections taken up all over the country, it was impossible to reduce the cost of living and the misery continued to get worse.

⁶¹Not mentioned in the necrology.

On the 20th September 1846 the retreats began in our houses. At Grammont it was given by the General to the Brothers. At Melle, Father Valentijns gave it and several conferences were given by the Founder. The Tirlemont Community was joined by those of Brussels and Louvain; their retreat was given by Fathers de Meulenaere and Duvivier.

In October 1846 two boys arrived in Melle as pupils; two young German Princes called Walburg-Zeil. They were accompanied by their tutor, a Priest called Charles Lichtenstein, who followed the pupils' regime in the refectory and dormitory. The arrival of these Princes caused a sensation among the parents of our boys and made us favourably known in Germany. The tutor followed the English and Flemish lessons, sitting with the other pupils. He said Mass at five o'clock in the morning and was very pious and reserved of manner. He was very strict with the two Princes and made them observe all the school rules.

In October 1846 Father De Vos, director of the Grammont hospital, was named Parish Priest of Astene; until then he had been the extraordinary confessor of our boys. Father Slings, a teacher at the college, was appointed hospital chaplain and our extraordinary confessor. He came to hear confession for the first time in mid December 1847. We were very happy with his zeal and punctiliousness.

Around Easter 1847 the Founder received permission from the Bishop of Ghent to celebrate the first Communions of the boys in all our schools in his Diocese on the Feats of the Most Holy Sacrament: previously it had been done earlier.

The Founder chose this day in order to encourage in the communicants a greater devotion to the Sacrament of Love. That year one of the German Princes made his first Communion at Melle.

On the 1st June 1847 Father Valentijns came to give a retreat to the boys at Grammont. The delicacy of his words and his affable manners won over the hearts of all the boys. In particular he inspired in them a devotion to the Holy Virgin. Almost all the boys went to confession to him. For several years Father Valentijns had been giving retreats to the boys of Grammont as well as at our college in Tirlemont. It was thus that Father Valentijns was involved not only with the boys and Religious at Melle, but his zeal inspired him to work also for the spiritual benefit of our other houses.

In 1847 the cereal crop was so good that it was talked about with admiration. In certain fields there were two ears on one stalk; wheat and rye were double the normal harvest. As a result, prices dropped: wheat was twenty francs the hectolitre and rye from fifteen to sixteen francs. Unfortunately the potato blight appeared again, worse than the previous year. Once again the whites fared best but although many had been planted the price stayed at between eight and nine francs per hundred kilos. This meant that hardship did not decline much, boosted as it was by the famine of the two previous years and the almost complete collapse of the weaving industry. Our Grammont Convent bore considerable losses because the people who rented our houses could no longer pay the rent. Out of pity for the poor wretches who occupied these houses our Founder cancelled the rent for that year. The occupants were very touched by his goodness; one of them said that when she saw him she would throw herself on her knees before him to thank him.

Mr Benoît, who had been following courses at the Seminary since 1844 was ordained sub-deacon by Monseigneur Delbecque at the Minor seminary of Saint Nicholas on the 18th September 1847, and three months later, on the 19th December, he received the diaconate from the same Bishop in Ghent Cathedral.

On the 19th. September the retreat began in our Convents. At Melle, Father Valentijns preached in French for the teachers and Father Duvivier in Flemish for the Brothers. Almost all the teachers from Grammont were present as well as the Founder. At Tirlemont the Communities of Brussels and Louvain came together: their retreat was given by Father De Jonghe and a Spaniard, Father Artola. As in previous years, I gave their retreat to the Brothers at Grammont. All these retreats were very fruitful.

On the 4th October 1847, the Institute having existed for thirty and a half years, the first professed Religious died. It was our dear confrere François, and he died on his patronal feast. He had been ill for a while and seemed to have dropsy. Shortly before his death he had said that by his feast day he would be cured or dead.: his prediction proved correct since he died at eight o'clock on the morning of his feast day in Rooborst. He gave his soul quietly to God after all the Religious had been to Communion and heard Mass for his intention. Brother François began the Congregation with Guillaume Van den Bossche on the 1st May 1817. He witnessed the humble beginnings of the Institute and the difficulties we had borne to maintain it, especially under the Dutch government. Our Confrere was humble and modest in all his ways, and he imprinted these virtues on the novices whom he had directed for a long time.

The two German Princes, whom I mentioned above, stayed at Melle until the summer holidays of 1847. Their father, Prince Walburg-Zeil, was very happy with their education and their conduct. He asked the Governor to give his thanks to the Superior and to add that he hoped one day to come to show his gratitude in person.

At the end of October 1847 a new floor was installed in our Church in Grammont because the old one was worn out. We removed the panelling at the end of the Church and the rest was very ably repaired by our handyman, Brother Herman. Some time previously the stalls had been varnished, and the high altar and the three side altars painted in marble. Mr De Paepe of Grammont did all this for nothing out of affection for us. The work was highly praised: people were encouraged to come to our Church as it was clean and well decorated.

In October 1847 the Parish Priest of Deftinge, Father Van Damme, was appointed to Massemen; he had been our extraordinary confessor for more than ten years. His Lordship the Bishop of Ghent asked the Dean, Father De Decker, to replace him; he accepted rapidly and came to hear confessions for the first time on the 16th December 1847.

1848

On the 4th January 1848 Mrs Anna, née De Backer and widow of Mr P. De Portemont, died in great sanctity. She was a benefactress of the Institute and we had been in touch with her since the beginning of the Congregations. It was this good lady who gave hospitality to Mr Baeyens who was forced by the government to leave our house, and our Religious were able to follow his course at her house. We prayed for the repose of her soul, even more so because she was our Founder's niece and he was very fond of her.

In January 1848 poverty became so extreme in the two Flanders that people were literally dying of hunger and had nothing but straw mattresses to sleep on. One could not read the newspapers without being upset. After all that, there were outbreaks of contagious diseases, mainly typhoid, of which so many poor people died that in many places there were more deaths than births. Many Priests also died, victims of their charity towards the sick.

On the 4th February 1848 the second of our professed Religious died, our dear Confrere Mr Maurice⁶², Désiré Edmond Pattyn, after a long and painful heart illness. He died in the house of his brother, a Curate at Caeltem. For two years this Religious had been following a cure with Doctor De Cock. On the doctor's advice we had allowed Mr Maurice to stay with his uncle, the Parish Priest of Blankenberghe, in the hope that the fresh sea air would cure him. However, Mr Maurice became more and more weak; he got to his brother's house but could not be moved to the Convent and died in Caeltem after a few days. The funeral service was sung at the Institutes' cost. We lost in Mr Maurice a good teacher whose polite and cordial manner had made him loved by the boys.

On the 16th March 1848 the Widow Godefroy died piously in the Lord, completely submissive to the Lord's will. She was also one of our first acquaintances in Grammont. Just like her husband who has already been mentioned in 1841 she had always been very good to the Institute.

By expelling King Louis-Philippe, the French Revolution of the 23rd and 24th February 1848 cause much anxiety in Belgium, especially in view of the unrest which broke out in other European countries and even in Rome. Even we Religious became worried, because in France the people had attacked Convents, even Convents of women. The General of the Jesuits had received permission from Pope Pius IX to leave Rome with all his Communities in order to avoid problems. The Belgian Religious Orders were therefore uneasy; for ourselves, we celebrated the month of March, dedicated to St Joseph, Patron of Belgium and of our Institute, in a special way. We did the same in May to obtain the protection of our good Mother and her holy Spouse. Thank God, whilst the revolution raged at our gates in France and Germany, our own country was saved from all problems apart from the ructions of a few republicans. After these sorry circumstances business practically collapsed in Belgium and, in other countries, many middle-class people could not satisfy their creditors; we ourselves could only just manage to get the money to pay our debts.

The February revolution remained a long time in the memory of the Belgians. To protect ourselves from attack from France, the government established the civil guard. All Religious between the ages of twenty one and forty nine were obliged to join. We were horrified, as we feared that they would have to do full military service. Happily we as Religious were categorised as reservists.

Mr Benoît, a deacon since December 1847, was ordained Priest in Ghent Cathedral by Monseigneur Delbecque on the 17th June 1848. He was the first of our Religious to be honoured with the Priesthood. I, as Superior General, together with the Founder, was present at the ceremony. The next day, Feast of the Holy Trinity, Mr Benoît sang his first Mass in the Church of the Large Béguinage, assisted by the Parish Priest and another Priest, both Dominicans, and the Curate. I was there with Messrs Bernardin, Albert, Théophile⁶³ and

⁶²Mr. Maurice, Désiré Pattijn, b. Bavikhove 16-11-1819, e. 15-06-1843, d. Kachtem 03-02-1848. The necrology says that he died on the 4th.

⁶³Mr. Théophile, Jean-Baptiste Wicart, b. Reckem 14-11-1818, e. 29-08-1839, d. Melle 28-01-1892.

Florimond⁶⁴. Mr Benoît celebrated in such a dignified manner that all present were edified by it. Lunch was offered by Pauline Coppens, a Béguine, with the Founder's permission, and served in the home of the Béguines Gheldoy. All the Religious mentioned above were present. Some members of Mr Benoît's family, along with Miss Coppens' mother and family, were also present. The next Tuesday the Founder gave a lunch in honour of the first Priest of the Institute: present were: the Bishop; the Vicars General; the President and Professors of the Seminary; several Titular Canons; Father Sauden, the Bishop's secretary; Mr Van Wymelbeke; Mr Henri Van Crombrughe; the Superior General with Messrs Albert and Théophile. An unforeseen problem prevented His Lordship from attending. He was represented by one of his Vicars General, Father De Smet. During the meal our Institute was greatly praised, and the Vicar General proposed the health of our Founder, congratulating him on having a Priest in the Congregation. The next day Mr Benoît went to Melle to sing the High Mass on the Feast of Saint Louis and the boys' first Communion. From Melle he went to Grammont where he performed the same ceremony on the next day, 22nd June, the Feast of the Most Holy Sacrament. Shortly afterwards we sent him to Louvain as Chaplain.

In July 1848 the potato blight burst out again. Those that were planted the latest were worse affected than had been the case last year. Happily we had planted a huge quantity. They were on sale at sixteen to seventeen francs the hundred kilos. This high price was caused by the purchase of potatoes for England. That year of 1848 was one of great misery for the lower middle class, weaving still being in a state of collapse and lace making fading away because of the February revolution in France.

In August 1848 we obtained a magnificent and costly altar cloth, embroidered and given by the Béguines Pauline and Mélanie Coppens, who had worked on it for six months using wool from Berlin. The Béguines Coppens, accompanied by the Grand Mistress and her assistants, came to deliver this gift: the ladies of the town admired the workmanship. For her part, Miss Pauline Spitaels gave us a gift of fine lace to cover the cloth. We did not forget our benefactresses in our prayers.

On the 9th September 1848 the retreat began at Melle. Father Van Wondelghem preached in French for the Choir Religious and Father Duvivier in Flemish for the Brothers. The Religious of Grammont joined them, as did the Founder. At Tirlemont, Father Artola preached the French sermons, and Father Donck the Flemish. I made my retreat with those who stayed at the Mother House.

Before the opening of the school year, we were afraid that the number of pupils would decline because of the troubles of the times. But, thank God, on the 3rd October when the boys returned to Melle we had one hundred and eighty five pupils, about twenty more than the previous year. The number had more than doubled since our take-over of the school in 1837. At Tirlemont the number increased by about twenty. At Louvain and Grammont the numbers were the same as the previous year. God blessed us, in spite of our faults and imperfections, and changed our sadness into joy.

Mr Benoît, who had obtained the Cardinal Archbishop's permission to preach, wished also to become a confessor. On the 3rd November 1848 he went to Malines and passed the examination before the Cardinal and his Vicars General. His Eminence congratulated him on the result and accorded him permission to hear confessions, not only in our college but wherever he might be asked. Mr Benoît was touched by the Cardinal's concern for him. Thank God, we now had a Religious Priest, confessor and preacher.

1849

On the 1st March 1849 our Convent in Grammont was badly damaged by a hurricane which resembled an earthquake. Above the Superior's room a chimney collapsed, part of which fell across the roof and caused major damage.

At Melle, the Religious' dormitory roof was ripped away and that caused such a noise that the Religious ran away in the middle of the night. No-one was hurt, thank God.

On the 6th. March 1849 Dean De Decker, who had been Parish Priest of the town since the 12th December 1838, was appointed Titular Canon and Vicar General of the Diocese. He left Grammont on the 22nd March in the company of Mr Stanislas who had to go the Ghent to see the Founder. Good Catholics applauded this nomination but, at the same time, were sad to lose this good and zealous pastor. In fact they were beholden to him for a more frequent preaching of the Word of God, the development of young Congregations and devotion to the Sacraments which had quadrupled since his arrival as I myself could tell, knowing the situation since 1817, He was greatly devoted to the Sunday Schools, where the pupils numbers were over one thousand; great was his zeal for the confessional, which concerned him to the extent that he would tell the Curates himself if penitents needed their ministry; finally, his charity towards the poor was endless, the Grammont newspaper calling him "the father of the poor". As for our Community he was our ordinary confessor for a long time. He had wanted to hear our confessions in our Convent church but, because of his

⁶⁴Not mentioned in the necrology.

many duties, it was difficult for him to establish a regular time. When he was appointed Dean of the area, His Lordship decided to appoint Father De Vos, the hospital Chaplain, our ordinary confessor. He seemed very attached to our Institute and was especially happy to see our council school because the children were better prepared for their first Communion. Leaving the town, he promised always to keep us in his favour. To have a souvenir of our friend the dean, we bought from him a stone statue of the Virgin which he gave us for forty five francs but which was actually worth more than sixty. This statue was placed in the centre of our cloister. Father D'Hooghe, Parish Priest of Grembergen, was appointed Parish Priest and Dean of Grammont, and made his entry into the town on the 28th March 1849. Twenty two associations, the civil authorities and a number of bands went to meet him at the Ghent Gate. Mr Van der Donck, the Mayor of Reep, wished him welcome on his arrival into his community. Three other speeches were given in the name of the town: by Mayor Van Santen, in the name of the Parish Council; by the lawyer Mr Van Wambeke in the name of the Conference of St Vincent de Paul; by Mr Napoleon Bijl. Our boarders and the children of the Sunday School and some Religious took part in the procession. The Bishop wet the procession at the college, then we proceeded to the Parish Church where the new Dean was solemnly installed by His Lordship who gave an appropriate sermon. The ceremony ended with the "Te Deum". His Lordship came to the lunch, along with the authorities and the members of the parish council. The houses were decorated with flags and, in the evening, almost everything was lit up. No-one had seen an installation like it for a long time. Four days after the Dean's arrival I went with Mr Bernardin to greet him. He received us graciously and promised to behave as his predecessor had towards us.

On the 28th May 1849, the second day of Pentecost, the Bishop of Ghent arrived at Melle to confirm the boys. He preached and gave Benediction. Then he visited the whole house, seemed very happy and recommended that we build a new chapel; we were not in a position to do this because the costs were too high.

On the 26th. June 1849 Monseigneur Delbecque came to the Mother House, He celebrated Mass and then confirmed about fifty children. The Mayor, Mr Van Santen, was godfather. Present at the ceremony were our chaplain Father De Praetere, the Dean, the principal of the college and the Curate of Overboulaere. The Bishop took lunch later with these Gentlemen and several Religious. During the meal the boys sang some songs and read two speeches. His Lordship inspected the boys, who were lined up in the corridor and gave them some words of encouragement.

On the 27th June Cardinal Sterckx arrived at our Convent in Tirlemont. He had come to the town on some other matter and had little time; nevertheless he wished to visit our establishment to show his concern. The Cardinal talked to the Founder, who happened to be with us, and to several Josephite teachers. He was very happy with his visit.

I must mention here the extent of devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and to the Holy Scapular in our Church at Grammont. The feast was celebrated on the third Sunday of July 1849. Father Vossaert, the Parish Priest of Nederbraeckel, gave such a good sermon that many of the congregation were moved to tears. The crowd was so large that many people had to remain in the churchyard, others in the corridors or in the sacristy. After the blessing, new members were being enrolled into the confraternity of the Holy Scapular until well into the evening. For the thirty one years that this feast had been celebrated we had never seen so many people present.

On the 13th September the retreat began at Melle. It was given in French by Father Vercruysse and in Flemish by Father Van der Linden. Most of the Grammont Religious were there. At Tirlemont it was preached in French by Father Van Wondelghem and in Flemish by Father Valentyns. The Religious of Louvain and Brussels were present. The retreat produced good fruit, especially at Melle. In the afternoon our Founder gave a conference on sharing.

In August 1849 the first case of cholera appeared at Grammont. The disease first erupted near the Audenaerde Gate: many people died of it. The Grammontois prayed to Our Lady of the Mountain, to Saint Adrian, venerated in the Parish Church, and to Saint Roch, venerated in the hospital chapel. The people of Ninove came in procession to offer candles to Our Lady of the Mountain, because the cholera was also claiming many victims in that town. Their example was followed by the Grammontois, who came in procession to the Mountain on Sunday 27th. September. They attended our Vespers and then Benediction in our Church. They wanted to be greeted at the chapel door by our Religious. Mr Bernardin, Superior of the house, greeted them with several Religious. We sang the Magnificat and Litanies and made a consecration to the Virgin. The number of pilgrims was estimated at three to four thousand. Dean D'Hooghe obtained from the Parish Priest of Waerbeke the relics of Saint Roch, which were exposed for several days in the Parish Church in the midst of a great number of people. The disease declined and disappeared almost completely at the end of September, but it started again with greater force in the middle of October. Ten to twelve people would receive the Last Rites every day, and more than half of them would die. There was a great panic among the population; many people left the town and went to Ghent or other places. A large number of

people said the Rosary almost constantly in the Church at Hunneghem, in the Béguinage Church and in ours which, for this reason, opened at half past midnight. The Rosary was also recited in many private houses. Towards the middle of November the disease declined considerably and, according to the newspaper on the 18th November, it was to be deplored that one hundred and eighty inhabitants of the town had died. Thank God, none of us had died, neither Religious nor boarders. We had put our trust in the Sacred Heart, whose Litany had been recited every morning.

The house at Melle had the honour of receiving, on the 11th. November 1849, His Eminence Cardinal Giraud, Archbishop of Cambrai, accompanied by Monseigneur Delbecque. This personages, received with great deference, were very happy to examine the house in detail. The Bishop of Ghent asked His Eminence to give a Papal Blessing on behalf of Pius IX to all the inhabitants of the house.

On the 19th November 1849 our boys at Grammont had the joy of a retreat given by Father Vercruysse. He preached four times a day. The sermons were much enjoyed by all. At the end of these exercises all the boys approached the Sacraments. To each retreatant Father Vercruysse gave a souvenir to remind him of those holy days. On the 22nd November the retreat was closed with a consecration to the Virgin and the singing of the "Te Deum". Father Vercruysse was very happy with the results.

During 1849 the number of pupils had increase by more than twenty.

On the 20th November in our Convent in Louvain our dear confrere Eloi died, very piously and humbly at the age of thirty nine years and nine months. He had caught smallpox and died after ten days. The Parish Priest of St, Michael's celebrated the service in our chapel. Brother Eloi had made his vows as a choir Religious on the 3rd April 1835 but later, out of humility, he had successfully asked to be transferred to the Brothers. He was the third professed Religious to die in our Institute after thirty three years of existence.

1850

On the 12th August 1850 the Bishop of Ghent came to preside at the distribution of prizes in Grammont. As I was unwell, I send the Curate, Father De Prater, and my Vicar, Mr Stanislas, to welcome His Lordship to Grammont He seemed very happy with this mark of respect and promised to come, the next day, to see a rehearsal of the play which the boys were to perform at the prize distribution. His Lordship arrived at the required time and first of all visited Father De Prater: later he came through the garden to our council school where the boys were. One of them, Mr Van Stalle, read a greeting; His Lordship expressed his satisfaction at the play and wished our young people a good holiday. When he left, I thanked His Lordship for his good will towards us. He replied that he was very grateful to the Institute for everything it was doing for the young and, in particular, the poor.

On the 6th August 1850, following a storm, we had such a major flood that our fields were submerged and we had to remove the cattle. A week after, on the 14th or 15th August, a second, even bigger storm caused such a major flood that not only the fields but even the Rue des Carmes, our garden and the cemetery were under water. This flood caused much damage to the aftercrop and the vegetables in our garden. The flow of the water was so strong that it swept a cow from the field and into the Dendre.

That year the prize distribution took place on the 16th August and, as part of the town was still under water, we presumed that not many people would come. In spite of the problems the principal personages of the town, the Dean, the Curates, several Parish Priests from the area and the parents came by skiff and there were as many present as in previous years.

On the 14th September 1850 the retreats began: they were at Melle and Tirlemont and were given by Jesuits. Our Founder gave some conferences on the Constitutions. At Grammont, Mr Denis⁶⁵ read the meditations of Saint Ignatius for the Brothers as I was prevented from being their by my illness.

At the end of the school year 1850 there was talk of closing the college in Grammont because the government had passed a law contrary to Catholic education. However, the Bishop took the college under his patronage and the classes continued, although there were difficulties to fear from the town and the government concerning the buildings which belonged to the town.

On the 22nd September we read in the Gazette de Grammont, edited by Mr Stocquart, an article written by a Liberal from the town. He had, he said, met a man who was going to the college to seek a place for his son. The Liberal said to him: "how can you send your son to this college which will soon cease to exist? We are going to make a factory out of it. Send your children to the Josephites: at least they are men". Knowing nothing of the matter we were very surprised by this article. A few days later we received a letter from the

⁶⁵Not mentioned in the necrology.

Bishop of Ghent, written in all probability following this incident, kindly asking us to be careful and not to make any arrangement with the Liberal Party concerning education, because he feared that the town council would not allow us to add a course of humanities to our curriculum. We replied that we had made no arrangement at all with the Liberal Party and that we had no intention of doing so, and that we would change nothing in our curriculum without previously consulting His Lordship. We thanked him with all our hearts for all his kindness and for his visits to our various Convents. A few days later there appeared in the "Journal de Bruxelles" and the "Organe des Flandres" an article inspired by the management of the episcopal college. In this article they announced the date of the opening of the school year and asked people not to confuse them with the primary school directed by the Josephite Brothers. This seemed to lessen the confidence that people had in our education. We were very angry about it, but we placed our trust in God and made no reply to the article. In spite of this campaign, fought even with our own parents to try and make them remove their sons from our school, even those following the commercial courses, we had, at the end of the holidays, ninety boarders, a greater number than ever before. Divine blessings were not lacking at our other Convents. At we had two hundred and nine pupils and had to turn some away for lack of space. At Louvain the total was two hundred and fifty, at Tirlemont one hundred and thirty and at Brussels more than one hundred. So I exhorted the Confreres to thank God and faithfully to fulfil their religious duties in order to deserve God's continued blessings on our dear Institute.

D E O G R A T I A S