

15th March 1808

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

Very dear Father

I have just received your letter which fully but briefly tells me about all my business¹. I give thanks to the All Powerful for the good things that He does for me. I am surprised that the number 101 doesn't put one out of all fear; here they ask for about 25, and 40 has nothing to fear; but whatever happens I hope, given the precautions that you have taken, that God will rid us of this burden which continually bears on us.

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

I learned at the same time that the news of the death of my Grandmother and that of Mr Vanderwegen(?) of Malines was only a false alarm². However, the news made me consider my own self. Death is a passage that we need all to pass through; happy the one who has the joy of hoping by his conduct that this fatal moment will not bring him to another more terrifying fate, that of being separated forever from the sight of God. One should want to live well in order not to dread death, but one does not think enough about it, and very often one loses entirely from view this fundamental point. Such were the truths that struck me at the moment when I learned the sad news, but I said to myself that it is not sufficient to accept the truth of these reflections, it is necessary to put them into practice, that is to say to conform to the truth in everything. It is therefore true that "omnes una manet nox"! I am only eighteen and how many people have been lost in our family? "Eheu fugace... labuntur anni", but far from believing that death was a misfortune for them, I pray on the contrary that it was only the end of their miseries, the beginning of their happiness. I do not hesitate to apply these words of an ancient: "vive memor (one illegible word) fugit hora, hoc quod loquor inde est".

Adieu, very dear Father, I embrace you cordially as well as all the family. François is well and sends you a thousand good wishes and embraces you.

Your very devoted and obedient son

C Van Crombrugghe



¹ Concerning the conscription lottery.

² Meaning unclear. Is his grandmother really dead, or is it only the news of the other grandmother which is false?