

21st January 1811

Mrs Van Crombrugghe, Grammont, Escaut
Gent, 21st January 1811

My very dear Mother

You will probably be very happy to hear something definite in relation to the state of Uncle Spitaels, the more so because of the notoriety of the matter which is spreading all sorts of untruths. Here is what is happening: two months ago already at the urgent demands of the worthy Fr Rykewaert it was decided that he should make a retreat with the Sisters of Charity. His Eminence the Bishop gave the necessary orders, but the Superior of the Convent appeared disposed to leave her establishment rather than to receive someone who might cause unpleasantness to herself or to her community. From our side we did everything that could inspire goodwill but it was useless. Fr Rykewaert however, who had unfortunately not been forewarned by the altogether too true reports he had received about my Uncle, changed his mind and decided that Fr Brusou should give him a retreat in a private house. Everything being arranged thus, I drove my uncle to my brother's house, and after some days Fr Rykewaert received a letter from the Diocese that informed him that Fr Brusou would not give the retreat, because there would be imprudence in this enterprise. I confessed in secret that all this was only too true, as if my Uncle were to fall again into his illness it could have had very a bad outcome for Fr Brusou. Pressed on all sides, and by my brother and by my Uncle to sort this business out, I was in a very difficult situation. Our efforts were going to fail, if I had not found from my Aunt De Scheppere (whose virtue I am only now beginning to know and to whom we will be eternally beholden) the help that everyone else refused me. She offered me her house for my Uncle Spitaels, and proclaiming my deep gratitude I accepted her offer on condition that she would accept payment for food. That very day my Uncle went there and Fr Rykewaert prepared to give the retreat himself, but the two classes that he has to give every day in our Seminary, and being besides considerably unwell himself made it impossible for him to live up to his initial enthusiasm. He looked therefore for new possibilities, and, by insisting, arranged that tomorrow evening he will begin his retreat with the Sisters of Charity. All being arranged, thanks to God and to the goodness of Fr Rykewaert, I saw with pain at dinner last Thursday that my Uncle was speaking with the vivacity and gestures symptomatic of his illness, about his meetings during the Revolution, and about his burdens: in a word he was mad enough to give me great concern (proof that we can no longer rely on him). He proposed to go to see Fr Rykewaert if we could, and he wanted to force the Bishop to name some people to check his accounts. Fr Rykewaert, very charitably, told him that it was not in Bishop's competence and that he would not interfere in his temporal affairs. He insisted, saying that it was the stone of obstacle that this was the cornerstone of all his excesses. Fr Rykewaert said that this was only too true, as experience had shown, and advised him to write before his retreat to his (one word illegible) to send them his accounts and thus to prove how properly he had acted. After an hour of discussion, I took him back to my Aunt where he ranted for the whole evening. The following day I found him improved but after having demonstrated in what danger he put Fr Rykewaert and myself I didn't want to be involved in his business until he had promised me to pay more attention. He is persevering, and makes me believe that once the reason for his illness has disappeared the effects will not reappear.

I recommend you to be the prudent with this letter and ask you to believe me to be very respectfully

Your very devoted son

C Van Crombrugghe

Please give my respects to my dear Father.

