

LETTER

Camille Desmoulins (1760–1794) to his Father

24 June 1789

I passed Monday and Tuesday at Versailles. Monday it was announced to us on our arrival that the royal session was adjourned. It rained. Guards prevented the deputies from entering their hall. It was a frightful spectacle for the good citizens to see our worthy representatives running in the streets without knowing where to assemble. The *Récollects* had the shamelessness to refuse their church. The curate of Saint-Louis offered his. There I was a witness of one of the most beautiful spectacles that I have seen in my life, the union of 149 deputies of the clergy. There were many touching discourses on all sides. Abbé Ogé¹ is among the number of curates faithful to the commons. The curate of Saint Martin de Noyon² remained with the Bishop of Laon³ in the ecclesiastical minority.

The next morning, Versailles was over-run by the crowd of strangers gathered for the session. The Archbishop of Paris⁴ and the Guard of the Seals were hooted at, derided, spit upon, and so abused that they would have perished from rage and shame if they had had any spirit. Paporet⁵, who accompanied the Guard of the Seals in the capacity of Syndic of the Secretaries of the King, died suddenly from the strain which the general hooting with which they had just regaled monseigneur made upon him. The Prince of Condé⁶ was slightly hooted; Linguet⁷, recognized in the hall into which he had glided, was seized by the shoulders and expelled by the deputies from their midst. It is fortunate for him that the people did not recognize him. In the evening, d'Esprémenil⁸ came near being over-powered, and the Abbé Maury⁹ was sheltered from the fury of the people and owed his safety simply to the vigor of a curate who picked him up and threw him into the coach of the Archbishop of Arles.¹⁰

The King came. As Monsieur Necker did not precede him, we were in consternation. A handful of paid children ran beside the carriage crying, "Long live the King!" Some valets, some spies joined in the chorus; all the respectable people and the crowd kept silent. The session lasted thirty-five minutes. The King annulled all that the third estate had done, threw an apple of discord among the three orders, proposed 53 articles of an artificial edict where he pretended to grant a part of what the *cahiers* demanded. He ended by saying: "No remonstrances" and dismissed the session. The nobles applauded, a good part of the clergy did the same. The most gloomy silence in the third estate. The two orders went out, with the exception of thirty or forty deputies who remained with the third estate. It was eleven o'clock.

The third estate remained assembled until three o'clock. It protested, confirmed the deliberations of the 17th, and annulled everything that had just been done. Monsieur de Brézé¹¹ came to tell them to separate. "The King," said Mirabeau¹², "can have our throats cut; tell him that we are awaiting death; but he cannot hope to separate us until we have made the constitution." Monsieur de Brézé came a second time; the same reply and they continued their deliberations. They declared by a second decree that their persons were sacred and inviolable; by a third degree, they declared that they could not obey the will of the Prince, and decreed that the door of the assembly should always be open to the nation.

¹ Jean Ogé, priest at Saint Pierremont, Vermandois à Laon.

² Louis-Bernard Gilbert, priest of Saint Martin de Noyon, Vermandois à Laon.

³ Louis Hector Honoré de Sabran (1739–1811), Bishop-Duke of Laon (1778–1790)

⁴ Antoine Éléonor Léon le Clerc de Juigné (1728–1811), Archbishop of Paris (1781–1802) and Duke of Saint Cloud (1781–1790)

⁵ Antione Paporet de Maxilly (1726–1789)

⁶ Louis-Joseph de Bourbon (1736–1818), Prince of Condé and Duke of Guise (1740–1818)

⁷ Simon-Henri Linguet (1736–1794), lawyer and journalist

⁸ Jean-Jacques Duval d'Esprémesnil (1745–1794), member of the Parlement of Paris

⁹ Jean-Siffrein Maury (1746–1817), Abbot of Frenade, Péronne (1781–1790), Member of the French Academy (1785–1814)

¹⁰ Jean-Marie du Lau d'Allemans (1738–1792), Archbishop of Arles (1775–1792)

¹¹ Henri-Evrard (1762–1829), Marquise de Dreux-Brézé (1781–1829), Master of Ceremonies (1781–1829)

¹² Honoré Gabriel (1749–1791), Count de Mirabeau, representative of the third estate of Aix

In a word, all showed a Roman firmness and decided to seal our liberties with their blood. All Paris is in an uproar, the Palais-Royal is as full as an egg; the Duc d'Orléans¹³ is applauded everywhere with rapture. The King passes, no one says a word; Monsieur Bailly¹⁴, president of the assembly, appears; everybody claps their hands; they cry: "Long live the nation!" Monsieur Necker gave his resignation; all the deputies went yesterday evening to say farewell; they burst into tears around him. The influx into the court of the ministers was immense. The court was frightened, they called to arms, the soldiers made no movement, the King thought he was lost.

Fred Morrow Fling. *Source Studies on the French Revolution* (1907):15–17.

¹³ Louis Philippe (1747–1793), Duke d'Orleans, de Valois, and de Nemours (1785–1793)

¹⁴ Jean Sylvain Bailly (1736–1793), astronomer, mathematician, President of the Third Estate