The Oath of the Tennis Court

beginning of the decree it should be stated that it had lacked one vote of passing unanimously.

If this defection had vexed the assembly, it found consolation in the general eagerness of those who asked to be permitted to add their signatures to those of the deputies whose credentials had already been verified. The deputies of Saint-Domingo begged to be admitted immediately that they might sign, and this was granted them provisionally. The deputies whose credentials had not been verified, the substitutes present asked and obtained the same favor. Thus ended this great and glorious day, and the assembly adjourned its session to Monday, the twenty-second, which was to be at the same time the royal session.


Yesterday, at the moment when the president presented himself at the assembly hall, he found it guarded by soldiers who refused him entrance. They gave as a reason that the king was to hold a session Monday and that preparations to be made in the hall required a great deal of time. He insisted and gained access to the hall; he saw that in truth everything was topsy-turvy. Then, by a sudden and almost involuntary movement of all the deputies who were on the spot, it was agreed to assemble in the tennis court. All the members arrived there successively, and after much indignation and many complaints it was proposed to draw up minutes of
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these facts and to bind themselves by an oath never to separate, in whatever place they should be forced to assemble and for whatever cause it might be. The minutes were drawn up, the oath taken and signed by all the members after a very slight discussion on the form of the oath. The signing took a very long time, and was finished only at six o'clock in the evening. Then different motions were made. M. le Chapelier proposed one which had for its object an address to the king for the purpose of presenting to him the minutes just drawn up as a proof of the love and fidelity of the assembly. It contained bitter complaints against the besetters of the throne who wish to detach the nation from its august chief to make of him a party leader. This motion appeared both too violent and too dangerous, as it is not known whether the royal session is for or against the commons; it is necessary to await the outcome before deciding what course to follow.

It was then proposed that the president should make a speech at the royal session; divers opinions were expressed in the debate which followed, after which it appears to me that it was voted there would not be any. It was agreed that immediately after the royal session the national assembly would remain in place to deliberate.

It is asserted that the majority of the nobility has just passed a decree in which it binds itself to shed the last drop of its blood rather than yield.
The Oath of the Tennis Court

Such is our position to-day: one can only form conjectures concerning the object of the royal session, but in fact it is evident that agreement, union are impossible. There exists such animosity on all sides, so firm a determination to make one's opinion prevail, such solemn pledges, that nothing less than Providence can save the kingdom from the horrible crisis which menaces it. The extreme facility with which the oath never to separate was taken and signed is an inconceivable thing. It is evident that it is equivalent to taking possession of authority, to taking away from the king the right to dissolve or suspend the estates, to making itself master from that time on of the executive power. It is evident that each one of the members exposes himself personally to the greatest dangers, either from the irritated king or from the people, tired of bearing the burden the commons are going to impose upon them, and desperate at not gathering from the estates the fruits they had expected from them.

It is impossible to imagine with what levity, what inconsideration, this pledge was taken; few people, without doubt, saw its consequences.

What side, then, can the king take? If that of the nobility, the kingdom is inundated with blood; if that of the commons, he ceases to be king, and one cannot tell where they will stop. It is a frightful thing to say, but, unfortunately, it is only too true, the most exaggerated ideas, the most incendiary
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propositions, nothing astonishes one to-day in the hall. It appears evident to me that the assembly is conducted by a half score of persons devoured by a profound and secret ambition, hungry for notoriety, and determined to acquire it at any price whatever. These men have no kind of morals and principles; nothing stops them; no right, no property will appear sacred to them, and natural equality, the natural law are the words they make use of to seduce and draw to them certain feeble minds which they have illuminated. Many through timidity do not dare oppose their frenzy, and the very exaggeration of their audacity, the boldness with which they slander, defame, insures their safety. Thus an assembly of six hundred persons, among whom there are many enlightened individuals, the entire kingdom are at the mercy of a few rascals to whom the greatest crimes are only a play.

It would be hard to believe, perhaps, that I have heard in the hall words like the following:

"It is only by swimming across rivers of blood that one can become free."

"My orders are given; to-morrow all the windows of the magistrates are broken."

"What can happen to us worse than death?"

"Perish if necessary, but perish with glory."


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