

# Aftermath of the Fall of the Bastille

## Summary

The duchess provides an immediate response to the dramatic Revolutionary events of early July 1789. Momentum had shifted from Versailles and the new National Assembly to the streets of Paris, where crowds engaged in a series of attacks on the symbols and infrastructure of established authority. This rising tide of rebellion culminated on 14 July with the attack on the Bastille, a prison which had become a powerful symbol of despotic government over the previous several decades. The duchess's short Letter two days afterwards (translated here in full) demonstrates how real acts of violence mixed with rumour and fear to compound tensions in the capital. Note how the duchess also separates the experience of the nobility from the rest of the population.

## Date and place of writing

16 July 1789, Paris

## Themes

- Violence
- Nobility
- Religion

## Letter

Paris. 16 July 1789

I will try to get this note to you, Madame. They estimate that there are 300000 armed men in amongst the people of the city. I still have no news about your friends who have been killed. Courage sustains me greatly. I myself am well, but I do not know if we have all turned into the English or the Turks, given that heads are being carried through the streets.<sup>1</sup> What I do know is that anyone who is a noble is trapped in Paris. Pray we get a happy ending! I will write to you if one day the Lord grants me the means to do so.

## Notes

1. Witness the fate of the marquis de Launay, governor of the Bastille prison, two days previously. Turkish 'barbarity' was a common feature of Early Modern European depictions of the Ottoman Empire. It is unclear what the duchess has in

mind regarding the English here: it might be a reference to the execution of Charles I, or perhaps to the Gordon Riots of 1780.

## **Source**

Archives nationales de France, F7 4775/1 (notebook 1, p. 16).

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