

The Last Words of the Duchess

Summary

The final entry in the duchess's notebook series. She observes that France's improving military situation has not resulted in a reduction in domestic political tensions. This trend was to continue into the period known as the 'Great Terror' in the spring of 1794, when Parisians witnessed a huge increase in the number of people sent to the guillotine in the capital even as France's armies won a series of victories against their European adversaries. Soon after writing this entry, the duchess was herself denounced as a Counter-Revolutionary to the local authorities (on 12 January 1794) and her notebooks were all seized the following day during the house search this triggered. She was placed under house arrest pending further investigation and died of natural causes in her Hôtel d'Elbeuf just over a month later, on 17 February 1794. This entry completes the section of the Elbeuf manuscript comprising short daily entries rather than the much longer letter entries found earlier in the notebook series.

Date and place of writing

8 January 1794, Paris

Themes

- National Politics
- War and Counter-Revolution
- Municipal Government

Letter

Paris

8th. There is constant argument between the bigwigs in the Assembly, in the municipality, and among the Jacobins, irrespective of the success on all fronts that everyone is hearing about: the Catholic army destroyed, the English have returned home, and the Prussians are beaten.¹

Notes

1. The Vendée rebels are the Catholic army, which had been destroyed at the battle of Savenay on 23 December 1793. Four days previously, the English (or British) had been forced to relinquish the southern French port of Toulon after capturing it in late

August. The Prussian war effort had stalled back in October—along with the rest of the coalition's military endeavours for 1793—after defeat at the battle of Wattignies on France's northern frontier.

Source

Archives nationales de France, F7 4775/1 (notebook 6, p. 156).

Published at www.revolutionaryduchess.exeter.ac.uk as part of the AHRC-funded project 'The Duchesse d'Elbeuf's Letters to a Friend, 1788-1794', a collaboration between Queen Mary, University of London and the University of Exeter.