

Danton's retreat from the play *The Fourteenth of July and Danton* by Romaine Rolland

DANTON: What is my idea? To save the country. Save it at all cost from our sacrilegious quarrels. Do you know the disease that is killing the Republic? Mediocrity. Too many brains are thinking about the State. No nation can stand a Mirabeau, a Brissot, a Vergniaud, a Marat--a Danton, a Desmoulins, a Robespierre. One of these geniuses could have gained the victory for Freedom. But all together, they fight with each other, and France bleeds. I took too prominent a part myself, though I must do myself the justice of saying that I never fought a Frenchman unless my life depended upon it, and even in the fury of combat I did everything in my power to save the defeated enemy. I do not intend, for personal interest, to enter into a struggle with the greatest man of the Republic--next to myself. I do not want to depopulate France. I know Robespierre; I saw his beginning, I watched him grow from day to day, through his tenacity, his work, his faith in his ideas. His ambition grew, too, and conquered the Assembly, and all of France. One man alone is a menace to him: my popularity counter-balances his, and his morbid vanity suffers. Often--I must give him credit for it--did he attempt to stifle his instinctive envy. But the fatality of events; jealousy, stronger than reason; my enemies who excited him--everything draws us into the struggle. No matter what the result, the Republic will be shaken to its foundations. Well, it is my place to give an example of sacrifice. Let my ambition sink before his! I have drunk deep of that bitter draught, and it has left a bad taste in my mouth. Let Robespierre drain the cup if he likes. I retire to my tent. I am less resentful than Achilles, and I shall wait patiently until he offers me his hand.

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