

The Temple of Reason

In its more radical phase after 1792, the leaders of the French Revolution closed the churches and abolished the Christian calendar and sabbath. The Goddess of Reason was enshrined in Notre Dame, and Temples of Reason were established in many French cities. This selection is a contemporary description of a civic festival held in 1794 in Châlons-sur-Marne to inaugurate such a Temple.

The festival was announced in the whole Commune the evening before; for this purpose, retreat was sounded by all the drummers and by the trumpeters of the troops in barracks at Châlons, in all parts of the town.

The next day at daybreak, it was again announced by general quarters, which was likewise sounded in all parts; the artillery did not fire, in order to save the powder to destroy the despots' henchmen.

The former church of Notre Dame was, for lack of time and means, cleaned and prepared only provisionally for its new use, and in its former sanctuary there was erected a pedestal supporting the symbolic statue of Reason. It is of simple and free design, decorated only by an inset bearing this inscription:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

It was flanked by two columns surmounted by two antique bronze perfume boxes, which emitted incense smoke during the whole ceremony: in front, at the foot of three steps, was placed an altar of antique form, on which were to be placed the emblems that the various groups composing the procession would put there; on the four pillars at the corners of the sanctuary were four projecting brackets to receive the busts of Brutus, the father of Republics and the model of Republicans; of Marat, the faithful friend of the people; of Le Peletier, who died for the Republic; and of the immortal Châlier.

At precisely nine o'clock in the morning, the general assemblage formed on the gravel promenade, otherwise called the promenade of Liberty; the military detachments and other groups destined to form the procession had their places indicated there; commissioners from the Society arranged them in order....

A detachment of cavalry, national constabulary, and hussars mingled together, to strengthen the bonds of fraternity, led the march, and on their pennant there were these words: “Reason guides us and enlightens us.”

It was followed by the company of cannoneers of Châlons, preceded by a banner with this inscription: "Death to the Tyrants."

This company was followed by a cart loaded with broken chains, on which were six prisoners of war and a few wounded being cared for by a surgeon; this cart carried two banners, front and back, with these two inscriptions: "Humanity is a Republican virtue" [and] "They were very mistaken in fighting for tyrants."

This cart was accompanied by two detachments of national guardsmen and regular troops fully armed.

The drummers grouped together followed and in turn were followed by four *sans-culottes* carrying a superb fasces from which flew a tricolor banner on which were these words: "Let us be united like it, nothing can conquer us."

Forty women citizens dressed in white and decorated with tricolor ribbons surrounded the fasces, and each carried a large tricolor ribbon which was tied to her head.

A Liberty bonnet crowned this banner, and young national guardsmen accompanying the fasces carried various pennants on which were written different devices.

After them marched groups of national guardsmen and regular troops mingled together and fraternally and amicably united, arm in arm, singing hymns to Liberty and bearing with them two banners on which were written the following inscriptions: "Our Unity is our strength." "We will exterminate the last of the despots."

Then came the military band gathered from different barracks, playing alternately with the drummers who were in front during the procession. The band was followed by a chariot of antique type decorated with oak branches and bearing a sexagenarian couple, with a streamer on which were written these words: "Respect Old Age."

The Société Populaire marched next, preceded by its banner, on which was depicted a watchful eye, and underneath were these words: "We watch over the maintenance of Liberty and the public welfare."

In its train, groups of children of both sexes carried baskets of fruit and vases of flowers, accompanying a cart drawn by two white horses; in the cart was a young woman nursing an infant, beside her a group of children of different ages; it was preceded by a banner with this inscription: "They are the hope of the Patrie." From the cart flew a tricolor streamer with this inscription: "The virtuous mother will produce defenders for the Patrie."

Next marched a group of women citizens adorned with tricolor ribbons, bearing a standard with this inscription: "Austere Morals will strengthen the Republic." All who composed this group were dressed in white, as were the drivers of the cart, and all were bedecked with tricolor ribbons.

Then followed the surveillance committees of the sections of the Commune of Châlons, grouped together one after another; in front were four banners, each bearing the name of a section, and an emblem depicting a finger on the lips to indicate secrecy, and another banner with this inscription: "Our institution purges Society of a multitude of suspect people."

The Republic section went first; it accompanied a chariot pulled by two white horses and led by two men on foot dressed in Roman style; in it was a woman dressed in the same way, representing the Republic; on the front of this chariot appeared a tricolor ensign bearing these words: "Government of the Wise."

Next marched the Equality section, accompanying a plow pulled by two oxen and guided by a cultivator in work clothes; a couple seated on it carried a standard on which were written on one side, "Honor the Plow," and on the other side, "Respect conjugal love."

The principal inspector and all the employees in the military store-houses formed a group which followed the plow: two standards were carried by this group; the first had the words, "Military supplies," and the second, "Our activity produces abundance in our armies."

The Liberty section followed, accompanied by groups of citizens, artisans, and workmen of all kinds and types; each of them was carrying an instrument or a tool related to and representative of his art or occupation. This group was preceded by a tricolor standard, inscribed with a single word: "Sovereign."

Then marched the Fraternity section, consoling groups of convalescents, whose physicians were close by. In the middle of this section was an open cart from the Montagne hospital, containing men wounded in the defense of the Patrie, who appeared to have been cared for and bled by health officers who were binding their wounds. They were partly covered by their bloody bandages. The front of this cart carried a banner with this inscription: "Our blood will never cease to flow for the safety of the Patrie."

After the committees followed four women citizens dressed in white and adorned with tricolor belts decorated with the attributes of the four seasons they represented.

After the four seasons came the People's Representative in the midst of the constituted Authorities, civil and judicial, wearing their distinctive insignia. In their midst citizens carried litters draped in antique style and bearing the constitution and the busts of Brutus, Marat, Le Peletier, and Chalier. Each citizen held in his hand a wheat stalk, and on the banner which preceded the constituted Authorities was this inscription: "From the enforcement of the laws come prosperity and abundance."

The constituted Authorities were followed by various staff officers of the national guard of Châlons and by regular troops stationed in Châlons; they were preceded by a banner with this inscription: "Destroy the tyrants, or die."

Next, the natural children of the Patrie were led by a woman bearing a banner with this inscription: "The Patrie adopts us, we are eager to serve it."

Finally the old people, represented by veterans without weapons, formed a group preceded by two banners on which were these inscriptions: "The dawn of Reason and Liberty embellishes the end of our life" [and] "The French Republic honors loyalty, courage, old age, filial piety, misfortune; it places its constitution under the safekeeping of all the virtues."

After the group of veterans followed a cart drawn by four donkeys and containing remains of feudalism, such as armorial bearings, etc., as well as emblems of the superstition in which we were too long submerged. On the front was a man representing a pope adorned with tiara and pallium, having two cardinals for acolytes; on the front and rear of the cart were two billboards, the first of which bore the words "Prejudices pass away," and the second, "Reason is eternal."

The end of the procession was a detachment of cavalry, national guardsmen, and hussars mingled together, led by a trumpeter, and on their banner were these words: "The French government is revolutionary until the peace."

The whole being thus ordered, the procession left the promenade at exactly ten o'clock, crossed on the drawbridge, followed the avenue which is its continuation to reach the Rue de la Société Populaire, where there was a pause for the singing of ... patriotic songs.... In the Place de la Liberté, there was another pause, for further singing....

On the front steps of the city hall, there had been built and painted a mountain, at the top of which was placed a Hercules defending a fasces fourteen feet in height. A tricolor flag flew above it on which was written in large letters: "To the Mountain, the grateful French."

At the foot of the mountain, pure water flowed from a spring, falling by various cascades; twelve men dressed as mountaineers, armed with pikes and with civic crowns on their heads, were hidden in caverns in the mountain; as the procession arrived, singing the last couplet of the *Marseillaise*, the mountaineers quietly came out of their caverns without fully revealing themselves, and when "Aux armes, citoyens" was sung, they ran to get axes to defend their retreat, posted themselves on different sides of the mountain, but seeing the cart with feudalism and fanaticism drawn by asses with miters on their heads, they ran towards them, axe in hand, grabbed the miters, copes, and chasubles which adorned them as well as the pope and his acolytes, and chained them to the chariot of Liberty. During this, the band played a military charge; the carmagnole song was heard; but the mountaineers, seeing other carts arrive and feigning to believe that they were only the train following the one containing fanaticism, advanced in a column to meet the first one they saw, which was the chariot of Liberty; they lowered their axes as a sign of respect, and the band played a march; then a litter appeared, supporting a chair decorated with garlands; the Goddess descended from her cart, seated herself on the chair and was borne by eight mountaineers to the foot of the mountain; she was followed by two nymphs, one of whom

was carrying a tricolor flag and the other the Declaration of the Rights of Man; they marched upon the trash remnants of nobility and superstition, which were then burned, to the great contentment of all the citizens, and climbing the mountain, with People's Representative Pflieger, then present at this festival, and mountaineers who represented his colleagues, while the band played "Where can one better be than in the bosom of one's family," reached the summit. The Goddess was crowned by the graces, then a tricolor flag was displayed, and they sang "Our country's three colors," and still on the mountain they sang "When from the mountain peaks the sun," etc. The procession descended, the Goddess stopped at the spring, a vase was presented to her by the president of the Commune, she drank some water from the mountain, then presented some to the People's Representative, to all the constituted authorities, citizens and officers of the different corps present, who all drank to the health of the Republic, one and indivisible, and of the Mountain. The Goddess, again on her chair, was borne to her chariot by eight mountaineers, four others placed themselves at her sides, axes raised, to drive away the profane, the others took their places with the administrative bodies, to indicate that public dignities are consistent with virtue alone.

From there... they went ... to ... the Temple of Reason....

All the musicians gathered behind the altar, with the singers; at the moment when the procession entered the Temple, the organ blared an overture, and the Société Populaire, the constituted Authorities, the surveillance committees, and the groups described above took places in rows facing the altar of Reason and a certain distance from it.

The military band played hymns to Reason, to Liberty, to hatred for tyrants, and to sacred love for the Patrie. After which the president of the Société Populaire delivered the inaugural speech, the Commune president, the Department president, the District president, the People's Representative, and General Debrun delivered speeches set forth hereafter.

After their harangues, various patriotic hymns were repeated and accompanied by the military band, after which, in front of the Temple entrance, the trumpeters announced that the inauguration festival and the ceremony were concluded.

In the evening fireworks were displayed on the mountain, a bouquet marked the gratitude of all the French to the mountaineers present, who were solemnly recognized to be the saviors of the Republic; then a ball was held, and so brotherhood was twice celebrated in a single day. Each citizen taking part in this fine day evidenced his civic spirit. All took the oath to live in freedom or to die.