

Tree-Worship

By Richard Le Gallienne

VAST and mysterious brother, ere was yet of me
So much as men may poise upon a needle's end,
Still shook with laughter all this monstrous might of thee,
And still with haughty crest it called the morning friend.

Thy latticed column jettied up the bright blue air,
Tall as a mast it was, and stronger than a tower ;
Three hundred winters had beheld thee mighty there,
Before my little life had lived one little hour.

With rocky foot stern-set like iron in the land,
With leafy rustling crest the morning sows with pearls,
Huge as a minster, half in heaven men saw thee stand,
Thy rugged girth the waists of fifty Eastern girls.

Knotted and warted, slabbed and armoured like the hide
Of tropic elephant ; unstormable and steep
As some grim fortress with a princess-pearl inside,
Where savage guardian faces beard the bastioned keep :

So

So hard a rind, old tree, shielding so soft a heart,
A woman's heart of tender little nestling leaves ;
Nor rind so hard but that a touch so soft can part,
And spring's first baby-bud an easy passage cleaves.

I picture thee within with dainty satin sides,
Where all the long day through the sleeping dryad dreams,
But when the moon bends low and taps thee thrice she glides,
Knowing the fairy knock, to bask within her beams.

And all the long night through, for him with eyes and ears,
She sways within thine arms and sings a fairy tune,
Till, startled with the dawn, she softly disappears,
And sleeps and dreams again until the rising moon.

But with the peep of day great bands of heavenly birds
Fill all thy branchy chambers with a thousand flutes,
And with the torrid noon stroll up the weary herds,
To seek thy friendly shade and doze about thy roots ;

Till with the setting sun they turn them once more home :
And, ere the moon dawns, for a brief enchanted space,
Weary with million miles, the sore-spent star-beams come,
And moths and bats hold witches' sabbath in the place.

And then I picture thee some bloodstained Holyrood,
Dread haunted palace of the bat and owl, whence steal,
Shrouded all day, lost murdered spirits of the wood,
And fright young happy nests with homeless hoot and
squeal.

Some Rizzio nightingale that plained adulterous love
Beneath the boudoir-bough of some fast-married bird,
Some dove that cooed to some one else's lawful dove,
And felt the dagger-beak pierce while his lady heard.

Then, maybe, dangling from thy gloomy gallows boughs,
A human corpse swings, mournful, rattling bones and
chains—
His eighteenth century flesh hath fattened nineteenth century
cows—
Ghastly Æolian harp fingered of winds and rains.

Poor Rizpah comes to reap each newly-fallen bone
That once thrilled soft, a little limb, within her womb ;
And mark yon alchemist, with zodiac-spangled zone,
Wrenching the mandrake root that fattens in the gloom.

So rounds thy day, from maiden morn to haunted night,
From larks and sunlit dreams to owl and gibbering ghost ;
A catacomb of dark, a sponge of living light,
To the wide sea of air a green and welcome coast.

I seek a god, old tree : accept my worship, thou !
All other gods have failed me always in my need.
I hang my votive song beneath thy temple bough,
Unto thy strength I cry—Old monster, be my creed !

Give me to clasp this earth with feeding roots like thine,
To mount yon heaven with such star-aspiring head,
Fill full with sap and buds this shrunken life of mine,
And from my boughs O might such stalwart sons be shed !

With

With loving cheek pressed close against thy horny breast,
I hear the roar of sap mounting within thy veins ;
Tingling with buds, thy great hands open towards the west,
To catch the sweetheart wind that brings the sister rains.

O winds that blow from out the fruitful mouth of God,
O rains that softly fall from his all-loving eyes,
You that bring buds to trees and daisies to the sod,
O God's best Angel of the Spring, in me arise.