

THE FOUNTAIN TREE*

IN one of the Canary Islands, grows a tree which furnishes water to the inhabitants and beasts of the whole place.

The district in which this tree stands is called *Tigulatre*, near to which, and in the cliff, or steep rocky ascent, surrounding the whole island, is a narrow gutter or gully, which commences at the sea, and continues to the summit of the cliff, where it joins or coincides with a valley which is terminated by the steep front of a rock.

On the top of this rock, grows a tree, called, in the language of the ancient inhabitants, *Garse* (sacred or holy tree), which for many years has been preserved sound, entire and fresh. Its leaves constantly distil such a quantity of water, as is sufficient to furnish drink to every living creature in Hierro; nature having provided this remedy for the drought of the island. It is situated about a league and a half from the sea. Nobody knows of what species it is, only that it is called *Til*. It is distinct from other trees, and stands by itself. The circumference of its trunk is about twelve spans, the diameter four, and in height from the ground to the top of the highest branch forty spans: the circumference of all the branches together, is one hundred and twenty feet. The branches are thick and extended; the lowest commence about an ell from the ground. Its fruit resembles the acorn, and tastes something like the kernel of a pine apple, but is softer and more aromatic. The leaves of this tree resemble those of the laurel, but are larger, wider, and more curved; they come forth in perpetual succession, so that the tree always remains green. On the north side of the trunk, are two large tanks, or cisterns, of rough stone, or rather one cistern divided, each half being twenty feet square, and sixteen spans in depth. One of these contains water for the drinking of the inhabitants; and the other that which they use for their cattle, washing, and such like purposes. Every morning, near this part of the island, a cloud or mist arises from the sea, which the south and easterly winds force against the fore-mentioned steep cliff, so that the cloud, having no vent but by the gutter, gradually ascends it, and from thence advances slowly to the extremity of the valley, where it is stopped and checked by the front of the rock, which terminates the valley, and then rests upon the thick leaves and wide-spreading branches of the tree, from whence it distils in drops, during the remainder of the day, until it is at length exhausted, in the same manner that we see water drip from the leaves of trees after a heavy shower of rain. This tree yields most water in those years when the Levant or easterly winds have prevailed for a continuance, for by these winds only the clouds or mists are drawn hither from the sea.

A person lives on the spot near where this tree grows, who is appointed by the Council to take care of it, and its water; and is allowed a house to live in, with a certain salary. He every day distributes to each family of the district, seven pots or vessels full of water, besides what he gives to the principal people in the island.

* This extract from George Glas's *History of the Canary Islands* (1764) was submitted by R. F. Wood.

$$1 \text{ league} = 3 \text{ mi} \\ = 4.8 \text{ km}$$

$$1 \text{ span} = 9 \text{ in} \\ = 22.9 \text{ cm}$$

$$1 \text{ ell} = 45 \text{ in} \\ = 114.3 \text{ cm}$$

Trunk c. r. 2.75 m
" diam. 0.9 m

Height 9.2 m
C. r. 36.6 m

Tanks 2 each
37.2 m² and
3.66 m deep
or each 136 m³
total 272 m³



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