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Sojourner Truth

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SOJOURNER TRUTH

tall gaunt and black
nearly six feet high
the audience tried to hiss her down
and still she rose
ever so slowly and solemnly she strode
head erect
eyes piercing the air
like one in a dream

she strode like a queen
into the church in akron ohio
may twenty-eight nineteen fifty-one
the crowd hissed but sojourner stood
fearless though female and also black
a deep hush and then she spoke
in deep tones not loud but clear:

"that man over there
he says woman needs a helping hand
but nobody ever helps me," she said
" and ain't i a woman?
look at my arm," she boomed
(we see an armful of muscle and power)
"i have ploughed and planted
and no man could head me
and ain't i a woman?
i could work like a man
eat like a man when i could get it
bear the whip like a man
and ain't i a woman?"

"i have borne thirteen kids
and seen most of 'em sold
and when i cried out my mother's grief
none except God heard me
and ain't i a woman?"

"then they talk about this thing in the head"
("intellect", someone whispered)
"that's it!
what's that got to do with women's rights?"

the cheering was long and loud
"then that little man in black down there
he says Christ was no woman
so women can't have as much rights as men
where did he come from
your Christ?"

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more than rumbling thunder her deep wonderful tones
stilled that restless crowd and she raised her voice
eyes blazing
arms outstretched she asked
"where did he come from
your Christ?
tell me
from God and a woman and that's the truth
man had nothing to do with it at all."

turning to another objector she became
counsel for the defense of mother eve
"if the first-ever woman was strong enough to
turn the world upside down on her own
all these women together - "
(she looked over the crowd)
"should be able to turn it back again
and now they want it
men better let 'em do it."

amid roars of applause sojourner returned
to her corner where all along she'd crouched
quiet and reticent on the pulpit stairs
bonnet shading her eyes
elbows on knees
chin resting upon her broad hard palms
all through the sessions until this day
when she rose and subdued the mob
with a magic all hers she turned sneers and jeers
into soft notes of admiration and respect.

-Based on Frances Gage's reminiscences of a woman's convention in Akron, Ohio,
May 28 and 29, 1951.

by chi chi laylor