

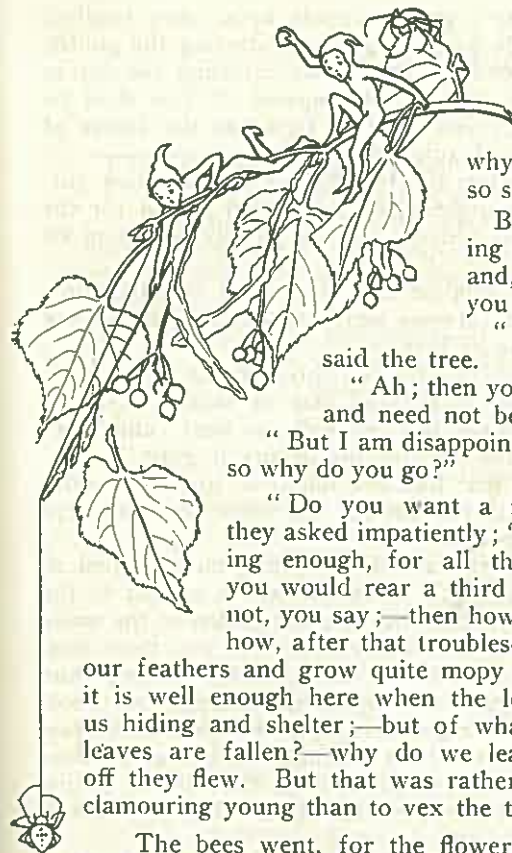
## The Linden Tree.

IT was a linden tree, its broad yellow-green leaves opening in thick masses as the spring sun called the birds to sing of summer coming. It grew beside a slow-flowing river, the sleepy Avon, together with alders, and silver birches, and pink-flowered quinces. The earliest summer winds were astir. It was the delightful month of October, whose favourite colour, and scent too, is lilac. October, and summer; everything that is beautiful seems to come nearer then;—the snowy mountains nearer the hills, the heaven nearer the earth, and joy nearer the heart.

The linden sang a murmuring song as the light wind stirred its leaves. "You have come again, O wandering lover," it sang, remembering only the beautiful days of the past years, when the winds came gently, and laden with many odours; "You have come again; will you wander again?"—and even as the words were breathed the wind was away, playing with the long hair of the shyly-leaning birches. "You wander like the ever-changing clouds," said the linden, "but you are always welcome," and its murmuring song died away.

Through the summer the winds came and went; and feeling how they lingered in its leaves,— "I am sure you love me now," said the linden; and in its shady shelter it hung sweet flowers, so nearly the colour of its leaves that only the winds and the bees could find them. And the bees came, humming their song, and gathering the nectar. "You kiss me only for what I give you," said the tree; "yet no, you give me your songs in return, singing of the summer, with its hedges of hawthorn, and its flowery gardens." The bees revelled among the flowers, humming louder as if in answer; but they had no thoughts for the tree; they were intoxicated with the sweetness of the nectar, and cared for nothing but that.

Then, too, as the shelter of the leaves made twilight hiding-places, birds came and built their nests; and the linden watched the building, and watched the dainty eggs as they lay in the finished nest, and enjoyed the song as the bird sang



near his mate. "Everything comes to me with singing," murmured the tree; "but

why do you leave me again so soon?" it asked the birds.

But they were busy feeding the hungry young ones; and, "We have not left you yet," they answered.

"But I know you will,"

said the tree.

"Ah; then you know what to expect, and need not be disappointed."

"But I am disappointed when you leave me; so why do you go?"

"Do you want a never-ending nesting?" they asked impatiently; "two broods are wearying enough, for all their pleasure. Perhaps you would rear a third one?—no, you could not, you say;—then how can we?—you will see how, after that troublesome time, we shall lose

our feathers and grow quite mopy for a while. Besides; it is well enough here when the leaves are thick, giving us hiding and shelter;—but of what use is it when your leaves are fallen?—why do we leave you, indeed!" and off they flew. But that was rather to get food for their clamouring young than to vex the tree.

The bees went, for the flowers were faded, and the birds went, for their young were fledged. But the tree was still beautiful; and in the sultry January days many lovers sat in the shade of the linden. They did not understand it when it sang to them; sang of happiness because it could feel that they were happy. Yet in later days some, taught by sorrow, understood; and they would come and lean against the grey bole, so that it thrilled to the love that still burned in their lonely hearts, and its leaves trembled.

March came; and the winds, that had grown boisterous, now grew rough, buffeting the tree un- gently. April came; Autumn burned in the skies, and Autumn glowed, too, in the linden, its leaves being a glorious dome of

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gold, as though it were a golden cupola upon some heathen temple. And the winds took delight in scattering the golden leaves. "Thus flies beauty," they cried, whirling the leaves along the grass where daisies still lingered; "You shall be stripped of your pride; you shall be bared to the frosts of the lengthening nights of autumn."

The frosts came when the red star of the Scorpion glittered evilly in the still nights; and the linden sighed for the short summer nights of Orion, and the ghostly lovers in its shadow.

You would never suppose that the winds could become so cruel; their summer caresses were all pretence; they were hard of heart, and bare of love.

"I am alone again," murmured the tree, its leaves scattered, "alone and bare to the red star of winter. So the summer goes; so went the last; so will the next; and there is not one will stay with me now my beauty is gone."

But the little elf that had not dared to love the linden when she stood so beautiful through the three seasons, crept to the root of the tree.

"I longed to love you when the young buds tingled in the broken days of August; when the leaves spread to the warm suns of October; when they glowed golden in the misty morns of April. I longed to love you, to love you more than did the winds, or the bees, or the birds, or the lovers;—and because your beauty gave me joy, I shall keep your root warm through the bitter nights of June; and your lovelines will come again." And the little elf made its bed at the root of the linden, and there it slept through the winter, giving the warmth of love to the tree, that dreamed and dreamed and was happy.

It awakened in the spring, and looked down with misty eyes towards where the little sleeping elf had lain; but the elf had stolen away.

"You dear thing," said the linden; "it is not only my passing beauty that you love then;—you give love, and thus creates new beauty. At least I can make your bed soft and warmer, little elf."

And it covered the roots with mosses and lichens and dry leaves; and as the autumn nights came silently in the mists the little elf returned to its winter bed, whispering as it nestled in the mosses, "I believe the beautiful linden is kind of heart to me;—the beautiful linden, oh, the beautiful linden."