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Alders And Birches

Mrs. William Starr Dana

There is another shrub or low tree growing along the brook's edge which flowers almost as early as the willows.

This is the alder.

Perhaps you noticed last fall that these alders were hung with a quantity of little green tassels. These tassels did not fall off with the leaves in November. Through the long winter they clung to the shrub. Sometimes they wore little coats of ice which made them look like the glass ornaments on a Christmas tree.

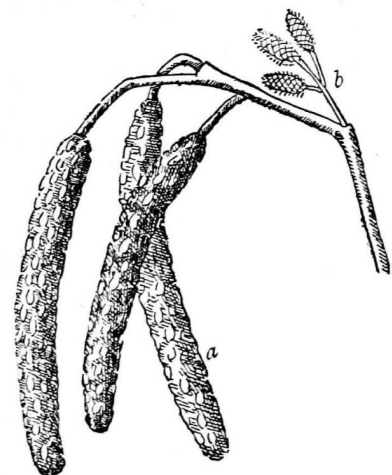
When the warm weather came, they put off their ice coats, and grew larger and longer, and at last let out a quantity of stamens.

But on the same alder tree that bears these tassels with flowers made up of stamens or dust boxes, you find also the tassels flowers made up of pistils.

If you make a search, you will find the little upright clusters composed of these flowers with pistils.

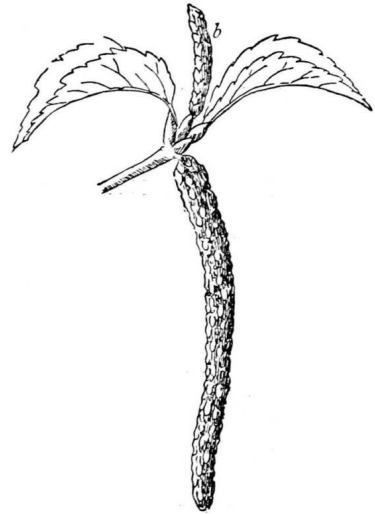
Late in the year, when these clusters have turned into fruit, they look like this picture.

The pretty birches are cousins to the alders, and keep house in much the same way, bearing the tassels with stamens and the little clusters made up of flowers with pistils on the same tree.



The tassels on some of the birches are very beautiful. When full grown, they are golden yellow, and so long and soft and graceful that one feels like stroking them and playing with them as he would with a kitten.

I hope every country child who reads this book and does not already know the willows, the alders, and the birches, will make their acquaintance this spring, and will examine their two kinds of flowers. And I hope that branches from the different trees will be brought into the city schoolroom, so that all can see these flowers, which are among the very earliest of the year.



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