



Newbury's Old Elm

Charles Skinner

North American

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Among the venerable relics of Newbury few are better known and more prized than the old elm. It is a stout tree, with a girth of twenty-four and a half feet, and is said to have been standing since 1713. In that year it was planted by Richard Jacques, then a youthful rustic, who had a sweetheart, as all rustics have, and adored her as rustics and other men should do. On one of his visits he stayed uncommonly late. It was nearly ten o'clock when he set off for home. The town had been abed an hour or more; the night was murky and oppressively still, and corpse-candles were dancing in the graveyard. Witch times had not been so far agone that he felt comfortable, and, lest some sprite, bogie, troll, or goblin should waylay him, he tore an elm branch from a tree that grew before his sweetheart's house, and flourished it as he walked. He reached home without experiencing any of the troubles that a superstitious fancy had conjured. As he was about to cast the branch away a comforting vision of his loved one came into his mind, and he determined to plant the branch at his own door, that in the hours of their separation he might be reminded of her who dwelt beneath the parent tree. He did so. It rooted and grew, and when the youth and maid had long been married, their children and grandchildren sported beneath its branches.

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