

of young men and maidens." It is closely connected, indeed, with old English customs and observances. But in almost all countries it is the same: people credit it with the possession of miraculous power, speak of its seed gleaming like gold on St. John's Eve, and attribute to it the most surprising medicinal virtues. Why is it called *St. John's wort*? For the answer to this question we must go back to old Scandinavian times, when we shall find that it was the symbol of the witches. Now, the witches were, as was natural, unfriendly to Baldur (the sun), and the plant went commonly by the name of Baldur's blood. On the conversion of the North to Christianity, the summer solstice—in the northern mythology the death of Baldur—was made by the Christians to coincide with the nativity of John the Baptist. The day, however, in spite of the change of faith, retained its pagan characteristics. On Midsummer's Night witches peopled the air, ghosts were seen, and the future stood revealed to those who observed certain strange rites. As the heathen festival was taken into the service of the Church, so the plant also was baptized, and Baldur's blood became St. John's Wort, the reddish sap, which had been held to indicate the blood of the Scandinavian god now suggesting that of the Baptist.

In Sweden and Norway the St. John's Wort is the central plant of the Midsummer's-gvastar, and the bouquet gathered on St. John's Eve is hung up as an antidote to witches. "For on that night," it has been remarked, "the orgies of the Walpurgis witches demand that every precaution should be taken. The Bon or Bel fires, kindled in their honour when they were deities, were now kindled to scare them when they had been transformed into devils. The plant, put over every door as their badge, was now, with the cross, set to bar their entrance."

A few miscellaneous continental superstitions in connection with this plant must for the present suffice. In the Tyrol it is a popular saying that, if a traveller have a piece of it in his shoes, he will never be weary. In the Netherlands it is believed that, if it be gathered before sunrise, it will prove good against lightning. Wreaths of the St. John's Wort are placed on the roofs of houses on the Lower Rhine as a protection against evil. In Germany special power is attributed to the sap of the plant. It is sometimes mixed with beer; but whether to improve its quality or for more subtle reasons we are not informed.

In our own country, on Midsummer's-day, it used to be gathered in great quantities. Some of the uses to which it was applied may be learned from the following translation, by Barnaby Googe, of the Latin poem of Naogeorgus, called "The Popish Kingdom":

"Then doth the joyful feast of John
The Baptist take his turne,
When bonfires great with lofty flame,
In everie town doth burne;