

Another foreign superstition is of interest to schoolboys: it is said that if boys are beaten with an elder-stick it hinders their growth.

Of the uses to which the elder is applied in curing diseases, we have some curious particulars in an old work, "The Anatomie of the Elder," translated from the Latin of Blochwich by C. de Iryngio, 1653. It tells that "the common people keep as a great secret in curing wounds the leaves of the elder, which they have gathered the last day of April, and which, to disappoint the charms of witches, they had affixed to their dores and windows." An amulet against the erysipelas is also taken notice of, "made of the elder on which the sunne never shined;" and another is described "made of the elder growing on a sallow." We are also told that "some hang a cross made of the elder and sallow, mutually interweaving, about the children's necks."

In Bohemia, three spoonful of the water in which an invalid has bathed are poured at the root of an elder-tree, with the words, "Elder, God send to thee that thou mayst take my fever upon thee." This rite must be performed on three successive days; the sick person will then recover, if he has not meanwhile passed over water.

So much for the living: the dead also have an interest in the elder. In far back times it was among the plants burned with human bodies. More recently it formed the whip-staff of the drivers of hearses. It is a custom in the Tyrol to trim an elder-bush in the form of a cross and plant it on a new grave: the survivors judge by the blooming of the tree whether or not the soul of the deceased is happy.

It is well known that the younger branches of the elder are full of pith, which the schoolboy pushes out, and so forms a hollow pipe fitted for a toy. In old times musical instruments were made by dwellers in the country in this way; and from this circumstance the tree got the name in England of pipe-tree, or bore-tree, and in Scotland of bour-tree. An odd notion in connection with this is mentioned by Pliny as prevalent in his time. "The shepherds are thoroughly persuaded," he says, "that the elder-tree, growing in a by-place out of the way, and where the crowing of cocks from any town cannot be heard, makes more shrill pipes and better trumpets than any other."

In old times the appearance of the berries of the elder was held to indicate the season for sowing wheat:—

"With purple fruit when elder branches bend,
And their high hues the hips and cornels lend,
Ere yet chill hoar-frost comes, or sleety rain,
Sow with choice wheat the neatly furrow'd plain."

THE ST. JOHN'S WORT is a plant of quite as wonderful a nature as the elder, and used to be considered in England as "powerful for the expulsion of witches and the prognostication of the fates.