

# FRAZER JAMES GEORGE

THE GOLDEN BOUGH: A  
STUDY IN MAGIC AND  
RELIGION (THIRD EDITION,  
VOL. 11 OF 12)

**James Frazer**  
**The Golden Bough: A Study**  
**in Magic and Religion**  
**(Third Edition, Vol. 11 of 12)**

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# **James George Frazer**

## **The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion**

### **(Third Edition, Vol. 11 of 12)**

## **Chapter VI. Fire- Festivals in Other Lands**

### **§ 1. The Fire-walk**

Bonfires at the Pongol festival in Southern India.

At first sight the interpretation of the European fire customs as charms for making sunshine is confirmed by a parallel custom observed by the Hindoos of Southern India at the Pongol or Feast of Ingathering. The festival is celebrated in the early part of January, when, according to Hindoo astrologers, the sun enters the tropic of Capricorn, and the chief event of the festival coincides with the passage of the sun. For some days previously the boys gather heaps of sticks, straw, dead leaves, and everything that will burn. On the morning of the first day of the festival the

heaps are fired. Every street and lane has its bonfire. The young folk leap over the flames or pile on fresh fuel. This fire is an offering to Sûrya, the sun-god, or to Agni, the deity of fire; it “wakes him from his sleep, calling on him again to gladden the earth with his light and heat.”<sup>1</sup> If this is indeed the explanation which the people themselves give of the festival, it seems decisive in favour of the solar explanation of the fires; for to say that the fires waken the sun-god from his sleep is only a metaphorical or mythical way of saying that they actually help to rekindle the sun's light and heat. But the hesitation which the writer indicates between the two distinct deities of sun and fire seems to prove that he is merely giving his own interpretation of the rite, not reporting the views of the celebrants. If that is so, the expression of his opinion has no claim to authority.

Bonfires at the Holi festival in Northern India. The village priest expected to pass through the fire. Leaping over the ashes of the fire to get rid of disease.

A festival of Northern India which presents points of resemblance to the popular European celebrations which we have been considering is the Holi. This is a village festival held in early spring at the full moon of the month Phalgun. Large bonfires are lit and young people dance round them. The people believe that the fires prevent blight, and that the ashes cure disease. At Barsana the local village priest is expected to pass through the

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. E. Gover, “The Pongol Festival in Southern India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, N.S., v. (1870) pp. 96 sq.

Holi bonfire, which, in the opinion of the faithful, cannot burn him. Indeed he holds his land rent-free simply on the score of his being fire-proof. On one occasion when the priest disappointed the expectant crowd by merely jumping over the outermost verge of the smouldering ashes and then bolting into his cell, they threatened to deprive him of his benefice if he did not discharge his spiritual functions better when the next Holi season came round. Another feature of the festival which has, or once had, its counterpart in the corresponding European ceremonies is the unchecked profligacy which prevails among the Hindoos at this time.<sup>2</sup> In Kumaon, a district of North-West India, at the foot of the Himalayas, each clan celebrates the Holi festival by cutting down a tree, which is thereupon stripped of its leaves, decked with shreds of cloth, and burnt at some convenient place in the quarter of the town inhabited by the clan. Some of the songs sung on this occasion are of a ribald character. The people leap over the ashes of the fire, believing that they thus rid themselves of itch and other diseases of the skin. While the trees are burning, each clan tries to carry off strips of cloth from the tree of another clan, and success in the attempt is thought to ensure good luck.

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<sup>2</sup> W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* (Westminster, 1896), ii. 314 *sqq.*; Captain G. R. Hearn, "Passing through the Fire at Phalon," *Man*, v. (1905) pp. 154 *sq.* On the custom of walking through fire, or rather over a furnace, see Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology* (London, 1897), pp. 148-175; *id.*, in *Athenaeum*, 26th August and 14th October, 1899; *id.*, in *Folk-lore*, xii. (1901) pp. 452-455; *id.*, in *Folk-lore*, xiv. (1903) pp. 87-89. Mr. Lang was the first to call attention to the wide prevalence of the rite in many parts of the world.

In Gwalior large heaps of cow-dung are burnt instead of trees. Among the Marwaris the festival is celebrated by the women with obscene songs and gestures. A monstrous and disgusting image of a certain Nathuram, who is said to have been a notorious profligate, is set up in a bazaar and then smashed with blows of shoes and bludgeons while the bonfire of cow-dung is blazing. No household can be without an image of Nathuram, and on the night when the bride first visits her husband, the image of this disreputable personage is placed beside her couch. Barren women and mothers whose children have died look to Nathuram for deliverance from their troubles.<sup>3</sup> Various stories are told to account for the origin of the Holi festival. According to one legend it was instituted in order to get rid of a troublesome demon (*rākshasî*). The people were directed to kindle a bonfire and circumambulate it, singing and uttering fearlessly whatever might come into their minds. Appalled by these vociferations, by the oblations to fire, and by the laughter of the children, the demon was to be destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

Vernal festival of fire in China. Ceremony to ensure an abundant year. Walking through the fire. Ashes of the fire mixed

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<sup>3</sup> Pandit Janardan Joshi, in *North Indian Notes and Queries*, iii. pp. 92 sq., § 199 (September, 1893); W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* (Westminster, 1896), ii. 318 sq.

<sup>4</sup> E. T. Atkinson, "Notes on the History of Religion in the Himalayas of the N.W. Provinces," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, liii. Part i. (Calcutta, 1884) p. 60. Compare W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* (Westminster, 1896), ii. 313 sq.

with the fodder of the cattle.

In the Chinese province of Fo-Kien we also meet with a vernal festival of fire which may be compared to the fire-festivals of Europe. The ceremony, according to an eminent authority, is a solar festival in honour of the renewal of vegetation and of the vernal warmth. It falls in April, on the thirteenth day of the third month in the Chinese calendar, and is doubtless connected with the ancient custom of renewing the fire, which, as we saw, used to be observed in China at this season.<sup>5</sup> The chief performers in the ceremony are labourers, who refrain from women for seven days, and fast for three days before the festival. During these days they are taught in the temple how to discharge the difficult and dangerous duty which is to be laid upon them. On the eve of the festival an enormous brazier of charcoal, sometimes twenty feet wide, is prepared in front of the temple of the Great God, the protector of life. At sunrise next morning the brazier is lighted and kept burning by fresh supplies of fuel. A Taoist priest throws a mixture of salt and rice on the fire to conjure the flames and ensure an abundant year. Further, two exorcists, barefooted and followed by two peasants, traverse the fire again and again till it is somewhat beaten down. Meantime the procession is forming in the temple. The image of the god of the temple is placed in a sedan-chair, resplendent with red paint and gilding, and is carried forth by a score or more of barefooted peasants. On the shafts of the sedan-chair, behind the image, stands a

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<sup>5</sup> See above, vol. i. pp. 136 *sq.*



magician with a dagger stuck through the upper parts of his arms and grasping in each hand a great sword, with which he essays to deal himself violent blows on the back; however, the strokes as they descend are mostly parried by peasants, who walk behind him and interpose bamboo rods between his back and the swords. Wild music now strikes up, and under the excitement caused by its stirring strains the procession passes thrice across the furnace. At their third passage the performers are followed by other peasants carrying the utensils of the temple; and the rustic mob, electrified by the frenzied spectacle, falls in behind. Strange as it may seem, burns are comparatively rare. Inured from infancy to walking barefoot, the peasants can step with impunity over the glowing charcoal, provided they plant their feet squarely and do not stumble; for usage has so hardened their soles that the skin is converted into a sort of leathery or horny substance which is almost callous to heat. But sometimes, when they slip and a hot coal touches the sides of their feet or ankles, they may be seen to pull a wry face and jump out of the furnace amid the laughter of the spectators. When this part of the ceremony is over, the procession defiles round the village, and the priests distribute to every family a leaf of yellow paper inscribed with a magic character, which is thereupon glued over the door of the house. The peasants carry off the charred embers from the furnace, pound them to ashes, and mix the ashes with the fodder of their cattle, believing that it fattens them. However, the Chinese Government disapproves of these performances, and

next morning a number of the performers may generally be seen in the hands of the police, laid face downwards on the ground and receiving a sound castigation on a part of their person which is probably more sensitive than the soles of their feet.<sup>6</sup>

Passage of the image of the deity through the fire. Passage of inspired men through the fire in India.

In this last festival the essential feature of the ceremony appears to be the passage of the image of the deity across the fire; it may be compared to the passage of the straw effigy of Kupalo across the midsummer bonfire in Russia.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see presently, such customs may perhaps be interpreted as magical rites designed to produce light and warmth by subjecting the deity himself to the heat and glow of the furnace; and where, as at Barsana, priests or sorcerers have been accustomed in the discharge of their functions to walk through or over fire, they have sometimes done so as the living representatives or embodiments of deities, spirits, or other supernatural beings. Some confirmation of this view is furnished by the beliefs and practices of the Dosadhs, a low Indian caste in Behar and Chota Nagpur. On the fifth, tenth, and full-moon days of three months

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<sup>6</sup> G. Schlegel, *Uranographie Chinoise* (The Hague and Leyden, 1875), pp. 143 sq.; *id.*, "La fête de fouler le feu célébrée en Chine et par les Chinois à Java," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, ix. (1896) pp. 193-195. Compare J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vi. (Leyden, 1910) pp. 1292 sq. According to Professor Schlegel, the connexion between this festival and the old custom of solemnly extinguishing and relighting the fire in spring is unquestionable.

<sup>7</sup> *The Dying God*, p. 262.

in the year, the priest walks over a narrow trench filled with smouldering wood ashes, and is supposed thus to be inspired by the tribal god Rahu, who becomes incarnate in him for a time. Full of the spirit and also, it is surmised, of drink, the man of god then mounts a bamboo platform, where he sings hymns and distributes to the crowd leaves of *tulsi*, which cure incurable diseases, and flowers which cause barren women to become happy mothers. The service winds up with a feast lasting far into the night, at which the line that divides religious fervour from drunken revelry cannot always be drawn with absolute precision.<sup>8</sup> Similarly the Bhuiyas, a Dravidian tribe of Mirzapur, worship their tribal hero Bir by walking over a short trench filled with fire, and they say that the man who is possessed by the hero does not feel any pain in the soles of his feet.<sup>9</sup> Ceremonies of this sort used to be observed in most districts of the Madras Presidency, sometimes in discharge of vows made in time of sickness or distress, sometimes periodically in honour of a deity. Where the ceremony was observed periodically, it generally occurred in March or June, which are the months of the vernal equinox and

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<sup>8</sup> (Sir) H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Ethnographic Glossary* (Calcutta, 1891-1892), i. 255 sq. Compare W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* (Westminster, 1896), i. 19; *id.*, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta, 1896), ii. 355. According to Sir Herbert Risley, the trench filled with smouldering ashes is so narrow (only a span and a quarter wide) “that very little dexterity would enable a man to walk with his feet on either edge, so as not to touch the smouldering ashes at the bottom.”

<sup>9</sup> W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, ii. 82.

the summer solstice respectively. A narrow trench, sometimes twenty yards long and half a foot deep, was filled with small sticks and twigs, mostly of tamarind, which were kindled and kept burning till they sank into a mass of glowing embers. Along this the devotees, often fifty or sixty in succession, walked, ran, or leaped barefoot. In 1854 the Madras Government instituted an enquiry into the custom, but found that it was not attended by danger or instances of injury sufficient to call for governmental interference.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> M. J. Walhouse, "Passing through the Fire," *Indian Antiquary*, vii. (1878) pp. 126 sq. Compare J. A. Dubois, *Mœurs, Institutions et Cérémonies des Peuples de l'Inde* (Paris, 1825), ii. 373; E. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (Madras, 1906), pp. 471-486; G. F. D'Penha, in *Indian Antiquary*, xxxi. (1902) p. 392; "Fire-walking in Ganjam," *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. iv. No. 3 (Madras, 1903), pp. 214-216. At Akka timanhully, one of the many villages which help to make up the town of Bangalore in Southern India, one woman at least from every house is expected to walk through the fire at the village festival. Captain J. S. F. Mackenzie witnessed the ceremony in 1873. A trench, four feet long by two feet wide, was filled with live embers. The priest walked through it thrice, and the women afterwards passed through it in batches. Capt. Mackenzie remarks: "From the description one reads of walking through fire, I expected something sensational. Nothing could be more tame than the ceremony we saw performed; in which there never was nor ever could be the slightest danger to life. Some young girl, whose soles were tender, might next morning find that she had a blister, but this would be the extent of harm she could receive." See Captain J. S. F. Mackenzie, "The Village Feast," *Indian Antiquary*, iii. (1874) pp. 6-9. But to fall on the hot embers might result in injuries which would prove fatal, and such an accident is known to have occurred at a village in Bengal. See H. J. Stokes, "Walking through Fire," *Indian Antiquary*, ii. (1873) pp. 190 sq. At Afkanbour, five days' march from Delhi, the Arab traveller Ibn Batutah saw a troop of fakirs dancing and even rolling on the glowing embers of a wood fire. See *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah* (Paris, 1853-1858), ii. 6 sq., iii. 439.

Hindoo fire-festival in honour of Darma Rajah and Draupadi. Worshippers walking through the fire.

The French traveller Sonnerat has described how, in the eighteenth century, the Hindoos celebrated a fire-festival of this sort in honour of the god Darma Rajah and his wife Drobedé (Draupadi). The festival lasted eighteen days, during which all who had vowed to take part in it were bound to fast, to practise continence, to sleep on the ground without a mat, and to walk on a furnace. On the eighteenth day the images of Darma Rajah and his spouse were carried in procession to the furnace, and the performers followed dancing, their heads crowned with flowers and their bodies smeared with saffron. The furnace consisted of a trench about forty feet long, filled with hot embers. When the images had been carried thrice round it, the worshippers walked over the embers, faster or slower, according to the degree of their religious fervour, some carrying their children in their arms, others brandishing spears, swords, and standards. This part of the ceremony being over, the bystanders hastened to rub their foreheads with ashes from the furnace, and to beg from the performers the flowers which they had worn in their hair; and such as obtained them preserved the flowers carefully. The rite was performed in honour of the goddess Drobedé (Draupadi), the heroine of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. For she married five brothers all at once; every year she left one of her husbands to betake herself to another, but before doing so she had to purify herself by fire. There was no fixed date for

the celebration of the rite, but it could only be held in one of the first three months of the year.<sup>11</sup> In some villages the ceremony is performed annually; in others, which cannot afford the expense every year, it is observed either at longer intervals, perhaps once in three, seven, ten, or twelve years, or only in special emergencies, such as the outbreak of smallpox, cholera, or plague. Anybody but a pariah or other person of very low degree may take part in the ceremony in fulfilment of a vow. For example, if a man suffers from some chronic malady, he may vow to Draupadi that, should he be healed of his disease, he will walk over the fire at her festival. As a preparation for the solemnity he sleeps in the temple and observes a fast. The celebration of the rite in any village is believed to protect the cattle and the crops and to guard the inhabitants from dangers of all kinds. When it is over, many people carry home the holy ashes of the fire as a talisman which will drive away devils and demons.<sup>12</sup>

Fire-festival of the Badagas in Southern India. Sacred fire made by friction. Walking through the fire. Cattle driven over the hot embers. The fire-walk preceded by a libation of milk and followed by ploughing and sowing.

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<sup>11</sup> Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (Paris, 1782), i. 247 sq.

<sup>12</sup> *Madras Government Museum, Bulletin*, vol. iv. No. 1 (Madras, 1901), pp. 55-59; E. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (Madras, 1906), pp. 471-474. One of the places where the fire-festival in honour of Draupadi takes place annually is the Allandur Temple, at St. Thomas's Mount, near Madras. Compare "Fire-walking Ceremony at the Dharmaraja Festival," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, vol. ii. No. 1 (October, 1910), pp. 29-32.

The Badagas, an agricultural tribe of the Neilgherry Hills in Southern India, annually celebrate a festival of fire in various parts of their country. For example, at Nidugala the festival is held with much ceremony in the month of January. Omens are taken by boiling two pots of milk side by side on two hearths. If the milk overflows uniformly on all sides, the crops will be abundant for all the villages; but if it flows over on one side only, the harvest will be good for villages on that side only. The sacred fire is made by friction, a vertical stick of *Rhodomyrtus tomentosus* being twirled by means of a cord in a socket let into a thick bough of *Debregeasia velutina*. With this holy flame a heap of wood of two sorts, the *Eugenia Jambolana* and *Phyllanthus Emblica*, is kindled, and the hot embers are spread over a fire-pit about five yards long and three yards broad. When all is ready, the priest ties bells on his legs and approaches the fire-pit, carrying milk freshly drawn from a cow which has calved for the first time, and also bearing flowers of *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Leucas aspera*, or jasmine. After doing obeisance, he throws the flowers on the embers and then pours some of the milk over them. If the omens are propitious, that is, if the flowers remain for a few seconds unscorched and the milk does not hiss when it falls on the embers, the priest walks boldly over the embers and is followed by a crowd of celebrants, who before they submit to the ordeal count the hairs on their feet. If any of the hairs are found to be singed after the passage through the fire-pit, it is an ill omen. Sometimes the Badagas drive their cattle, which have recovered

from sickness, over the hot embers in performance of a vow.<sup>13</sup> At Melur, another place of the Badagas in the Neilgherry Hills, three, five, or seven men are chosen to walk through the fire at the festival; and before they perform the ceremony they pour into an adjacent stream milk from cows which have calved for the first time during the year. A general feast follows the performance of the rite, and next day the land is ploughed and sown for the first time that season. At Jakkaneri, another place of the Badagas in the Neilgherry Hills, the passage through the fire at the festival “seems to have originally had some connection with agricultural prospects, as a young bull is made to go partly across the fire-pit before the other devotees, and the owners of young cows which have had their first calves during the year take precedence of others in the ceremony, and bring offerings of milk, which are sprinkled over the burning embers.”<sup>14</sup> According to another account the ceremony among the Badagas was performed every second year at a harvest festival, and the performers were a set of degenerate Brahmans called Haruvarus, who “used to walk on burning coals with bare feet, pretending that the god they worshipped could allay the heat and make fire like cold water to them. As they only remained a few seconds, however, on the coals, it was impossible that they could receive much injury.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), i. 98 sq.; *id.*, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (Madras, 1906), pp. 476 sq.

<sup>14</sup> E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), i. 100 sq.

<sup>15</sup> F. Metz, *The Tribes inhabiting the Neilgherry Hills*, Second Edition (Mangalore,



## The fire-walk in Japan.

In Japan the fire-walk is performed as a religious rite twice a year at a temple in the Kanda quarter of Tokio. One of the performances takes place in September. It was witnessed in the year 1903 by the wife of an American naval officer, who has described it. In a court of the temple a bed of charcoal about six yards long, two yards wide, and two feet deep was laid down and covered with a deep layer of straw. Being ignited, the straw blazed up, and when the flames had died down the bed of hot charcoal was fanned by attendants into a red glow. Priests dressed in robes of white cotton then walked round the fire, striking sparks from flint and steel and carrying trays full of salt. When mats had been laid down at the two ends of the fire and salt poured on them, the priests rubbed their bare feet twice in the salt and then walked calmly down the middle of the fire. They were followed by a number of people, including some boys and a woman with a baby in her arms. "The Shintoists claim that, having been perfectly purified by their prayers and ceremonies, no evil has any power over them. Fire they regard as the very spirit of evil; so twice a year, I believe, they go through this fire-walking as a kind of 'outward and visible sign of inward spiritual grace.'"<sup>16</sup>

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1864), p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> "A Japanese Fire-walk," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, v. (1903) pp. 377-380. The ceremony has been described to me by two eye-witnesses, Mr. Ernest Foxwell of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Miss E. P. Hughes, formerly Principal of the Teachers' Training College, Cambridge. Mr. Foxwell examined the feet of the

The fire-walk in Fiji, Tahiti, the Marquesas Islands, and Trinidad.

In the island of Mbengga, one of the Fijian archipelago, once every year a dracaena, which grows in profusion on the grassy hillsides, becomes fit to yield the sugar of which its fibrous root is full. To render the roots edible it is necessary to bake them among hot stones for four days. A great pit is dug and filled with great stones and blazing logs, and when the flames have died down and the stones are at white heat, the oven is ready to receive the roots. At this moment the members of a certain clan called Na Ivilankata, favoured of the gods, leap into the oven and walk unharmed upon the hot stones, which would scorch the feet of any other persons. On one occasion when the ceremony was witnessed by Europeans fifteen men of the clan, dressed in garlands and fringes, walked unscathed through the furnace, where tongues of fire played among the hot stones. The

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performers both before and after their passage through the fire and found no hurt. The heat was so great that the sweat ran down him as he stood near the bed of glowing charcoal. He cannot explain the immunity of the performers. He informs me that the American writer Percival Lowell walked in the fire and was burned so severely that he was laid up in bed for three weeks; while on the other hand a Scotch engineer named Hillhouse passed over the hot charcoal unscathed. Several of Miss Hughes's Japanese pupils also went through the ordeal with impunity, but one of them burned a toe. Both before and after walking through the fire the people dipped their feet in a white stuff which Miss Hughes was told was salt. Compare W. G. Aston, *Shinto* (London, 1905), p. 348: "At the present day plunging the hand into boiling water, walking barefoot over a bed of live coals, and climbing a ladder formed of sword-blades set edge upwards are practised, not by way of ordeal, but to excite the awe and stimulate the piety of the ignorant spectators."

pit was about nineteen feet wide and the men marched round it, planting their feet squarely and firmly on each stone. When they emerged from the pit, the feet of several were examined and shewed no trace of scorching; even the anklets of dried tree-fern leaves which they wore on their legs were unburnt. The immunity thus enjoyed by members of the clan in the fiery furnace is explained by a legend that in former days a chief of the clan, named Tui Nkualita, received for himself and his descendants this remarkable privilege from a certain god, whom the chief had accidentally dragged out of a deep pool of water by the hair of his head.<sup>17</sup> A similar ceremony of walking through fire, or rather over a furnace of hot charcoal or hot stones, has also been observed in Tahiti,<sup>18</sup> the Marquesas Islands,<sup>19</sup> and by Hindoo

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<sup>17</sup> Basil Thomson, *South Sea Yarns* (Edinburgh and London, 1894), pp. 195-207. Compare F. Arthur Jackson, "A Fijian Legend of the Origin of the *Vilavilairevo* or Fire Ceremony," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol. iii. No. 2 (June, 1894), pp. 72-75; R. Fulton, "An Account of the Fiji Fire-walking Ceremony, or *Vilavilairevo*, with a probable explanation of the mystery," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, xxxv. (1902) pp. 187-201; Lieutenant Vernon H. Haggard, in *Folk-lore*, xiv. (1903) pp. 88 sq.

<sup>18</sup> S. P. Langley, "The Fire-walk Ceremony in Tahiti," *Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1901* (Washington, 1902), pp. 539-544; *id.*, in *Folk-lore*, xiv. (1901) pp. 446-452; "More about Fire-walking," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol. x. No. 1 (March, 1901), pp. 53 sq. In his *Modern Mythology* (pp. 162-165) Andrew Lang quotes from *The Polynesian Society's Journal*, vol. ii. No. 2, pp. 105-108, an account of the fire-walk by Miss Tenira Henry, which seems to refer to Raiatea, one of the Tahitian group of islands.

<sup>19</sup> *Annales de l'Association de la Propagation de la Foi*, lxix. (1897) pp. 130-133. But in the ceremony here described the chief performer was a native of Huahine, one of

coolies in the West Indian island of Trinidad;<sup>20</sup> but the eye-witnesses who have described the rite, as it is observed in these islands, have said little or nothing as to its meaning and purpose, their whole attention having been apparently concentrated on the heat of the furnace and the state of the performers' legs before and after passing through it.

Hottentot custom of driving their sheep through fire and smoke.

“Another grand custom of the Hottentots, which they likewise term *andersmaken*, is the driving their sheep at certain times through the fire. Early in the day appointed by a kraal for the observance of this custom, the women milk all their cows, and set the whole produce before their husbands. 'Tis a strict rule at those times that the women neither taste, nor suffer their children to touch, a drop of it. The whole quantity is sacred to the men, who drink it all up before they address themselves to the business of the fire. Having consumed the milk, some go and bring the sheep together to the place where the fire is to be lighted, while others repair to the place to light it. The fire is made of chips and dry twigs and thinly spread into a long square. Upon the coming up of the sheep, the fire, scattered into this figure, is covered with green twigs to raise a great smoak;

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the Tahitian group of islands. The wood burned in the furnace was hibiscus and native chestnut (*Inocarpus edulis*). Before stepping on the hot stones the principal performer beat the edge of the furnace twice or thrice with *ti* leaves (*dracaena*).

<sup>20</sup> *Les Missions Catholiques*, x. (1878) pp. 141 *sq.*; A. Lang, *Modern Mythology*, p. 167, quoting Mr. Henry R. St. Clair.

and a number of men range themselves closely on both sides of it, making a lane for the sheep to pass through, and extending themselves to a good distance beyond the fire on the side where the sheep are to enter. Things being in this posture, the sheep are driven into the lane close up to the fire, which now smoaks in the thickest clouds. The foremost boggle, and being forced forward by the press behind, seek their escape by attempting breaches in the ranks. The men stand close and firm, and whoop and goad them forward; when a few hands, planted at the front of the fire, catch three or four of the foremost sheep by the head, and drag them through, and bring them round into the sight of the rest; which sometimes upon this, the whooping and goading continuing, follow with a tantivy, jumping and pouring themselves through the fire and smoak with a mighty clattering and fury. At other times they are not so tractable, but put the Hottentots to the trouble of dragging numbers of them through; and sometimes, in a great press and fright, sturdily attacking the ranks, they make a breach and escape. This is a very mortifying event at all times, the Hottentots, upon whatever account, looking upon it as a heavy disgrace and a very ill omen into the bargain. But when their labours here are attended with such success, that the sheep pass readily through or over the fire, 'tis hardly in the power of language to describe them in all the sallies of their joy." The writer who thus describes the custom had great difficulty in extracting an explanation of it from the Hottentots. At last one of them informed him that their country was much infested by

wild dogs, which made terrible havoc among the cattle, worrying the animals to death even when they did not devour them. "Now we have it," he said, "from our ancestors, that if sheep are driven through the fire, as we say, that is, through a thick smoak, the wild dogs will not be fond of attacking them while the scent of the smoak remains upon their fleeces. We therefore from time to time, for the security of our flocks, perform this *andersmaken*."<sup>21</sup>

Fire applied to sick cattle by the Nandi and Zulus.

When disease breaks out in a herd of the Nandi, a pastoral tribe of British East Africa, a large bonfire is made with the wood of a certain tree (*Olea chrysophilla*), and brushwood of two sorts of shrubs is thrown on the top. Then the sick herd is driven to the fire, and while the animals are standing near it, a sheep big with young is brought to them and anointed with milk by an elder, after which it is strangled by two men belonging to clans that may intermarry. The intestines are then inspected, and if the omens prove favourable, the meat is roasted and eaten; moreover rings are made out of the skin and worn by the cattle-owners. After the meat has been eaten, the herd is driven round the fire, and milk is poured on each beast.<sup>22</sup> When their cattle are sick, the Zulus of Natal will collect their herds in a kraal, where a medicine-man kindles a fire, burns medicine in it, and so fumigates the cattle with the medicated smoke. Afterwards he sprinkles the herd with

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Kolben, *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*, Second Edition (London, 1738), i. 129-133.

<sup>22</sup> A. C. Hollis, *The Nandi* (Oxford, 1909), pp. 45 *sq.*

a decoction, and, taking some melted fat of the dead oxen in his mouth, squirts it on a fire-brand and holds the brand to each animal in succession.<sup>23</sup> Such a custom is probably equivalent to the Hottentot and European practice of driving cattle through a fire.

Indians of Yucatan walk over hot embers in order to avert calamities.

Among the Indians of Yucatan the year which was marked in their calendar by the sign of *Cauac* was reputed to be very unlucky; they thought that in the course of it the death-rate would be high, the maize crops would be withered up by the extreme heat of the sun, and what remained of the harvest would be devoured by swarms of ants and birds. To avert these calamities they used to erect a great pyre of wood, to which most persons contributed a faggot. Having danced about it during the day, they set fire to it at night-fall, and when the flames had died down, they spread out the red embers and walked or ran barefoot over them, some of them escaping unsmirched by the flames, but others burning themselves more or less severely. In this way they hoped to conjure away the evils that threatened them, and to undo the sinister omens of the year.<sup>24</sup>

The fire-walk in antiquity, at Castabala in Cappadocia and at Mount Soracte near Rome.

Similar rites were performed at more than one place in

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<sup>23</sup> Rev. Joseph Shooter, *The Kafirs of Natal* (London, 1857), p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Diego de Landa, *Relation des choses de Yucatan* (Paris, 1864), pp. 231, 233.

classical antiquity. At Castabala, in Cappadocia, the priestesses of an Asiatic goddess, whom the Greeks called Artemis Perasia, used to walk barefoot through a furnace of hot charcoal and take no harm.<sup>25</sup> Again, at the foot of Mount Soracte, in Italy, there was a sanctuary of a goddess Feronia, where once a year the men of certain families walked barefoot, but unscathed, over the glowing embers and ashes of a great fire of pinewood in presence of a vast multitude, who had assembled from all the country round about to pay their devotions to the deity or to ply their business at the fair. The families from whom the performers of the rite were drawn went by the name of Hirpi Sorani, or “Soranian Wolves”; and in consideration of the services which they rendered the state by walking through the fire, they were exempted, by a special decree of the senate, from military service and all public burdens. In the discharge of their sacred function, if we can trust the testimony of Strabo, they were believed to be inspired by the goddess Feronia. The ceremony certainly took place in her sanctuary, which was held in the highest reverence alike by Latins and Sabines; but according to Virgil and Pliny the rite was performed in honour of the god of the mountain, whom they call by the Greek name of Apollo, but whose real name appears to have been Soranus.<sup>26</sup> If Soranus was a sun-god, as his

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<sup>25</sup> Strabo, xii. 2. 7, p. 537. Compare *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Second Edition, pp. 89, 134 *sqq.*

<sup>26</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* vii. 19; Virgil, *Aen.* xi. 784 *sqq.* with the comment of Servius; Strabo, v. 2. 9, p. 226; Dionysius Halicarnasensis, *Antiquit. Rom.* iii. 32. From a reference to the custom in Silius Italicus (v. 175 *sqq.*) it seems that the men passed



name has by some been thought to indicate,<sup>27</sup> we might perhaps conclude that the passage of his priests through the fire was a magical ceremony designed to procure a due supply of light and warmth for the earth by mimicking the sun's passage across the firmament. For so priceless a service, rendered at some personal risk, it would be natural that the magicians should be handsomely rewarded by a grateful country, and that they should be released from the common obligations of earth in order the better to devote themselves to their celestial mission. The neighbouring towns paid the first-fruits of their harvest as tribute to the shrine, and loaded it besides with offerings of gold and silver, of which, however, it was swept clean by Hannibal when he hung with his dusky army, like a storm-cloud about to break, within sight of

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thrice through the furnace holding the entrails of the sacrificial victims in their hands. The learned but sceptical Varro attributed their immunity in the fire to a drug with which they took care to anoint the soles of their feet before they planted them in the furnace. See Varro, cited by Servius, on Virgil, *Aen.* xi. 787. The whole subject has been treated by W. Mannhardt (*Antike Wald- und Feldkulte*, Berlin, 1877, pp 327 *sqq.*), who compares the rites of these "Soranian Wolves" with the ceremonies performed by the brotherhood of the Green Wolf at Jumièges in Normandy. See above, vol. i. pp. 185 *sq.*

<sup>27</sup> L. Preller (*Römische Mythologie*,<sup>3</sup> i. 268), following G. Curtius, would connect the first syllable of Soranus and Soracte with the Latin *sol*, "sun." However, this etymology appears to be at the best very doubtful. My friend Prof. J. H. Moulton doubts whether *Soranus* can be connected with *sol*; he tells me that the interchange of *l* and *r* is rare. He would rather connect *Soracte* with the Greek ῥαξ, "a shrew-mouse." In that case Apollo Soranus might be the equivalent of the Greek Apollo Smintheus, "the Mouse Apollo." Professor R. S. Conway also writes to me (11th November 1902) that *Soranus* and *Soracte* "have nothing to do with *sol*; *r* and *l* are not confused in Italic."

the sentinels on the walls of Rome.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Livy, xxvi. 11. About this time the Carthaginian army encamped only three miles from Rome, and Hannibal in person, at the head of two thousand cavalry, rode close up to the walls and leisurely reconnoitered them. See Livy, xxvi. 10; Polybius, ix. 5-7.

## § 2. The Meaning of the Fire-walk

Little evidence to shew that the fire-walk is a sun-charm.

The foregoing customs, observed in many different parts of the world, present at least a superficial resemblance to the modern European practices of leaping over fires and driving cattle through them; and we naturally ask whether it is not possible to discover a general explanation which will include them all. We have seen that two general theories have been proposed to account for the European practices; according to one theory the customs in question are sun-charms, according to the other they are purifications. Let us see how the two rival theories fit the other facts which we have just passed in review. To take the solar theory first, it is supported, first, by a statement that the fires at the Pongol festival in Southern India are intended to wake the sun-god or the fire-god from his sleep;<sup>29</sup> and, second, by the etymology which connects Soranus, the god of Soracte, with the sun.<sup>30</sup> But for reasons which have already been given, neither of these arguments carries much weight; and apart from them there appears to be nothing in the foregoing customs to suggest that they are sun-charms. Nay, some of the customs appear hardly reconcilable with such a view. For it is to be observed that the fire-walk is frequently practised in India and other tropical

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<sup>29</sup> Above, p. [1](#).

<sup>30</sup> Above, p. [15](#).

countries, where as a rule people would more naturally wish to abate than to increase the fierce heat of the sun. In Yucatan certainly the intention of kindling the bonfires cannot possibly have been to fan the solar flames, since one of the principal evils which the bonfires were designed to remedy was precisely the excessive heat of the sun, which had withered up the maize crops.<sup>31</sup> Thus the solar theory is not strongly supported by any of the facts which we are considering, and it is actually inconsistent with some of them.

On the other hand there is much to be said for the view that the fire-walk is a form of purification, the flames being thought either to burn up or repel the powers of evil. Custom of stepping over fire for the purpose of getting rid of a ghost. Widows fumigated to free them from their husbands' ghosts.

Not so with the purificatory theory. It is obviously applicable to some of the facts, and apparently consistent with them all. Thus we have seen that sick men make a vow to walk over the fire, and that sick cattle are driven over it. In such cases clearly the intention is to cleanse the suffering man or beast from the infection of disease, and thereby to restore him or it to health; and the fire is supposed to effect this salutary end, either by burning up the powers of evil or by interposing an insurmountable barrier between them and the sufferer. For it is to be remembered that evils which civilized men regard as impersonal are often conceived by uncivilized man in the personal shape of witches

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<sup>31</sup> Above, pp. [13](#) sq.

and wizards, of ghosts and hobgoblins; so that measures which we should consider as simple disinfectants the savage looks upon as obstacles opportunely presented to the attacks of demons or other uncanny beings. Now of all such obstacles fire seems generally to be thought the most effective; hence in passing through or leaping over it our primitive philosopher often imagines that he is not so much annihilating his spiritual foe as merely giving him the slip; the ghostly pursuer shrinks back appalled at the flames through which his intended victim, driven to desperation by his fears, has safely passed before him. This interpretation of the ceremony is confirmed, first, by the observation that in India the ashes of the bonfire are used as a talisman against devils and demons;<sup>32</sup> and, second, by the employment of the ceremony for the avowed purpose of escaping from the pursuit of a troublesome ghost. For example, in China “they believe that a beheaded man wanders about a headless spectre in the World of Shades. Such spectres are frequently to be seen in walled towns, especially in the neighbourhood of places of execution. Here they often visit the people with disease and disaster, causing a considerable depreciation in the value of the houses around such scenes. Whenever an execution takes place, the people fire crackers to frighten the headless ghost away from the spot; and the mandarin who has superintended the bloody work, on entering the gate of his mansion, has himself carried in his sedan chair over a fire lighted on the pavement,

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<sup>32</sup> Above, p. [8](#), compare p. [3](#).

lest the headless apparition should enter there along with him; for disembodied spirits are afraid of fire.”<sup>33</sup> For a like reason Chinese mourners after a funeral, and persons who have paid a visit of condolence to a house of death, often purify themselves by stepping over a fire of straw;<sup>34</sup> the purification, we cannot doubt, consists simply in shaking off the ghost who is supposed to dog their steps. Similarly at a coroner's inquest in China the mandarin and his subordinates hold pocket handkerchiefs or towels to their mouths and noses while they are inspecting the corpse, no doubt to hinder the ghost from insinuating himself into their bodies by these apertures; and when they have discharged their dangerous duty, they purify themselves by passing through a small fire of straw kindled on the pavement before they enter their sedan-chairs to return home, while at the same time the crowd of idlers, who have gathered about the door, assist in keeping the ghost at bay by a liberal discharge of crackers. The same double process of purification, or rather of repelling the ghost, by means of fire and crackers is repeated at the gate of the mandarin's residence when the procession defiles into it.<sup>35</sup> Among some of the Tartars it used to be customary for all persons returning from a burial to leap over a fire made for the

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<sup>33</sup> J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, i. (Leyden, 1892), p. 355; *id.* vi. (Leyden, 1910) p. 942.

<sup>34</sup> Rev. J. H. Gray, *China* (London, 1878), i. 287, 305; J. J. M. de Groot, *op. cit.* i. 32, vi. 942.

<sup>35</sup> J. J. M. de Groot, *op. cit.* i. 137, vi. 942.

purpose, “in order that the dead man might not follow them; for apparently in their opinion he would be afraid of the fire.”<sup>36</sup> “The Yakuts bury their dead as a rule on the day of the death, and in order not to take the demon of death home with them, they kindle fires on the way back from the burial and jump over them in the belief that the demon of death, who dreads fire, will not follow them, and that in this way they will be freed from the persecutions of the hated demon of death.”<sup>37</sup> In Sikkhim, when members of the Khambu caste have buried a corpse, all persons present at the burial “adjourn to a stream for a bath of purification, and, on re-entering the house, have to tread on a bit of burning cloth, to prevent the evil spirits who attend at funerals from following them in.”<sup>38</sup> Among the Fans of West Africa, “when the mourning is over, the wives of the deceased must pass over a small lighted brazier in the middle of the village, then they sit down while some leaves are still burning under their feet; their heads are shaved, and from that moment they are purified from the mourning – perhaps we should translate: ‘delivered from the ghost of their husband’ – and may be divided among the heirs.”<sup>39</sup> At Agweh, on the Slave Coast of West Africa, a widow used to

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<sup>36</sup> J. G. Gmelin, *Reise durch Sibirien* (Göttingen, 1751-1752), i. 333.

<sup>37</sup> W. L. Priklonski, “Ueber das Schamenthum bei den Jakuten,” in A. Bastian's *Allerlei aus Volks- und Menschenkunde* (Berlin, 1888), i. 219. Compare Vasilij Priklonski, “Todtengebräuche der Jakuten,” *Globus*, lix. (1891) p. 85.

<sup>38</sup> J. A. H. Louis, *The Gates of Thibet* (Calcutta, 1894), p. 116.

<sup>39</sup> E. Allegret, “Les Idées religieuses des Fañ (Afrique Occidentale),” *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, l. (1904) p. 220.

remain shut up for six months in the room where her husband was buried; at the end of the time a fire was lighted on the floor, and red peppers strewn in it, until in the pungent fumes the widow was nearly stifled.<sup>40</sup> No doubt the intention was to rid her of her husband's ghost in order that she might mingle again in the world with safety to herself and others.

Hence it seems probable that the chief use of the fire in the fire-festivals of Europe was to destroy or repel the witches, to whose maleficent arts the people ascribed most of their troubles.

On the analogy of these customs, in which the purpose of the passage through the fire appears to be unmistakable, we may suppose that the motive of the rite is similar at the popular festivals of Europe and the like observances in other lands. In every case the ritual appears to be explained in a simple and natural way by the supposition that the performers believe themselves to be freed from certain evils, actual or threatened, through the beneficent agency of fire, which either burns up and destroys the noxious things or at all events repels and keeps them at bay. Indeed this belief, or at least this hope, is definitely expressed by some of the people who leap across the bonfires: they imagine that all ills are burnt up and consumed in the flames, or that they leave their sins, or at all events their fleas, behind them on the far side of the fire.<sup>41</sup> But we may conjecture

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<sup>40</sup> A. B. Ellis, *The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (London, 1890), p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Above, pp. 162, 163, 211, 212, 214, 215, 217.



that originally all the evils from which the people thus thought to deliver themselves were conceived by them to be caused by personal beings, such as ghosts and demons or witches and warlocks, and that the fires were kindled for the sole purpose of burning or banning these noxious creatures. Of these evil powers witches and warlocks appear to have been the most dreaded by our European peasantry; and it is therefore significant that the fires kindled on these occasions are often expressly alleged to burn the witches,<sup>42</sup> that effigies of witches are not uncommonly consumed in them,<sup>43</sup> and that two of the great periodic fire-festivals of the year, namely May Day and Midsummer Eve, coincide with the seasons when witches are believed to be most active and mischievous, and when accordingly many other precautions are taken against them.<sup>44</sup> Thus if witchcraft, as a

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<sup>42</sup> See the references above, vol. i. p. 342 note 2.

<sup>43</sup> See the references above, vol. i. p. 342 note 3.

<sup>44</sup> See *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 52 *sqq.*, 127; *The Scapegoat*, pp. 157 *sqq.* Compare R. Kühnau, *Schlesische Sagen* (Berlin, 1910-1913), iii. p. 69, No. 1428: "In the county of Glatz the people believe that on Walpurgis Night (the Eve of May Day) the witches under cover of the darkness seek to harm men in all sorts of ways. To guard themselves against them the people set small birch trees in front of the house-door on the previous day, and are of opinion that the witches must count all the leaves on these little trees before they can get into the house. While they are still at this laborious task, the day dawns and the dreaded guests must retire to their own realm"; *id.*, iii. p. 39, No. 1394: "On St. John's Night (between the 23rd and 24th of June) the witches again busily bestir themselves to force their way into the houses of men and the stalls of cattle. People stick small twigs of oak in the windows and doors of the houses and cattle-stalls to keep out the witches. This is done in the neighbourhood of Patschkau and generally in the districts of Frankenstein, Münsterberg, Grottkau, and

great part of mankind has believed, is the fertile source of almost all the calamities that afflict our species, and if the surest means of frustrating witchcraft is fire, then it follows as clearly as day follows night that to jump over a fire must be a sovereign panacea for practically all the ills that flesh is heir to. We can now, perhaps, fully understand why festivals of fire played so prominent a part in the religion or superstition of our heathen forefathers; the observance of such festivals flowed directly from their overmastering fear of witchcraft and from their theory as to the best way of combating that dreadful evil.

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Neisse. In the same regions they hang garlands, composed of oak leaves intertwined with flowers, at the windows. The garland must be woven in the house itself and may not be carried over any threshold; it must be hung out of the window on a nail, which is inserted there." Similar evidence might be multiplied almost indefinitely.

# **Chapter VII. The Burning of Human Beings in the Fires**

## **§ 1. The Burning of Effigies in the Fires**

The effigies burnt in the fires probably represent witches.

We have still to ask, What is the meaning of burning effigies in the fire at these festivals? After the preceding investigation the answer to the question seems obvious. As the fires are often alleged to be kindled for the purpose of burning the witches, and as the effigy burnt in them is sometimes called “the Witch,” we might naturally be disposed to conclude that all the effigies consumed in the flames on these occasions represent witches or warlocks, and that the custom of burning them is merely a substitute for burning the wicked men and women themselves, since on the principle of homoeopathic or imitative magic you practically destroy the witch herself in destroying her effigy. On the whole this explanation of the burning of straw figures in human shape at the festivals appears to be the most probable.

Possibly some of the effigies burnt in the fires represent tree-spirits or spirits of vegetation.

Yet it may be that this explanation does not apply to all the cases, and that certain of them may admit and even require

another interpretation, in favour of which I formerly argued as follows: —<sup>45</sup>

“It remains to ask, What is the meaning of burning an effigy in these bonfires? The effigies so burned, as I have already remarked, can hardly be separated from the effigies of Death which are burned or otherwise destroyed in spring; and grounds have been already given for regarding the so-called effigies of Death as really representatives of the tree-spirit or spirit of vegetation.<sup>46</sup> Are the other effigies, which are burned in the spring and midsummer bonfires, susceptible of the same explanation? It would seem so. For just as the fragments of the so-called Death are stuck in the fields to make the crops grow, so the charred embers of the figure burned in the spring bonfires are sometimes laid on the fields in the belief that they will keep vermin from the crop.<sup>47</sup> Again, the rule that the last married bride must leap over the fire in which the straw-man is burned on Shrove Tuesday, is probably intended to make her fruitful.<sup>48</sup> But, as we have seen, the power of blessing women with offspring is a special attribute of tree-spirits;<sup>49</sup> it is therefore a fair presumption that the burning effigy over which the bride must leap is a representative of the fertilizing tree-spirit or spirit

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<sup>45</sup> *The Golden Bough*, Second Edition (London, 1900), ii. 314-316.

<sup>46</sup> *The Dying God*, pp. 249 *sqq.*

<sup>47</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 117, compare pp. 143, 144.

<sup>48</sup> See above, vol. i. p. 120.

<sup>49</sup> *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 56 *sqq.*

of vegetation. This character of the effigy, as representative of the spirit of vegetation, is almost unmistakable when the figure is composed of an unthreshed sheaf of corn or is covered from head to foot with flowers.<sup>50</sup> Again, it is to be noted that, instead of a puppet, trees, either living or felled, are sometimes burned both in the spring and midsummer bonfires.<sup>51</sup> Now, considering the frequency with which the tree-spirit is represented in human shape, it is hardly rash to suppose that when sometimes a tree and sometimes an effigy is burned in these fires, the effigy and the tree are regarded as equivalent to each other, each being a representative of the tree-spirit. This, again, is confirmed by observing, first, that sometimes the effigy which is to be burned is carried about simultaneously with a May-tree, the former being carried by the boys, the latter by the girls;<sup>52</sup> and, second, that the effigy is sometimes tied to a living tree and burned with it.<sup>53</sup> In these cases, we can scarcely doubt, the tree-spirit is represented, as we have found it represented before, in duplicate, both by the tree and by the effigy. That the true character of the effigy as a representative of the beneficent spirit of vegetation should sometimes be forgotten, is natural. The custom of burning a beneficent god is too foreign to later modes of thought to escape misinterpretation. Naturally enough the people who continued to

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<sup>50</sup> Above, vol. i. pp. 120, 167.

<sup>51</sup> Above, vol. i. pp. 115 *sq.*, 116, 142, 173 *sq.*, 185, 191, 192, 193, 209.

<sup>52</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 120.

<sup>53</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 116. But the effigy is called the Witch.

burn his image came in time to identify it as the effigy of persons, whom, on various grounds, they regarded with aversion, such as Judas Iscariot, Luther, and a witch.

Reasons for burning effigies of the spirit of vegetation or for passing them through the fire.

“The general reasons for killing a god or his representative have been examined in the preceding chapter.<sup>54</sup> But when the god happens to be a deity of vegetation, there are special reasons why he should die by fire. For light and heat are necessary to vegetable growth; and, on the principle of sympathetic magic, by subjecting the personal representative of vegetation to their influence, you secure a supply of these necessities for trees and crops. In other words, by burning the spirit of vegetation in a fire which represents the sun, you make sure that, for a time at least, vegetation shall have plenty of sun. It may be objected that, if the intention is simply to secure enough sunshine for vegetation, this end would be better attained, on the principles of sympathetic magic, by merely passing the representative of vegetation through the fire instead of burning him. In point of fact this is sometimes done. In Russia, as we have seen, the straw figure of Kupalo is not burned in the midsummer fire, but merely carried backwards and forwards across it.<sup>55</sup> But, for the reasons already given, it is necessary that the god should die; so next day

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<sup>54</sup> The chapter has since been expanded into the four volumes of *The Dying God*, *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, and *The Scapegoat*.

<sup>55</sup> *The Dying God*, p. 262.

Kupalo is stripped of her ornaments and thrown into a stream. In this Russian custom, therefore, the passage of the image through the fire is a sun-charm pure and simple; the killing of the god is a separate act, and the mode of killing him – by drowning – is probably a rain-charm. But usually people have not thought it necessary to draw this fine distinction; for the various reasons already assigned, it is advantageous, they think, to expose the god of vegetation to a considerable degree of heat, and it is also advantageous to kill him, and they combine these advantages in a rough-and-ready way by burning him.”

The custom of passing images of gods or their living representatives through the fires may be simply a form of purification.

On the foregoing argument, which I do not now find very cogent, I would remark that we must distinguish the cases in which an effigy or an image is burnt in the fire from the cases in which it is simply carried through or over it. We have seen that in the Chinese festival of fire the image of the god is carried thrice by bearers over the glowing furnace. Here the motive for subjecting a god to the heat of the furnace must surely be the same as the motive for subjecting his worshippers to the same ordeal; and if the motive in the case of the worshippers is purificatory, it is probably the same in the case of the deity. In other words we may suppose that the image of a god is periodically carried over a furnace in order to purify him from the taint of corruption, the spells of

magicians, or any other evil influences that might impair or impede his divine energies. The same theory would explain the custom of obliging the priest ceremonially to pass through the fire; the custom need not be a mitigation of an older practice of burning him in the flames, it may only be a purification designed to enable him the better to discharge his sacred duties as representative of the deity in the coming year. Similarly, when the rite is obligatory, not on the people as a whole, but only on certain persons chosen for the purpose,<sup>56</sup> we may suppose that these persons act as representatives of the entire community, which thus passes through the fire by deputy and consequently participates in all the benefits which are believed to accrue from the purificatory character of the rite.<sup>57</sup> In both cases, therefore, if my interpretation of them is correct, the passage over or through a fire is not a substitute for human sacrifice; it is nothing but a stringent form of purification.

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<sup>56</sup> Above, pp. [9](#), [10](#), [14](#).

<sup>57</sup> Among the Klings of Southern India the ceremony of walking over a bed of red-hot ashes is performed by a few chosen individuals, who are prepared for the rite by a devil-doctor or medicine-man. The eye-witness who describes the ceremony adds: "As I understood it, they took on themselves and expiated the sins of the Kling community for the past year." See the letter of Stephen Ponder, quoted by Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology* (London, 1897), p. 160.



## § 2. The Burning of Men and Animals in the Fires

Yet at some of the fire-festivals the pretence of burning live persons in the fires points to a former custom of human sacrifice.

Yet in the popular customs connected with the fire-festivals of Europe there are certain features which appear to point to a former practice of human sacrifice. We have seen reasons for believing that in Europe living persons have often acted as representatives of the tree-spirit and corn-spirit and have suffered death as such.<sup>58</sup> There is no reason, therefore, why they should not have been burned, if any special advantages were likely to be attained by putting them to death in that way. The consideration of human suffering is not one which enters into the calculations of primitive man. Now, in the fire-festivals which we are discussing, the pretence of burning people is sometimes carried so far that it seems reasonable to regard it as a mitigated survival of an older custom of actually burning them. Thus in Aachen, as we saw, the man clad in peas-straw acts so cleverly that the children really believe he is being burned.<sup>59</sup> At Jumièges in Normandy the man clad all in green, who bore the title of the Green Wolf, was pursued by his comrades, and when they

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<sup>58</sup> *The Dying God*, pp. 205 *sqq.*; *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, i. 216 *sqq.*

<sup>59</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 120.

caught him they feigned to fling him upon the mid-summer bonfire.<sup>60</sup> Similarly at the Beltane fires in Scotland the pretended victim was seized, and a show made of throwing him into the flames, and for some time afterwards people affected to speak of him as dead.<sup>61</sup> Again, in the Hallowe'en bonfires of north-eastern Scotland we may perhaps detect a similar pretence in the custom observed by a lad of lying down as close to the fire as possible and allowing the other lads to leap over him.<sup>62</sup> The titular king at Aix, who reigned for a year and danced the first dance round the midsummer bonfire,<sup>63</sup> may perhaps in days of old have discharged the less agreeable duty of serving as fuel for that fire which in later times he only kindled. In the following customs Mannhardt is probably right in recognizing traces of an old custom of burning a leaf-clad representative of the spirit of vegetation. At Wolfeck, in Austria, on Midsummer Day, a boy completely clad in green fir branches goes from house to house, accompanied by a noisy crew, collecting wood for the bonfire. As he gets the wood he sings —

*“Forest trees I want,  
No sour milk for me,  
But beer and wine,*

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<sup>60</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 186.

<sup>61</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 233.

<sup>63</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 194.

*So can the wood-man be jolly and gay.”*<sup>64</sup>

In some parts of Bavaria, also, the boys who go from house to house collecting fuel for the midsummer bonfire envelop one of their number from head to foot in green branches of firs, and lead him by a rope through the whole village.<sup>65</sup> At Moosheim, in Wurtemberg, the festival of St. John's Fire usually lasted for fourteen days, ending on the second Sunday after Midsummer Day. On this last day the bonfire was left in charge of the children, while the older people retired to a wood. Here they encased a young fellow in leaves and twigs, who, thus disguised, went to the fire, scattered it, and trod it out. All the people present fled at the sight of him.<sup>66</sup>

In pagan Europe the water as well as the fire seems to have claimed its human victim on Midsummer Day. Custom of throwing a man and a tree into the water on St. John's Day.

In this connexion it is worth while to note that in pagan Europe the water as well as the fire seems to have claimed its human victim on Midsummer Day. Some German rivers, such as the Saale and the Spree, are believed still to require their victim on

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<sup>64</sup> W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 524.

<sup>65</sup> *Bavaria, Landes- und Volkskunde des Königreichs Bayern* (Munich, 1860-1867), iii. 956; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 524. In the neighbourhood of Breitenbrunn the lad who collects fuel at this season has his face blackened and is called “the Charcoal Man” (*Bavaria*, etc., ii. 261).

<sup>66</sup> A. Birlinger, *Volksthümliches aus Schwaben* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1861-1862), ii. 146; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, pp. 524 sq.

that day; hence people are careful not to bathe at this perilous season. Where the beautiful Neckar flows, between vine-clad and wooded hills, under the majestic ruins of Heidelberg castle, the spirit of the river seeks to drown three persons, one on Midsummer Eve, one on Midsummer Day, and one on the day after. On these nights, if you hear a shriek as of a drowning man or woman from the water, beware of running to the rescue; for it is only the water-fairy shrieking to lure you to your doom. Many a fisherman of the Elbe knows better than to launch his boat and trust himself to the treacherous river on Midsummer Day. And Samland fishermen will not go to sea at this season, because they are aware that the sea is then hollow and demands a victim. In the neighbourhood of the Lake of Constance the Swabian peasants say that on St. John's Day the Angel or St. John must have a swimmer and a climber; hence no one will climb a tree or bathe even in a brook on that day.<sup>67</sup> According to others, St. John will have three dead men on his day; one of them must die by water, one by a fall, and one by lightning; therefore old-fashioned people warn their children not to climb or bathe, and are very careful

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<sup>67</sup> E. Meier, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1852), pp. 428 *sq.*, §§ 120, 122; O. Freiherr von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Das festliche Jahr* (Leipsic, 1863), p. 194; J. A. E. Köhler, *Volksbrauch, Aberglauben, Sagen und andre alte Ueberlieferungen im Voigtlande* (Leipsic, 1867), p. 176; J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague and Leipsic, 1864), p. 49, § 311; W. J. A. Tettau und J. D. H. Temme, *Die Volkssagen Ost-preussens, Lithauens und West-preussens* (Berlin, 1837), pp. 277 *sq.*; K. Haupt, *Sagenbuch der Lausitz* (Leipsic, 1862-1863), i. 48; R. Eisel, *Sagenbuch des Voigtlandes* (Gera, 1871), p. 31, Nr. 62.

themselves not to run into any kind of danger on Midsummer Day.<sup>68</sup> So in some parts of Switzerland people are warned against bathing on St. John's Night, because the saint's day demands its victims. Thus in the Emmenthal they say, "This day will have three persons; one must perish in the air, one in the fire, and the third in the water." At Schaffhausen the saying runs, "St. John the Baptist must have a runner, must have a swimmer, must have a climber." That is the reason why you should not climb cherry-trees on the saint's day, lest you should fall down and break your valuable neck.<sup>69</sup> In Cologne the saint is more exacting; on his day he requires no less than fourteen dead men; seven of them must be swimmers and seven climbers.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly when we find that, in one of the districts where a belief of this sort prevails, it used to be customary to throw a person into the water on Midsummer Day, we can hardly help concluding that this was only a modification of an older custom of actually drowning a human being in the river at that time. In Voigtland it was formerly the practice to set up a fine May tree, adorned with all kinds of things, on St. John's Day. The people danced round it, and when the lads had fetched down the things with which it was tricked out, the tree was thrown into the water. But before this

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<sup>68</sup> Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste, Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube* (Iserlohn, n. d.), p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> E. Hoffmann-Krayer, *Feste und Bräuche des Schweizervolkes* (Zurich, 1913), p. 163.

<sup>70</sup> E. H. Meyer, *Badisches Volksleben* (Strasburg, 1900), p. 507.

was done, they sought out somebody whom they treated in the same manner, and the victim of this horseplay was called "the John." The brawls and disorders, which such a custom naturally provoked, led to the suppression of the whole ceremony.<sup>71</sup>

Loaves and flowers thrown into the water on St. John's Day, perhaps as substitutes for human beings.

At Rotenburg on the Neckar they throw a loaf of bread into the water on St. John's Day; were this offering not made, the river would grow angry and take away a man.<sup>72</sup> Clearly, therefore, the loaf is regarded as a substitute which the spirit of the river consents to accept instead of a human victim. Elsewhere the water-sprite is content with flowers. Thus in Bohemia people sometimes cast garlands into water on Midsummer Eve; and if the water-sprite pulls one of them down, it is a sign that the person who threw the garland in will die.<sup>73</sup> In the villages of Hesse the girl who first comes to the well early on the morning of Midsummer Day, places on the mouth of the well a gay garland composed of many sorts of flowers which she has culled from the

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<sup>71</sup> J. A. E. Köhler, *loc. cit.* Tacitus tells us that the image of the goddess Nerthus, her vestments, and chariot were washed in a certain lake, and that immediately afterwards the slaves who ministered to the goddess were swallowed by the lake (*Germania*, 40). The statement may perhaps be understood to mean that the slaves were drowned as a sacrifice to the deity. Certainly we know from Tacitus (*Germania*, 9 and 39) that the ancient Germans offered human sacrifices.

<sup>72</sup> E. Meier, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1852), p. 429, § 121.

<sup>73</sup> O. Frh. von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Fest-Kalender aus Böhmen* (Prague, n. d.), p. 311.

fields and meadows. Sometimes a number of such garlands are twined together to form a crown, with which the well is decked. At Fulda, in addition to the flowery decoration of the wells, the neighbours choose a Lord of the Wells and announce his election by sending him a great nosegay of flowers; his house, too, is decorated with green boughs, and children walk in procession to it. He goes from house to house collecting materials for a feast, of which the neighbours partake on the following Sunday.<sup>74</sup> What the other duties of the Lord of the Wells may be, we are not told. We may conjecture that in old days he had to see to it that the spirits of the water received their dues from men and maidens on that important day.

Midsummer Day deemed unlucky and dangerous.

The belief that the spirits of the water exact a human life on Midsummer Day may partly explain why that day is regarded by some people as unlucky. At Neuburg, in Baden, people who meet on Midsummer Day bid each other beware.<sup>75</sup> Sicilian mothers on that ominous day warn their little sons not to go out of the house, or, if they do go out, not to stray far, not to walk on solitary unfrequented paths, to avoid horses and carriages and persons with firearms, and not to dare to swim; in short they bid them be on their guard at every turn. The Sicilian writer who tells us this adds: "This I know and sadly remember ever since the year 1848,

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<sup>74</sup> Karl Lynker, *Deutsche Sagen und Sitten in hessischen Gauen*<sup>2</sup> (Cassel and Göttingen, 1860), pp. 253, 254, §§ 335, 336.

<sup>75</sup> E. H. Meyer, *Badisches Volksleben* (Strasburg, 1900), p. 506.

when, not yet seven years old, I beheld in the dusk of the evening on St. John's Day some women of my acquaintance bringing back in their arms my little brother, who had gone to play in a garden near our house, and there had found his death, my poor Francesco! In their simplicity the women who strove to console my inconsolable mother, driven distracted by the dreadful blow, kept repeating that St. John must have his due, that on that day he must be appeased. 'Who knows,' said they, 'how many other mothers are weeping now for other little sons forlorn!' ”<sup>76</sup>

In Europe people used to bathe on Midsummer Eve or Midsummer Day, because water was thought to acquire wonderful medicinal virtues at that time.

Yet curiously enough, though the water-spirits call for human victims on Midsummer Eve or Midsummer Day, water in general is supposed at that season to acquire certain wonderful medicinal virtues, so that he who bathes in it then or drinks of it is not only healed of all his infirmities but will be well and hearty throughout the year. Hence in many parts of Europe, from Sweden in the north to Sicily in the south, and from Ireland and Spain in the west to Esthonia in the east it used to be customary for men, women, and children to bathe in crowds in rivers, the sea, or springs on Midsummer Eve or Midsummer Day, hoping thus to fortify themselves for the next twelve months. The usual time for taking the bath was the night which intervenes between

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<sup>76</sup> Giuseppe Pitrè, *Spettacoli e Feste Popolari Siciliane* (Palermo, 1881), p. 313.



Midsummer Eve and Midsummer Day;<sup>77</sup> but in Belgium the hour was noon on Midsummer Day. It was a curious sight, we are told, to see the banks of a river lined with naked children waiting for the first stroke of noon to plunge into the healing water. The dip was supposed to have a remarkable effect in strengthening the legs. People who were ashamed to bathe in public used to have cans of water brought to their houses from the river at midday, and then performed their ablutions in the privacy of their chambers. Nor did they throw away the precious fluid; on the contrary they bottled it up and kept it as a sort of elixir for use throughout the year. It was thought never to grow foul and to be as blessed as holy water fetched from a church, which we may well believe. Hence it served to guard the house against a thunder-storm; when the clouds were heavy and threatening, all you had to do was to take the palm branches (that is, the twigs of box-wood) which were blessed on Palm Sunday, dip them in the midsummer

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<sup>77</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> i. 489 sq., iii. 487; A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1869), p. 77 § 92; O. Freiherr von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Das festliche Jahr* (Leipsic, 1863), p. 193; F. J. Vonbun, *Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie* (Chur, 1862), p. 133; P. Drechsler, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien* (Leipsic, 1903-1906), i. 143 § 161; Karl Haupt, *Sagenbuch der Lausitz* (Leipsic, 1862-1863), i. 248, No. 303; F. J. Wiedemann, *Aus dem inneren und äusseren Leben der Ehsten* (St. Petersburg, 1876), p. 415; L. Lloyd, *Peasant Life in Sweden* (London, 1870), pp. 261 sq.; Paul Sébillot, *Le Folk-lore de France* (Paris, 1904-1907), ii. 160 sq.; T. F. Thiselton Dyer, *British Popular Customs* (London, 1876), pp. 322 sq., 329 sq. For more evidence, see above, vol. i. pp. 193, 194, 205 sq., 208, 210, 216; *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Second Edition, pp. 204 sqq.

water, and burn them. That averted the tempest.<sup>78</sup> In the Swiss canton of Lucerne a bath on Midsummer Eve is thought to be especially wholesome, though in other parts of Switzerland, as we saw, bathing at that season is accounted dangerous.<sup>79</sup>

Similar customs and beliefs as to water at Midsummer in Morocco.

Nor are such customs and beliefs confined to the Christian peoples of Europe; they are shared also by the Mohammedan peoples of Morocco. There, too, on Midsummer Day all water is thought to be endowed with such marvellous virtue that it not only heals but prevents sickness for the rest of the year; hence men, women, and children bathe in the sea, in rivers, or in their houses at that time for the sake of their health. In Fez and other places on this day people pour or squirt water over each other in the streets or from the house-tops, so that the streets become almost as muddy as after a fall of rain. More than that, in the Andjra they bathe their animals also; horses, mules, donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats, all must participate in the miraculous benefits of midsummer water.<sup>80</sup> The rite forms part of that old

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<sup>78</sup> Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge* (Brussels, 1861-1862), i. 420 sq.; E. Monseur, *Le Folklore Wallon* (Brussels, n. d.), p. 130; P. Sébillot, *Le Folklore de France*, ii. 374 sq.

<sup>79</sup> E. Hoffmann-Krayer, *Feste und Bräuche des Schweizervolkes* (Zurich, 1913), p. 163. See above, p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> E. Westermarck, "Midsummer Customs in Morocco," *Folk-lore*, xvi. (1905) pp. 31 sq.; *id.*, *Ceremonies and Beliefs connected with Agriculture, certain Dates of the Solar Year, and the Weather in Morocco* (Helsingfors, 1913), pp. 84-86; E. Doutté,

heathen celebration of Midsummer which appears to have been common to the peoples on both sides of the Mediterranean;<sup>81</sup> and as the aim of bathing in the midsummer water is undoubtedly purification, it is reasonable to assign the same motive for the custom of leaping over the midsummer bonfire. On the other hand some people in Morocco, like some people in Europe, think that water on Midsummer Day is unclean or dangerous. A Berber told Dr. Westermarck that water is haunted on Midsummer Day, and that people therefore avoid bathing in it and keep animals from drinking of it. And among the Beni Ahsen persons who swim in the river on that day are careful, before plunging into the water, to throw burning straw into it as an offering, in order that the spirits may not harm them.<sup>82</sup> The parallelism between the rites of water and fire at this season is certainly in favour of interpreting both in the same way;<sup>83</sup> and the traces of human sacrifice which we have detected in the rite of water may therefore be allowed to strengthen the inference of a similar sacrifice in the rite of fire.

Human sacrifices by fire among the ancient Gauls. Men and animals enclosed in great wicker-work images and burnt alive.

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*Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Algiers, 1908), pp. 567 sq. See also above, vol. i. p. 216.

<sup>81</sup> See above, vol. i. pp. 213-219.

<sup>82</sup> E. Westermarck, *Ceremonies and Beliefs connected with Agriculture, certain Dates of the Solar Year, and the Weather in Morocco* (Helsingfors, 1913), pp. 94 sq.

<sup>83</sup> This has been rightly pointed out by Dr. Edward Westermarck ("Midsummer Customs in Morocco," *Folk-lore*, xvi. (1905) p. 46).

But it seems possible to go farther than this. Of human sacrifices offered on these occasions the most unequivocal traces, as we have seen, are those which, about a hundred years ago, still lingered at the Beltane fires in the Highlands of Scotland, that is, among a Celtic people who, situated in a remote corner of Europe and almost completely isolated from foreign influence, had till then conserved their old heathenism better perhaps than any other people in the West of Europe. It is significant, therefore, that human sacrifices by fire are known, on unquestionable evidence, to have been systematically practised by the Celts. The earliest description of these sacrifices has been bequeathed to us by Julius Caesar. As conqueror of the hitherto independent Celts of Gaul, Caesar had ample opportunity of observing the national Celtic religion and manners, while these were still fresh and crisp from the native mint and had not yet been fused in the melting-pot of Roman civilization. With his own notes Caesar appears to have incorporated the observations of a Greek explorer, by name Posidonius, who travelled in Gaul about fifty years before Caesar carried the Roman arms to the English Channel. The Greek geographer Strabo and the historian Diodorus seem also to have derived their descriptions of the Celtic sacrifices from the work of Posidonius, but independently of each other, and of Caesar, for each of the three derivative accounts contain some details which are not to be found in either of the others. By combining them, therefore, we can restore the original account of Posidonius with some probability, and thus

obtain a picture of the sacrifices offered by the Celts of Gaul at the close of the second century before our era.<sup>84</sup> The following seem to have been the main outlines of the custom. Condemned criminals were reserved by the Celts in order to be sacrificed to the gods at a great festival which took place once in every five years. The more there were of such victims, the greater was believed to be the fertility of the land.<sup>85</sup> If there were not enough criminals to furnish victims, captives taken in war were immolated to supply the deficiency. When the time came the victims were sacrificed by the Druids or priests. Some they shot down with arrows, some they impaled, and some they burned alive in the following manner. Colossal images of wicker-work or of wood and grass were constructed; these were filled with live men, cattle, and animals of other kinds; fire was then applied to the images, and they were burned with their living contents.

As the fertility of the land was supposed to depend on these sacrifices, Mannhardt interpreted the victims as representatives of tree-spirits or spirits of vegetation.

Such were the great festivals held once every five years. But besides these quinquennial festivals, celebrated on so grand a scale, and with, apparently, so large an expenditure of human

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<sup>84</sup> Caesar, *Bell. Gall.* vi. 15; Strabo, iv. 4. 5, p. 198; Diodorus Siculus, v. 32. See W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, pp. 525 *sqq.*

<sup>85</sup> Strabo, iv. 4. 4, p. 197: τὰς δὲ φονικὰς δίκας μάλιστα τούτοις [*i. e.* the Druids] ἐπετέτραπτο δικάζειν, ὅταν τε φορὰ τούτων ᾖ, φορὰν καὶ τῆς χώρας νομίζουσιν ὑπάρχειν. On this passage see W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, pp. 529 *sqq.*; and below, pp. 42 *sq.*

life, it seems reasonable to suppose that festivals of the same sort, only on a lesser scale, were held annually, and that from these annual festivals are lineally descended some at least of the fire-festivals which, with their traces of human sacrifices, are still celebrated year by year in many parts of Europe. The gigantic images constructed of osiers or covered with grass in which the Druids enclosed their victims remind us of the leafy framework in which the human representative of the tree-spirit is still so often encased.<sup>86</sup> Hence, seeing that the fertility of the land was apparently supposed to depend upon the due performance of these sacrifices, Mannhardt interpreted the Celtic victims, cased in osiers and grass, as representatives of the tree-spirit or spirit of vegetation.

Wicker-work giants at popular festivals in modern Europe. The giant at Douay on July the seventh. The giants at Dunkirk on Midsummer Day.

These wicker giants of the Druids seem to have had till lately their representatives at the spring and midsummer festivals of modern Europe. At Douay, down to the early part of the nineteenth century, a procession took place annually on the Sunday nearest to the seventh of July. The great feature of the procession was a colossal figure, some twenty or thirty feet high, made of osiers, and called "the giant," which was moved through the streets by means of rollers and ropes worked by men who were enclosed within the effigy. The wooden head of the

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<sup>86</sup> *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 80 sqq.

giant is said to have been carved and painted by Rubens. The figure was armed as a knight with lance and sword, helmet and shield. Behind him marched his wife and his three children, all constructed of osiers on the same principle, but on a smaller scale.<sup>87</sup> At Dunkirk the procession of the giants took place on Midsummer Day, the twenty-fourth of June. The festival, which was known as the Follies of Dunkirk, attracted such multitudes of spectators, that the inns and private houses could not lodge them all, and many had to sleep in cellars or in the streets. In 1755 an eye-witness estimated that the number of onlookers was not less than forty thousand, without counting the inhabitants of the town. The streets through which the procession took its way were lined with double ranks of soldiers, and the houses crammed with spectators from top to bottom. High mass was celebrated in the principal church and then the procession got under weigh. First came the guilds or brotherhoods, the members walking two and two with great waxen tapers, lighted, in their hands. They were followed by the friars and the secular priests,

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<sup>87</sup> Madame Clément, *Histoire des fêtes civiles et religieuses du département du Nord*<sup>2</sup> (Cambrai, 1836), pp. 193-200; A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France*, (Paris and Lyons, 1846), pp. 323 sq.; F. W. Fairholt, *Gog and Magog, the Giants in Guildhall, their real and legendary History* (London, 1859), pp. 78-87; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 523, note. It is said that the giantess made her first appearance in 1665, and that the children were not added to the show till the end of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century the procession took place on the third Sunday in June, which must always have been within about a week of Midsummer Day (H. Gaidoz, "Le dieu gaulois du soleil et le symbolisme de la roue," *Revue Archéologique*, iii. série iv. 32 sq.).

and then came the Abbot, magnificently attired, with the Host borne before him by a venerable old man. When these were past, the real “Follies of Dunkirk” began. They consisted of pageants of various sorts wheeled through the streets in cars. These appear to have varied somewhat from year to year; but if we may judge from the processions of 1755 and 1757, both of which have been described by eye-witnesses, a standing show was a car decked with foliage and branches to imitate a wood, and carrying a number of men dressed in leaves or in green scaly skins, who squirted water on the people from pewter syringes. An English spectator has compared these maskers to the Green Men of our own country on May Day. Last of all came the giant and giantess. The giant was a huge figure of wicker-work, occasionally as much as forty-five feet high, dressed in a long blue robe with gold stripes, which reached to his feet, concealing the dozen or more men who made it dance and bob its head to the spectators. This colossal effigy went by the name of Papa Reuss, and carried in its pocket a bouncing infant of Brobdingnagian proportions, who kept bawling “Papa! papa!” in a voice of thunder, only pausing from time to time to devour the victuals which were handed out to him from the windows. The rear was brought up by the daughter of the giant, constructed, like her sire, of wicker-work, and little, if at all, inferior to him in size. She wore a rose-coloured robe, with a gold watch as large as a warming pan at her side: her breast glittered with jewels: her complexion was high, and her eyes and head turned with as easy a grace as the men



inside could contrive to impart to their motions. The procession came to an end with the revolution of 1789, and has never been revived. The giant himself indeed, who had won the affections of the townspeople, survived his ancient glory for a little while and made shift to appear in public a few times more at the Carnival and other festal occasions; but his days were numbered, and within fifty years even his memory had seemingly perished.<sup>88</sup>

Wicker-work giants in Brabant and Flanders.

Most towns and even villages of Brabant and Flanders have, or used to have, similar wicker giants which were annually led about to the delight of the populace, who loved these grotesque figures, spoke of them with patriotic enthusiasm, and never wearied of gazing at them. The name by which the giants went was Reuzes, and a special song called the Reuze song was sung in the Flemish dialect while they were making their triumphal progress through the streets. The most celebrated of these monstrous effigies were those of Antwerp and Wetteren. At Ypres a whole family of giants contributed to the public hilarity at the Carnival. At Cassel and Hazebrouch, in the French department of Nord, the giants

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<sup>88</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, xxix. (1759), pp. 263-265; Madame Clément, *Histoire des fêtes civiles et religieuses du département du Nord*,<sup>2</sup> pp. 169-175; A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France*, pp. 328-332. Compare John Milner, *The History, Civil and Ecclesiastical, and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester* (Winchester, n. d.), i. 8 *sq.* note 6; John Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1882-1883), i. 325 *sq.*; James Logan, *The Scottish Gael or Celtic Manners*, edited by Rev. Alex. Stewart (Inverness, n. d.), ii. 358. According to the writer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* the name of the procession was the Cor-mass.

made their annual appearance on Shrove Tuesday.<sup>89</sup> At Antwerp the giant was so big that no gate in the city was large enough to let him go through; hence he could not visit his brother giants in neighbouring towns, as the other Belgian giants used to do on solemn occasions. He was designed in 1534 by Peter van Aelst, painter to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, and is still preserved with other colossal figures in a large hall at Antwerp.<sup>90</sup> At Ath, in the Belgian province of Hainaut, the popular procession of the giants took place annually in August down to the year 1869 at least. For three days the colossal effigies of Goliath and his wife, of Samson and an Archer (*Tirant*), together with a two-headed eagle, were led about the streets on the shoulders of twenty bearers concealed under the flowing drapery of the giants, to the great delight of the townspeople and a crowd of strangers who assembled to witness the pageant. The custom can be traced back by documentary evidence to the middle of the fifteenth century; but it appears that the practice of giving Goliath a wife dates only from the year 1715. Their nuptials were solemnized every year on the eve of the festival in the church of St. Julien,

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<sup>89</sup> Madame Clément, *Histoire des fêtes civiles et religieuses, etc., de la Belgique méridionale*, etc. (Avesnes, 1846), p. 252; Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge* (Brussels, 1861-1862), i. 123-126. We may conjecture that the Flemish *Reuze*, like the *Reuss* of Dunkirk, is only another form of the German *Riese*, "giant."

<sup>90</sup> F. W. Fairholt, *Gog and Magog, the Giants in Guildhall, their real and legendary History* (London, 1859), pp. 64-78. For the loan of this work and of the one cited in the next note I have to thank Mrs. Wherry, of St. Peter's Terrace, Cambridge.

whither the two huge figures were escorted by the magistrates in procession.<sup>91</sup>

### Midsummer giants in England.

In England artificial giants seem to have been a standing feature of the midsummer festival. A writer of the sixteenth century speaks of "Midsommer pageants in London, where to make the people wonder, are set forth great and ugle gyants marching as if they were alive, and armed at all points, but within they are stuffed full of browne paper and tow, which the shrewd boyes, underpeering, do guilefully discover, and turne to a greate derision."<sup>92</sup> At Chester the annual pageant on Midsummer Eve included the effigies of four giants, with animals, hobby-horses, and other figures. An officious mayor of the town suppressed the giants in 1599, but they were restored by another mayor in 1601. Under the Commonwealth the pageant was discontinued, and the giants and beasts were destroyed; but after the restoration of Charles II. the old ceremony was revived on the old date, new effigies being constructed to replace those which had fallen

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<sup>91</sup> E. Fourdin, "La foire d'Ath," *Annales du Cercle Archéologique de Mons*, ix. (Mons, 1869) pp. 7, 8, 12, 36 *sq.* The history of the festival has been carefully investigated, with the help of documents by M. Fourdin. According to him, the procession was religious in its origin and took its rise from a pestilence which desolated Hainaut in 1215 (*op. cit.* pp. 1 *sqq.*). He thinks that the effigies of giants were not introduced into the procession till between 1450 and 1460 (*op. cit.* p. 8).

<sup>92</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1811, reprint of the original edition of London, 1589), book iii. chapter vi. p. 128. On the history of the English giants and their relation to those of the continent, see F. W. Fairholt, *Gog and Magog, the Giants in Guildhall, their real and legendary History* (London, 1859).

victims to Roundhead bigotry. The accounts preserve a record not only of the hoops, buckram, tinfoil, gold and silver leaf, paint, glue, and paste which went to make up these gorgeous figures; they also mention the arsenic which was mixed with the paste in order to preserve the poor giants from being eaten alive by the rats.<sup>93</sup> At Coventry the accounts of the Cappers' and Drapers' Companies in the sixteenth century shed light on the giants which there also were carried about the town at Midsummer; from some of the entries it appears that the giant's wife figured beside the giant.<sup>94</sup> At Burford, in Oxfordshire, Midsummer Eve used to be celebrated with great jollity by the carrying of a giant and a dragon up and down the town. The last survivor of these perambulating English giants dragged out a miserable existence at Salisbury, where an antiquary found him mouldering to decay in the neglected hall of the Tailors' Company about the year 1844. His bodily framework was of lath and hoop like the one which used to be worn by Jack-in-the-Green on May Day. The drapery, which concealed the bearer, was of coloured chintz, bordered with red and purple, and trimmed with yellow fringe. His head was modelled in paste-board and adorned with a gold-laced cocked hat: his flowing locks were of tow; and in his big right hand he brandished a branch of artificial laurel. In the days

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<sup>93</sup> Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, New Edition, by W. Hone (London, 1834), pp. xliii. – xlv.; F. W. Fairholt, *Gog and Magog, the Giants in Guildhall* (London, 1859), pp. 52-59.

<sup>94</sup> F. W. Fairholt, *op. cit.* pp. 59-61.

of his glory he promenaded about the streets, dancing clumsily and attended by two men grotesquely attired, who kept a watchful eye on his movements and checked by the wooden sword and club which they carried any incipient tendency to lose his balance and topple over in an undignified manner, which would have exposed to the derision of the populace the mystery of his inner man. The learned called him St. Christopher, the vulgar simply the giant.<sup>95</sup>

Wicker-work giants burnt at or near Midsummer.

In these cases the giants only figure in the processions. But sometimes they were burned in the summer bonfires. Thus the people of the Rue aux Ours in Paris used annually to make a great wicker-work figure, dressed as a soldier, which they promenaded up and down the streets for several days, and solemnly burned on the third of July, the crowd of spectators singing *Salve Regina*. A personage who bore the title of king presided over the ceremony with a lighted torch in his hand. The burning fragments of the image were scattered among the people, who eagerly scrambled for them. The custom was abolished in 1743.<sup>96</sup> In Brie, Isle de France, a wicker-work giant, eighteen feet high, was annually burned on Midsummer Eve.<sup>97</sup>

Animals burnt in the Midsummer bonfires. Serpents formerly

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<sup>95</sup> F. W. Fairholt, *op. cit.* pp. 61-63.

<sup>96</sup> Felix Liebrecht, *Des Gervasius von Tilbury Otia Imperialia* (Hanover, 1856), pp. 212 sq.; A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes, et Traditions des Provinces de France*, pp. 354 sq.; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 514.

<sup>97</sup> W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, pp. 514, 523.

burnt in the Midsummer fire at Luchon. Cats formerly burnt in the Midsummer, Easter, and Lenten bonfires.

Again, the Druidical custom of burning live animals, enclosed in wicker-work, has its counterpart at the spring and midsummer festivals. At Luchon in the Pyrenees on Midsummer Eve “a hollow column, composed of strong wicker-work, is raised to the height of about sixty feet in the centre of the principal suburb, and interlaced with green foliage up to the very top; while the most beautiful flowers and shrubs procurable are artistically arranged in groups below, so as to form a sort of background to the scene. The column is then filled with combustible materials, ready for ignition. At an appointed hour – about 8 p. m. – a grand procession, composed of the clergy, followed by young men and maidens in holiday attire, pour forth from the town chanting hymns, and take up their position around the column. Meanwhile, bonfires are lit, with beautiful effect, in the surrounding hills. As many living serpents as could be collected are now thrown into the column, which is set on fire at the base by means of torches, armed with which about fifty boys and men dance around with frantic gestures. The serpents, to avoid the flames, wriggle their way to the top, whence they are seen lashing out laterally until finally obliged to drop, their struggles for life giving rise to enthusiastic delight among the surrounding spectators. This is a favourite annual ceremony for the inhabitants of Luchon and its neighbourhood, and local

tradition assigns it to a heathen origin.”<sup>98</sup> In the midsummer fires formerly kindled on the Place de Grève at Paris it was the custom to burn a basket, barrel, or sack full of live cats, which was hung from a tall mast in the midst of the bonfire; sometimes a fox was burned. The people collected the embers and ashes of the fire and took them home, believing that they brought good luck. The French kings often witnessed these spectacles and even lit the bonfire with their own hands. In 1648 Louis the Fourteenth, crowned with a wreath of roses and carrying a bunch of roses in his hand, kindled the fire, danced at it and partook of the banquet afterwards in the town hall. But this was the last occasion when a monarch presided at the midsummer bonfire in Paris.<sup>99</sup> At Metz midsummer fires were lighted with great pomp on the esplanade, and a dozen cats, enclosed in wicker-cages, were burned alive in them, to the amusement of the people.<sup>100</sup> Similarly at Gap, in the

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<sup>98</sup> *Athenaeum*, 24th July 1869, p. 115; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, pp. 515 *sq.* From a later account we learn that about the year 1890 the custom of lighting a bonfire and dancing round it was still observed at Bagnères de Luchon on Midsummer Eve, but the practice of burning live serpents in it had been discontinued. The fire was kindled by a priest. See *Folk-lore*, xii. (1901) pp. 315-317.

<sup>99</sup> A. Breuil, “Du culte de St. – Jean Baptiste,” *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, viii. (1845) pp. 187 *sq.*; Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire Infernal* (Paris, 1825-1826), iii. 40; A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France*, pp. 355 *sq.*; J. W. Wolf, *Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie* (Göttingen and Leipsic, 1852-1857), ii. 388; E. Cortet, *Essai sur les Fêtes Religieuses* (Paris, 1867), pp. 213 *sq.*; Laisnel de la Salle, *Croyances et Légendes du Centre de la France* (Paris, 1875), i. 82; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 515.

<sup>100</sup> Tessier, in *Mémoires et Dissertations publiés par la Société Royale des Antiquaires de France*, v. (1823) p. 388; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 515.

department of the High Alps, cats used to be roasted over the midsummer bonfire.<sup>101</sup> In Russia a white cock was sometimes burned in the midsummer bonfire;<sup>102</sup> in Meissen or Thuringia a horse's head used to be thrown into it.<sup>103</sup> Sometimes animals are burned in the spring bonfires. In the Vosges cats were burned on Shrove Tuesday; in Alsace they were thrown into the Easter bonfire.<sup>104</sup> In the department of the Ardennes cats were flung into the bonfires kindled on the first Sunday in Lent; sometimes, by a refinement of cruelty, they were hung over the fire from the end of a pole and roasted alive. "The cat, which represented the devil, could never suffer enough." While the creatures were perishing in the flames, the shepherds guarded their flocks and forced them to leap over the fire, esteeming this an infallible means of preserving them from disease and witchcraft.<sup>105</sup> We have seen that squirrels were sometimes burned in the Easter fire.<sup>106</sup>

Thus the sacrificial rites of the ancient Gauls have their counterparts in the popular festivals of modern Europe.

Thus it appears that the sacrificial rites of the Celts of ancient

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<sup>101</sup> Alexandre Bertrand, *La Religion des Gaulois* (Paris, 1897), p. 407.

<sup>102</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> i. 519; W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 515.

<sup>103</sup> W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 515; Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfesten, Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube* (Iserlohn, n. d.), p. 34.

<sup>104</sup> W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 515.

<sup>105</sup> A. Meyrac, *Traditions, Coutumes, Légendes, et Contes des Ardenness* (Charleville, 1890), p. 68.

<sup>106</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 142.



Gaul can be traced in the popular festivals of modern Europe. Naturally it is in France, or rather in the wider area comprised within the limits of ancient Gaul, that these rites have left the clearest traces in the customs of burning giants of wicker-work and animals enclosed in wicker-work or baskets. These customs, it will have been remarked, are generally observed at or about midsummer. From this we may infer that the original rites of which these are the degenerate successors were solemnized at midsummer. This inference harmonizes with the conclusion suggested by a general survey of European folk-custom, that the midsummer festival must on the whole have been the most widely diffused and the most solemn of all the yearly festivals celebrated by the primitive Aryans in Europe. At the same time we must bear in mind that among the British Celts the chief fire-festivals of the year appear certainly to have been those of Beltane (May Day) and Hallowe'en (the last day of October); and this suggests a doubt whether the Celts of Gaul also may not have celebrated their principal rites of fire, including their burnt sacrifices of men and animals, at the beginning of May or the beginning of November rather than at Midsummer.

The men, women, and animals burnt at these festivals were perhaps thought to be witches or wizards in disguise.

We have still to ask, What is the meaning of such sacrifices? Why were men and animals burnt to death at these festivals? If we are right in interpreting the modern European fire-festivals as attempts to break the power of witchcraft by burning or banning

the witches and warlocks, it seems to follow that we must explain the human sacrifices of the Celts in the same manner; that is, we must suppose that the men whom the Druids burnt in wicker-work images were condemned to death on the ground that they were witches or wizards, and that the mode of execution by fire was chosen because, as we have seen, burning alive is deemed the surest mode of getting rid of these noxious and dangerous beings. The same explanation would apply to the cattle and wild animals of many kinds which the Celts burned along with the men.<sup>107</sup> They, too, we may conjecture, were supposed to be either under the spell of witchcraft or actually to be the witches and wizards, who had transformed themselves into animals for the purpose of prosecuting their infernal plots against the welfare of their fellow creatures. This conjecture is confirmed by the observation that the victims most commonly burned in modern bonfires have been cats, and that cats are precisely the animals into which, with the possible exception of hares, witches were most usually supposed to transform themselves. Again, we have seen that serpents and foxes used sometimes to be burnt in the midsummer fires;<sup>108</sup> and Welsh and German witches are reported to have assumed the form both of foxes and serpents.<sup>109</sup> In

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<sup>107</sup> Strabo, iv. 4. 5, p. 198, καὶ ἄλλα δὲ ἀνθρωποθυσιῶν εἶδη λέγεται; καὶ γὰρ κατετόξευόν τινας καὶ ἀνεσταύρουν ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς καὶ κατασκευάσαντες κολοσσὸν χόρτου καὶ ξύλων, ἐμβalόντες εἰς τοῦτον βοσκήματα καὶ θηρία παντοῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπους ὠλοκαύτουν.

<sup>108</sup> Above, p. [39](#).

<sup>109</sup> Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), pp. 214,

short, when we remember the great variety of animals whose forms witches can assume at pleasure,<sup>110</sup> it seems easy on this hypothesis to account for the variety of living creatures that have been burnt at festivals both in ancient Gaul and modern Europe; all these victims, we may surmise, were doomed to the flames, not because they were animals, but because they were believed to be witches who had taken the shape of animals for their nefarious purposes. One advantage of explaining the ancient Celtic sacrifices in this way is that it introduces, as it were, a harmony and consistency into the treatment which Europe has meted out to witches from the earliest times down to about two centuries ago, when the growing influence of rationalism discredited the belief in witchcraft and put a stop to the custom of burning witches. On this view the Christian Church in its dealings with the black art merely carried out the traditional policy of Druidism, and it might be a nice question to decide which of the two, in pursuance of that policy, exterminated the larger number of innocent men and women.<sup>111</sup> Be that as it may, we can

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301 *sq.*; Ulrich Jahn, *Hexenwesen und Zauberei in Pommern* (Breslau, 1886), p. 7; *id.*, *Volkssagen aus Pommern und Rügen* (Stettin, 1886), p. 353, No. 446.

<sup>110</sup> See above, vol. i. p. 315 *n.* 1.

<sup>111</sup> The treatment of magic and witchcraft by the Christian Church is described by W. E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, New Edition (London, 1882), i. 1 *sqq.* Four hundred witches were burned at one time in the great square of Toulouse (W. E. H. Lecky, *op. cit.* ii. 38). Writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century Addison observes: "Before I leave Switzerland I cannot but observe, that the notion of witchcraft reigns very much in this country. I have often been tired with accounts of this nature from very sensible men, who are

now perhaps understand why the Druids believed that the more persons they sentenced to death, the greater would be the fertility of the land.<sup>112</sup> To a modern reader the connexion at first sight may not be obvious between the activity of the hangman and the productivity of the earth. But a little reflection may satisfy him that when the criminals who perish at the stake or on the gallows are witches, whose delight it is to blight the crops of the farmer or to lay them low under storms of hail, the execution of these wretches is really calculated to ensure an abundant harvest by removing one of the principal causes which paralyze the efforts and blast the hopes of the husbandman.

Mannhardt thought that the men and animals whom the Druids burned in wickerwork images represented spirits of vegetation, and that the burning of them was a charm to secure a supply of sunshine for the crops.

The Druidical sacrifices which we are considering were explained in a different way by W. Mannhardt. He supposed that the men whom the Druids burned in wickerwork images represented the spirits of vegetation, and accordingly that the

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most of them furnished with matters of fact which have happened, as they pretend, within the compass of their own knowledge. It is certain there have been many executions on this account, as in the canton of Berne there were some put to death during my stay at Geneva. The people are so universally infatuated with the notion, that if a cow falls sick, it is ten to one but an old woman is clapt up in prison for it, and if the poor creature chance to think herself a witch, the whole country is for hanging her up without mercy." See *The Works of Joseph Addison*, with notes by R. Hurd, D.D. (London, 1811), vol. ii., "Remarks on several Parts of Italy," p. 196.

<sup>112</sup> Strabo, iv. 4. 4, p. 197. See the passage quoted above, p. [32](#), note 2.

custom of burning them was a magical ceremony intended to secure the necessary sunshine for the crops. Similarly, he seems to have inclined to the view that the animals which used to be burnt in the bonfires represented the corn-spirit,<sup>113</sup> which, as we saw in an earlier part of this work, is often supposed to assume the shape of an animal.<sup>114</sup> This theory is no doubt tenable, and the great authority of W. Mannhardt entitles it to careful consideration. I adopted it in former editions of this book; but on reconsideration it seems to me on the whole to be less probable than the theory that the men and animals burnt in the fires perished in the character of witches. This latter view is strongly supported by the testimony of the people who celebrate the fire-festivals, since a popular name for the custom of kindling the fires is “burning the witches,” effigies of witches are sometimes consumed in the flames, and the fires, their embers, or their ashes are supposed to furnish protection against witchcraft. On the other hand there is little to shew that the effigies or the animals burnt in the fires are regarded by the people as representatives of the vegetation-spirit, and that the bonfires are sun-charms. With regard to serpents in particular, which used to be burnt in the midsummer fire at Luchon, I am not aware of any certain evidence that in Europe snakes have been regarded as embodiments of the tree-spirit or corn-spirit,<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> W. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, pp. 532-534.

<sup>114</sup> *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, i. 270-305.

<sup>115</sup> Some of the serpents worshipped by the old Prussians lived in hollow oaks,

though in other parts of the world the conception appears to be not unknown.<sup>116</sup> Whereas the popular faith in the transformation of witches into animals is so general and deeply rooted, and the fear of these uncanny beings is so strong, that it seems safer to suppose that the cats and other animals which were burnt in the fire suffered death as embodiments of witches than that they perished as representatives of vegetation-spirits.

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and as oaks were sacred among the Prussians, the serpents may possibly have been regarded as genii of the trees. See Simon Grunau, *Preussischer Chronik*, herausgegeben von Dr. M. Perlbach, i. (Leipsic, 1876) p. 89; Christophor Hartknoch, *Alt und Neues Preussen* (Frankfort and Leipsic, 1684), pp. 143, 163. Serpents played an important part in the worship of Demeter, but we can hardly assume that they were regarded as embodiments of the goddess. See *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, ii. 17 sq.

<sup>116</sup> For example, in China the spirits of plants are thought to assume the form of snakes oftener than that of any other animal. Chinese literature abounds with stories illustrative of such transformations. See J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, iv. (Leyden, 1901) pp. 283-286. In Siam the spirit of the *takhien* tree is said to appear sometimes in the shape of a serpent and sometimes in that of a woman. See Adolph Bastian, *Die Voelker des Oestlichen Asien*, iii. (Jena, 1867) p. 251. The vipers that haunted the balsam trees in Arabia were regarded by the Arabs as sacred to the trees (Pausanias, ix. 28. 4); and once in Arabia, when a wood hitherto untouched by man was burned down to make room for the plough, certain white snakes flew out of it with loud lamentations. No doubt they were supposed to be the dispossessed spirits of the trees. See J. Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1897), pp. 108 sq.

## **Chapter VIII. The Magic Flowers of Midsummer Eve**

It is a common belief in Europe that plants acquire certain magical, but transient, virtues on Midsummer Eve. Magical plants culled on Midsummer Eve (St. John's Eve) or Midsummer Day (St. John's Day) in France. St. John's herb.

A feature of the great midsummer festival remains to be considered, which may perhaps help to clear up the doubt as to the meaning of the fire-ceremonies and their relation to Druidism. For in France and England, the countries where the sway of the Druids is known to have been most firmly established, Midsummer Eve is still the time for culling certain magic plants, whose evanescent virtue can be secured at this mystic season alone. Indeed all over Europe antique fancies of the same sort have lingered about Midsummer Eve, imparting to it a fragrance of the past, like withered rose leaves that, found by chance in the pages of an old volume, still smell of departed summers. Thus in Saintonge and Aunis, two of the ancient provinces of Western France, we read that "of all the festivals for which the merry bells ring out there is not one which has given rise to a greater number of superstitious practices than the festival of St. John the Baptist. The Eve of St. John was the day of all days for gathering the wonderful herbs by means

of which you could combat fever, cure a host of diseases, and guard yourself against sorcerers and their spells. But in order to attain these results two conditions had to be observed; first, you must be fasting when you gathered the herbs, and second, you must cull them before the sun rose. If these conditions were not fulfilled, the plants had no special virtue.”<sup>117</sup> In the neighbouring province of Perigord the person who gathered the magic herbs before sunrise at this season had to walk backwards, to mutter some mystic words, and to perform certain ceremonies. The plants thus collected were carefully kept as an infallible cure for fever; placed above beds and the doors of houses and of cattle-sheds they protected man and beast from disease, witchcraft, and accident.<sup>118</sup> In Normandy a belief in the marvellous properties of herbs and plants, of flowers and seeds and leaves gathered, with certain traditional rites, on the Eve or the Day of St. John has remained part of the peasant's creed to this day. Thus he fancies that seeds of vegetables and plants, which have been collected on St. John's Eve, will keep better than others, and that flowers plucked that day will never fade.<sup>119</sup> Indeed so widespread

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<sup>117</sup> J. L. M. Noguès, *Les mœurs d'autrefois en Saintonge et en Aunis* (Saintes, 1891), p. 71. Amongst the superstitious practices denounced by the French writer J. B. Thiers in the seventeenth century was “the gathering of certain herbs between the Eve of St. John and the Eve of St. Peter and keeping them in a bottle to heal certain maladies.” See J. B. Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions* (Paris, 1679), p. 321.

<sup>118</sup> A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France* (Paris and Lyons, 1846), pp. 150 sq.

<sup>119</sup> Jules Lecœur, *Esquisses du Bocage Normand* (Condé-sur-Noireau, 1883-1887),



in France used to be the faith in the magic virtue of herbs culled on that day that there is a French proverb “to employ all the herbs of St. John in an affair,” meaning “to leave no stone unturned.”<sup>120</sup> In the early years of the nineteenth century a traveller reported that at Marseilles, “on the Eve of St. John, the Place de Noailles and the course are cleaned. From three o'clock in the morning the country-people flock thither, and by six o'clock the whole place is covered with a considerable quantity of flowers and herbs, aromatic or otherwise. The folk attribute superstitious virtues to these plants; they are persuaded that if they have been gathered the same day before sunrise they are fitted to heal many ailments. People buy them emulously to give away in presents and to fill the house with.”<sup>121</sup> On the Eve of St. John (Midsummer Eve), before sunset, the peasants of Perche still gather the herb called St. John's herb. It is a creeping plant, very aromatic, with small flowers of a violet blue. Other scented flowers are added, and out of the posies they make floral crosses and crowns, which they hang up over the doors of houses and stables. Such floral decorations are sold like the box-wood on Palm Sunday, and

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ii. 8, 244; Amélie Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque et merveilleuse* (Paris and Rouen, 1845), p. 294.

<sup>120</sup> De la Loubere, *Du Royaume de Siam* (Amsterdam, 1691), i. 202. The writer here mentions an Italian mode of divination practised on Midsummer Eve. People washed their feet in wine and threw the wine out of the window. After that, the first words they heard spoken by passers-by were deemed oracular.

<sup>121</sup> Aubin-Louis Millin, *Voyage dans les Départements du Midi de la France* (Paris, 1807-1811), iii. 344 *sq.*

the withered wreaths are kept from year to year. If an animal dies, it may be a cow, they carefully clean the byre or the stable, make a pile of these faded garlands, and set them on fire, having previously closed up all the openings and interstices, so that the whole place is thoroughly fumigated. This is thought to eradicate the germs of disease from the byre or stable.<sup>122</sup> At Nellingen, near Saarlben, in Lorraine the hedge doctors collect their store of simples between eleven o'clock and noon on Midsummer Day; and on that day nut-water is brewed from nuts that have been picked on the stroke of noon. Such water is a panacea for all ailments.<sup>123</sup> In the Vosges Mountains they say that wizards have but one day in the year, and but one hour in that day, to find and cull the baleful herbs which they use in their black art. That day is the Eve of St. John, and that hour is the time when the church bells are ringing the noonday Angelus. Hence in many villages they say that the bells ought not to ring at noon on that day.<sup>124</sup>

Magical plants culled on Midsummer Eve or Midsummer Day in the Tyrol and Germany.

In the Tyrol also they think that the witching hour is when

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<sup>122</sup> Alexandre Bertrand, *La Religion des Gaulois* (Paris, 1897), p. 124. In French the name of St. John's herb (*herbe de la Saint-Jean*) is usually given to *millepertuis*, that is, St. John's wort, which is quite a different flower. See below, pp. [54 sqq.](#) But "St. John's herb" may well be a general term which in different places is applied to different plants.

<sup>123</sup> Bruno Stehle, "Aberglauben, Sitten und Gebräuche in Lothringen," *Globus*, lix. (1891) p. 379.

<sup>124</sup> L. F. Sauvé, *Le Folk-lore des Hautes-Vosges* (Paris, 1889), pp. 168 *sq.*

the *Ave Maria* bell is ringing on Midsummer Eve, for then the witches go forth to gather the noxious plants whereby they raise thunderstorms. Therefore in many districts the bells ring for a shorter time than usual that evening;<sup>125</sup> at Folgareit the sexton used to steal quietly into the church, and when the clock struck three he contented himself with giving a few pulls to the smallest of the bells.<sup>126</sup> At Rengen, in the Eifel Mountains, the sexton rings the church bell for an hour on the afternoon of Midsummer Day. As soon as the bell begins to ring, the children run out into the meadows, gather flowers, and weave them into garlands which they throw on the roofs of the houses and buildings. There the garlands remain till the wind blows them away. It is believed that they protect the houses against fire and thunderstorms.<sup>127</sup> At Niederehe, in the Eifel Mountains, on Midsummer Day little children used to make wreaths and posies out of "St. John's flowers and Maiden-flax" and throw them on the roofs. Some time afterwards, when the wild gooseberries were ripe, all the children would gather round an old woman on a Sunday afternoon, and taking the now withered wreaths and posies with them march out of the village, praying while

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<sup>125</sup> I. V. Zingerle, "Wald, Bäume, Kräuter," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, i. (1853) pp. 332 sq.; *id.*, *Sitten, Bräuche und Meinungen des Tiroler Volkes*<sup>2</sup> (Innsbruck, 1871), p. 158, §§ 1345, 1348.

<sup>126</sup> Christian Schneller, *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol* (Innsbruck, 1867), p. 237, § 24.

<sup>127</sup> J. H. Schmitz, *Sitten und Bräuche, Lieder, Sprichwörter und Räthsel des Eifler Volkes* (Treves, 1856-1858), i. 40.

they walked. Wreaths and posies were then thrown in a heap and kindled, whereupon the children snatched them up, still burning, and ran and fumigated the wild gooseberry bushes with the smoke. Then they returned with the old woman to the village, knelt down before her, and received her blessing. From that time the children were free to pick and eat the wild gooseberries.<sup>128</sup> In the Mark of Brandenburg the peasants gather all sorts of simples on Midsummer Day, because they are of opinion that the drugs produce their medicinal effect only if they have been culled at that time. Many of these plants, especially roots, must be dug up at midnight and in silence.<sup>129</sup> In Mecklenburg not merely is a special healing virtue ascribed to simples collected on Midsummer Day; the very smoke of such plants, if they are burned in the fire, is believed to protect a house against thunder and lightning, and to still the raging of the storm.<sup>130</sup> The Wends of the Spreewald twine wreaths of herbs and flowers at midsummer, and hang them up in their rooms; and when any one gets a fright he will lay some of the leaves and blossoms on hot coals and fumigate himself with the smoke.<sup>131</sup> In Eastern Prussia, some two hundred years ago, it used to be customary on Midsummer Day to make up a bunch of herbs of various sorts and fasten it

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<sup>128</sup> J. H. Schmitz, *op. cit.* i. 42.

<sup>129</sup> A. Kuhn, *Märkische Sagen und Märchen* (Berlin, 1843), p. 330.

<sup>130</sup> K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg* (Vienna, 1879-1880), ii. p. 287, § 1436.

<sup>131</sup> W. von Schulenburg, *Wendische Volkssagen und Gebräuche aus dem Spreewald* (Leipsic, 1880), p. 254.

to a pole, which was then put up over the gate or door through which the corn would be brought in at harvest. Such a pole was called Kaupole, and it remained in its place till the crops had been reaped and garnered. Then the bunch of herbs was taken down; part of it was put with the corn in the barn to keep rats and mice from the grain, and part was kept as a remedy for diseases of all sorts.<sup>132</sup>

Magical plants culled on Midsummer Eve (St. John's Eve) or Midsummer Day in Austria and Russia.

The Germans of West Bohemia collect simples on St. John's Night, because they believe the healing virtue of the plants to be especially powerful at that time.<sup>133</sup> The theory and practice of the Huzuls in the Carpathian Mountains are similar; they imagine that the plants gathered on that night are not only medicinal but possess the power of restraining the witches; some say that the herbs should be plucked in twelve gardens or meadows.<sup>134</sup> Among the simples which the Czechs and Moravians of Silesia cull at this season are dandelions, ribwort, and the bloom of the lime-tree.<sup>135</sup> The Esthonians of the island of Oesel gather

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<sup>132</sup> M. Prätorius, *Deliciae Prussicae* (Berlin, 1871), pp. 24 *sq.* Kaupole is probably identical in name with Kupole or Kupalo, as to whom see *The Dying God*, pp. 261 *sq.*

<sup>133</sup> Alois John, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube im deutschen Westböhmen* (Prague, 1905), p. 86.

<sup>134</sup> R. F. Kaindl, *Die Huzulen* (Vienna, 1894), pp. 78, 90, 93, 105; *id.*, "Zauberglaube bei den Huzulen," *Globus*, lxxvi. (1899) p. 256.

<sup>135</sup> Dr. F. Tetzner, "Die Tschechen und Mährer in Schlesien," *Globus*, lxxviii. (1900) p. 340.

St. John's herbs (*Jani rohhud*) on St. John's Day, tie them up in bunches, and hang them up about the houses to prevent evil spirits from entering. A subsidiary use of the plants is to cure diseases; gathered at that time they have a greater medical value than if they were collected at any other season. Everybody does not choose exactly the same sorts of plants; some gather more and some less, but in the collection St. John's wort (*Jani rohhi*, *Hypericum perforatum*) should never be wanting.<sup>136</sup> A writer of the early part of the seventeenth century informs us that the Livonians, among whom he lived, were impressed with a belief in the great and marvellous properties possessed by simples which had been culled on Midsummer Day. Such simples, they thought, were sure remedies for fever and for sickness and pestilence in man and beast; but if gathered one day too late they lost all their virtue.<sup>137</sup> Among the Letts of the Baltic provinces of Russia girls and women go about on Midsummer Day crowned with wreaths of aromatic plants, which are afterwards hung up for good luck in the houses. The plants are also dried and given to cows to eat, because they are supposed to help the animals to calve.<sup>138</sup>

Magical plants culled on St. John's Eve or St. John's Day

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<sup>136</sup> J. B. Holzmayer, "Osiliana," *Verhandlungen der gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft*, vii. Heft 2 (Dorpat, 1872), p. 62.

<sup>137</sup> P. Einhorn, "Wiederlegunge der Abgötterey: der ander (*sic*) Theil," printed at Riga in 1627, and reprinted in *Scriptores rerum Livonicarum*, ii. (Riga and Leipsic, 1848) pp. 651 *sq.*

<sup>138</sup> J. G. Kohl, *Die deutsch-russischen Ostseeprovinzen* (Dresden and Leipsic, 1841), ii. 26.

among the South Slavs, in Macedonia, and Bolivia.

In Bulgaria St. John's Day is the special season for culling simples. On this day, too, Bulgarian girls gather nosegays of a certain white flower, throw them into a vessel of water, and place the vessel under a rose-tree in bloom. Here it remains all night. Next morning they set it in the courtyard and dance singing round it. An old woman then takes the flowers out of the vessel, and the girls wash themselves with the water, praying that God would grant them health throughout the year. After that the old woman restores her nosegay to each girl and promises her a rich husband.<sup>139</sup> Among the South Slavs generally on St. John's Eve it is the custom for girls to gather white flowers in the meadows and to place them in a sieve or behind the rafters. A flower is assigned to each member of the household: next morning the flowers are inspected; and he or she whose flower is fresh will be well the whole year, but he or she whose flower is faded will be sickly or die. Garlands are then woven out of the flowers and laid on roofs, folds, and beehives.<sup>140</sup> In some parts of Macedonia on St. John's Eve the peasants are wont to festoon their cottages and gird their own waists with wreaths of what they call St. John's flower; it is the blossom of a creeping plant which resembles honeysuckle.<sup>141</sup> Similar notions as to the magical virtue which plants acquire

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<sup>139</sup> A. Strausz, *Die Bulgaren* (Leipsic, 1898), pp. 348, 386.

<sup>140</sup> F. S. Krauss, *Volks Glaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven* (Münster i. W., 1890), p. 34.

<sup>141</sup> G. F. Abbott, *Macedonian Folk-lore* (Cambridge, 1903), pp. 54, 58.

at midsummer have been transported by Europeans to the New World. At La Paz in Bolivia people believe that flowers of mint (*Yerba buena*) gathered before sunrise on St. John's Day foretell an endless felicity to such as are so lucky as to find them.<sup>142</sup>

Magical plants culled at Midsummer among the Mohammedans of Morocco.

Nor is the superstition confined to Europe and to people of European descent. In Morocco also the Mohammedans are of opinion that certain plants, such as penny-royal, marjoram, and the oleander, acquire a special magic virtue (*baraka*) when they are gathered shortly before midsummer. Hence the people collect these plants at this season and preserve them for magical or medical purposes. For example, branches of oleander are brought into the houses before midsummer and kept under the roof as a charm against the evil eye; but while the branches are being brought in they may not touch the ground, else they would lose their marvellous properties. Cases of sickness caused by the evil eye are cured by fumigating the patients with the smoke of these boughs. The greatest efficacy is ascribed to "the sultan of the oleander," which is a stalk with four pairs of leaves clustered round it. Such a stalk is always endowed with magical virtue, but that virtue is greatest when the stalk has been cut just before midsummer. Arab women in the Hiaina district of Morocco gather *Daphne gnidium* on Midsummer Day, dry it in

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<sup>142</sup> H. A. Weddell, *Voyage dans le Nord de la Bolivie et dans les parties voisines du Pérou* (Paris and London, 1853), p. 181.



the sun, and make it into a powder which, mixed with water, they daub on the heads of their little children to protect them from sunstroke and vermin and to make their hair grow well. Indeed such marvellous powers do these Arabs attribute to plants at this mystic season that a barren woman will walk naked about a vegetable garden on Midsummer Night in the hope of conceiving a child through the fertilizing influence of the vegetables.<sup>143</sup>

Seven different sorts of magical plants gathered at Midsummer. Nine different sorts of plants gathered at Midsummer. Dreams of love on flowers at Midsummer Eve. Love's watery mirror at Midsummer Eve.

Sometimes in order to produce the desired effect it is deemed necessary that seven or nine different sorts of plants should be gathered at this mystic season. Norman peasants, who wish to fortify themselves for the toil of harvest, will sometimes go out at dawn on St. John's Day and pull seven kinds of plants, which they afterwards eat in their soup as a means of imparting strength and suppleness to their limbs in the harvest field.<sup>144</sup> In Mecklenburg maidens are wont to gather seven sorts of flowers at noon on Midsummer Eve. These they weave into garlands, and sleep with them under their pillows. Then they are sure to dream of the

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<sup>143</sup> W. Westermarck, "Midsummer Customs in Morocco," *Folk-lore*, xvi. (1905) p. 35; *id.*, *Ceremonies and Beliefs connected with Agriculture, certain Dates of the Solar Year, and the Weather in Morocco* (Helsingfors, 1913), pp. 88 sq.

<sup>144</sup> J. Lecœur, *Esquisses du Bocage Normand* (Condé-sur-Noireau, 1883-1887), ii. 9.

men who will marry them.<sup>145</sup> But the flowers on which youthful lovers dream at Midsummer Eve are oftener nine in number. Thus in Voigtland nine different kinds of flowers are twined into a garland at the hour of noon, but they may not enter the dwelling by the door in the usual way; they must be passed through the window, or, if they come in at the door, they must be thrown, not carried, into the house. Sleeping on them that night you will dream of your future wife or future husband.<sup>146</sup> The Bohemian maid, who gathers nine kinds of flowers on which to dream of love at Midsummer Eve, takes care to wrap her hand in a white cloth, and afterwards to wash it in dew; and when she brings her garland home she must speak no word to any soul she meets by the way, for then all the magic virtue of the flowers would be gone.<sup>147</sup> Other Bohemian girls look into the book of fate at this season after a different fashion. They twine their hair with wreaths made of nine sorts of leaves, and go, when the stars of the summer night are twinkling in the sky, to a brook that flows beside a tree. There, gazing on the stream, the girl beholds, beside the broken reflections of the tree and the stars, the watery image of her future lord.<sup>148</sup> So in Masuren maidens gather nosegays of

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<sup>145</sup> K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg* (Vienna, 1879-1890), ii. 285.

<sup>146</sup> J. A. E. Köhler, *Volksbrauch, Aberglauben, Sagen und andre alte Ueberlieferungen im Voigtlande* (Leipsic, 1867), p. 376.

<sup>147</sup> O. Freiherr von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Fest-Kalender aus Böhmen* (Prague, n. d.), p. 312.

<sup>148</sup> Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *loc. cit.*

wild flowers in silence on Midsummer Eve. At the midnight hour each girl takes the nosegay and a glass of water, and when she has spoken certain words she sees her lover mirrored in the water.<sup>149</sup>

Garlands of flowers of nine sorts gathered at Midsummer and used in divination and medicine.

Sometimes Bohemian damsels make a different use of their midsummer garlands twined of nine sorts of flowers. They lie down with the garland laid as a pillow under their right ear, and a hollow voice, swooning from underground, proclaims their destiny.<sup>150</sup> Yet another mode of consulting the oracle by means of these same garlands is to throw them backwards and in silence upon a tree at the hour of noon, just when the flowers have been gathered. For every time that the wreath is thrown without sticking to the branches of the tree the girl will have a year to wait before she weds. This mode of divination is practised in Voigtland,<sup>151</sup> East Prussia,<sup>152</sup> Silesia,<sup>153</sup> Belgium,<sup>154</sup> and Wales,<sup>155</sup> and the same thing is done in Masuren, although we are not told that there the wreaths must be composed of nine sorts of

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<sup>149</sup> M. Töppen, *Aberglauben aus Masuren*<sup>2</sup> (Danzig, 1867), p. 72.

<sup>150</sup> Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *loc. cit.*

<sup>151</sup> J. A. E. Köhler, *Volksbrauch*, etc., *im Voigtlande*, p. 376.

<sup>152</sup> C. Lemke, *Volksthümliches in Ostpreussen* (Mohrungen, 1884-1887), i. 20.

<sup>153</sup> P. Drechsler, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien* (Leipsic, 1903-1906), i. 144 sq.

<sup>154</sup> Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge* (Brussels, 1861-1862), i. 423.

<sup>155</sup> Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), p. 252.

flowers.<sup>156</sup> However, in Masuren chaplets of nine kinds of herbs are gathered on St. John's Eve and put to a more prosaic use than that of presaging the course of true love. They are carefully preserved, and the people brew a sort of tea from them, which they administer as a remedy for many ailments; or they keep the chaplets under their pillows till they are dry, and thereupon dose their sick cattle with them.<sup>157</sup> In Esthonia the virtues popularly ascribed to wreaths of this sort are many and various. These wreaths, composed of nine kinds of herbs culled on the Eve or the Day of St. John, are sometimes inserted in the roof or hung up on the walls of the house, and each of them receives the name of one of the inmates. If the plants which have been thus dedicated to a girl happen to take root and grow in the chinks and crannies, she will soon wed; if they have been dedicated to an older person and wither away, that person will die. The people also give them as medicine to cattle at the time when the animals are driven forth to pasture; or they fumigate the beasts with the smoke of the herbs, which are burnt along with shavings from the wooden threshold. Bunches of the plants are also hung about the house to keep off evil spirits, and maidens lay them under their pillows to dream on.<sup>158</sup> In Sweden the "Midsummer Brooms," made up of nine sorts of flowers gathered on Midsummer Eve, are put to

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<sup>156</sup> M. Töppen, *Aberglauben aus Masuren*,<sup>2</sup> p. 72.

<sup>157</sup> M. Töppen, *op. cit.* p. 71.

<sup>158</sup> A. Wiedemann, *Aus dem inneren und äussern Leben der Ehsten* (St. Petersburg, 1876), pp. 362 sq.

nearly the same uses. Fathers of families hang up such “brooms” to the rafters, one for each inmate of the house; and he or she whose broom (*quast*) is the first to wither will be the first to die. Girls also dream of their future husbands with these bunches of flowers under their pillows. A decoction made from the flowers is, moreover, a panacea for all disorders, and if a bunch of them be hung up in the cattle shed, the Troll cannot enter to bewitch the beasts.<sup>159</sup> The Germans of Moravia think that nine kinds of herbs gathered on St. John's Night (Midsummer Eve) are a remedy for fever;<sup>160</sup> and some of the Wends attribute a curative virtue in general to such plants.<sup>161</sup>

St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer. St. John's blood on St. John's Day.

Of the flowers which it has been customary to gather for purposes of magic or divination at midsummer none perhaps is so widely popular as St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). The reason for associating this particular plant with the great summer festival is perhaps not far to seek, for the flower blooms about Midsummer Day, and with its bright yellow petals and masses of golden stamens it might well pass for a tiny copy on earth of the great sun which reaches its culminating point in heaven at this season. Gathered on Midsummer Eve, or on Midsummer

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<sup>159</sup> L. Lloyd, *Peasant Life in Sweden* (London, 1870), pp. 267 sq.

<sup>160</sup> Willibald Müller, *Beiträge zur Volkskunde der Deutschen in Mähren* (Vienna and Olmütz, 1893), p. 264.

<sup>161</sup> W. von Schulenburg, *Wendisches Volksthum* (Berlin, 1882), p. 145.

Day before sunrise, the blossoms are hung on doorways and windows to preserve the house against thunder, witches, and evil spirits; and various healing properties are attributed to the different species of the plant. In the Tyrol they say that if you put St. John's wort in your shoe before sunrise on Midsummer Day you may walk as far as you please without growing weary. In Scotland people carried it about their persons as an amulet against witchcraft. On the lower Rhine children twine chaplets of St. John's wort on the morning of Midsummer Day, and throw them on the roofs of the houses. Here, too, the people who danced round the midsummer bonfires used to wear wreaths of these yellow flowers in their hair, and to deck the images of the saints at wayside shrines with the blossoms. Sometimes they flung the flowers into the bonfires. In Sicily they dip St. John's wort in oil, and so apply it as a balm for every wound. During the Middle Ages the power which the plant notoriously possesses of banning devils won for it the name of *fuga daemonum*; and before witches and wizards were stretched on the rack or otherwise tortured, the flower used to be administered to them as a means of wringing the truth from their lips.<sup>162</sup> In North Wales

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<sup>162</sup> Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste, Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube* (Iserlohn, n. d.), p. 145; A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1869), p. 100, § 134; I. V. Zingerle, "Wald, Bäume, Kräuter," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, i. (1853) p. 329; A. Schlossar, "Volksmeinung und Volksaberglaube aus der deutschen Steiermark," *Germania*, N.R., xxiv. (1891) p. 387; E. Meier, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1852), p. 428; J. Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1882-1883), i. 307, 312; T. F.

people used to fix sprigs of St. John's wort over their doors, and sometimes over their windows, "in order to purify their houses, and by that means drive away all fiends and evil spirits."<sup>163</sup> In Saintonge and Aunis the flowers served to detect the presence of sorcerers, for if one of these pestilent fellows entered a house, the bunches of St. John's wort, which had been gathered on Midsummer Eve and hung on the walls, immediately dropped their yellow heads as if they had suddenly faded.<sup>164</sup> However, the Germans of Western Bohemia think that witches, far from dreading St. John's wort, actually seek the plant on St. John's Eve.<sup>165</sup> Further, the edges of the calyx and petals of St. John's

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Thiselton Dyer, *Folk-lore of Plants* (London, 1889), pp. 62, 286; Rev. Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore*, Third Edition (London, 1886), pp. 147, 149, 150, 540; G. Finamore, *Credenze, Usi e Costumi Abruzzesi* (Palermo, 1890), pp. 161 *sq.*; G. Pitrè, *Spettacoli e Feste Popolari Siciliane* (Palermo, 1881), p. 309. One authority lays down the rule that you should gather the plant fasting and in silence (J. Brand, *op. cit.* p. 312). According to Sowerby, the *Hypericum perforatum* flowers in England about July and August (*English Botany*, vol. v. London, 1796, p. 295). We should remember, however, that in the old calendar Midsummer Day fell twelve days later than at present. The reform of the calendar probably put many old floral superstitions out of joint.

<sup>163</sup> Bingley, *Tour round North Wales* (1800), ii. 237, quoted by T. F. Thiselton Dyer, *British Popular Customs* (London, 1876), p. 320. Compare Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), p. 251: "St. John's, or Midsummer Day, was an important festival. St. John's wort, gathered at noon on that day, was considered good for several complaints. The old saying went that if anybody dug the devil's bit at midnight on the eve of St. John, the roots were then good for driving the devil and witches away." Apparently by "the devil's bit" we are to understand St. John's wort.

<sup>164</sup> J. L. M. Noguès, *Les mœurs d'autrefois en Saintonge et en Aunis* (Saintes, 1891), pp. 71 *sq.*

<sup>165</sup> Alois John, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube im deutschen Westböhmen* (Prague,

wort, as well as their external surface, are marked with dark purple spots and lines, which, if squeezed, yield a red essential oil soluble in spirits.<sup>166</sup> German peasants believe that this red oil is the blood of St. John,<sup>167</sup> and this may be why the plant is supposed to heal all sorts of wounds.<sup>168</sup> In Mecklenburg they say that if you pull up St. John's wort at noon on Midsummer Day you will find at the root a bead of red juice called St. John's blood; smear this blood on your shirt just over your heart, and no mad dog will bite you.<sup>169</sup> In the Mark of Brandenburg the same blood, procured in the same manner and rubbed on the barrel of a gun, will make every shot from that gun to hit the mark.<sup>170</sup> According to others, St. John's blood is found at noon on St. John's Day, and only then, adhering in the form of beads to the root of a weed called knawel, which grows in sandy soil. But some people say that these beads of red juice are not really the blood of the martyred saint, but only insects resembling

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1905), p. 84. They call the plant "witch's herb" (*Hexenkraut*).

<sup>166</sup> James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. v. (London, 1796), p. 295.

<sup>167</sup> Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste, Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube* (Iserlohn, n. d.), p. 35.

<sup>168</sup> T. F. Thiselton Dyer, *Folk-lore of Plants* (London, 1889), p. 286; K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg*, ii. p. 291, § 1450a. The Germans of Bohemia ascribe wonderful virtues to the red juice extracted from the yellow flowers of St. John's wort (W. Müller, *Beiträge zur Volkskunde der Deutschen in Mähren*, Vienna and Olmütz, 1893, p. 264).

<sup>169</sup> K. Bartsch, *op. cit.* ii. p. 286, § 1433. The blood is also a preservative against many diseases (*op. cit.* ii. p. 290, § 1444).

<sup>170</sup> A. Kuhn, *Märkische Sagen und Märchen* (Berlin, 1843), p. 387, § 105.



the cochineal or kermes-berry.<sup>171</sup> “About Hanover I have often observed devout Roman Catholics going on the morning of St. John's day to neighbouring sandhills, gathering on the roots of herbs a certain insect (*Coccus Polonica*) looking like drops of blood, and thought by them to be created on purpose to keep alive the remembrance of the foul murder of St. John the Baptist, and only to be met with on the morning of the day set apart for him by the Church. I believe the life of this insect is very ephemeral, but by no means restricted to the twenty-fourth of June.”<sup>172</sup>

Mouse-ear hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*) gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer.

Yet another plant whose root has been thought to yield the blood of St. John is the mouse-ear hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*), which grows very commonly in dry exposed places, such as gravelly banks, sunny lawns, and the tops of park walls. “It blossoms from May to the end of July, presenting its elegant sulphur-coloured flowers to the noontide sun, while the surrounding herbage, and even its own foliage, is withered and burnt up”;<sup>173</sup> and these round yellow flowers may be likened not inaptly to the disc of the great luminary whose light they love. At Hildesheim, in Germany, people used to dig up hawkweed,

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<sup>171</sup> *Die gestriegelte Rockenphilosophie* <sup>5</sup> (Chemnitz, 1759), pp. 246 *sq.*; Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfesten, Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube*, p. 147.

<sup>172</sup> Berthold Seeman, *Viti, An Account of a Government Mission to the Vitian or Fijian Islands in the years 1860-61* (Cambridge, 1862), p. 63.

<sup>173</sup> James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xvi. (London, 1803) p. 1093.

especially on the Gallows' Hill, when the clocks were striking noon on Midsummer Day; and the blood of St. John, which they found at the roots, was carefully preserved in quills for good luck. A little of it smeared secretly on the clothes was sure to make the wearer fortunate in the market that day.<sup>174</sup> According to some the plant ought to be dug up with a gold coin.<sup>175</sup> Near Gablonz, in Bohemia, it used to be customary to make a bed of St. John's flowers, as they were called, on St. John's Eve, and in the night the saint himself came and laid his head on the bed; next morning you could see the print of his head on the flowers, which derived a healing virtue from his blessed touch, and were mixed with the fodder of sick cattle to make them whole.<sup>176</sup> But whether these St. John's flowers were the mouse-ear hawkweed or not is doubtful.<sup>177</sup>

Mountain arnica gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer.

More commonly in Germany the name of St. John's flowers (*Johannisblumen*) appears to be given to the mountain arnica. In Voigtland the mountain arnica if plucked on St. John's Eve and stuck in the fields, laid under the roof, or hung on the wall, is

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<sup>174</sup> K. Seifart, *Sagen, Märchen, Schwänke und Gebräuche aus Stadt und Stift Hildesheim*<sup>2</sup> (Hildesheim, 1889), p. 177, § 12.

<sup>175</sup> C. L. Rochholz, *Deutscher Glaube und Brauch* (Berlin, 1867), i. 9.

<sup>176</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague and Leipsic, 1864), p. 98, § 681.

<sup>177</sup> A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1869), p. 100, § 134.

believed to protect house and fields from lightning and hail.<sup>178</sup> So in some parts of Bavaria they think that no thunderstorm can harm a house which has a blossom of mountain arnica in the window or the roof, and in the Tyrol the same flower fastened to the door will render the dwelling fire-proof. But it is needless to remark that the flower, which takes its popular name from St. John, will be no protection against either fire or thunder unless it has been culled on the saint's own day.<sup>179</sup>

Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer. Mugwort in China and Japan.

Another plant which possesses wondrous virtues, if only it be gathered on the Eve or the Day of St. John, is mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*). Hence in France it goes by the name of the herb of St. John.<sup>180</sup> Near Péronne, in the French department of Somme,

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<sup>178</sup> J. A. E. Köhler, *Volksbrauch, Aberglauben, Sagen und andre alte Ueberlieferungen im Voigtlande* (Leipsic, 1867), p. 376. The belief and practice are similar at Grün, near Asch, in Western Bohemia. See Alois John, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube im deutschen Westböhmen* (Prague, 1905), p. 84.

<sup>179</sup> F. Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie* (Munich, 1848-1855), ii. 299; *Bavaria, Landes- und Volkskunde des Königreichs Bayern*, iii. (Munich, 1865), p. 342; I. V. Zingerle, *Sitten, Bräuche und Meinungen des Tiroler Volkes*<sup>2</sup> (Innsbruck, 1871), p. 160, § 1363.

<sup>180</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> ii. 1013; A. de Gubernatis, *Mythologie des Plantes* (Paris, 1878-1882), i. 189 sq.; Rev. Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore*, Third Edition (London, 1886), p. 75. In England mugwort is very common in waste ground, hedges, and the borders of fields. It flowers throughout August and later. The root is woody and perennial. The smooth stems, three or four feet high, are erect, branched, and leafy, and marked by many longitudinal purplish ribs. The pinnatifid leaves alternate on the stalk; they are smooth and dark green above, cottony and very

people used to go out fasting before sunrise on St. John's Day to cull the plant; put among the wheat in the barn it protected the corn against mice. In Artois people carried bunches of mugwort, or wore it round their body;<sup>181</sup> in Poitou they still wear girdles of mugwort or hemp when they warm their backs at the midsummer fire as a preservative against backache at harvest;<sup>182</sup> and the custom of wearing girdles of mugwort on the Eve or Day of St. John has caused the plant to be popularly known in Germany and Bohemia as St. John's girdle. In Bohemia such girdles are believed to protect the wearer for the whole year against ghosts, magic, misfortune, and sickness. People also weave garlands of the plant and look through them at the midsummer bonfire or

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white below. The flowers are in simple leafy spikes or clusters; the florets are purplish, furnished with five stamens and five awl-shaped female flowers, which constitute the radius. The whole plant has a weak aromatic scent and a slightly bitter flavour. Its medical virtues are of no importance. See James Sowerby, *English Botany*, xiv. (London, 1802) p. 978. Altogether it is not easy to see why such an inconspicuous and insignificant flower should play so large a part in popular superstition. Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) is not to be confounded with wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*), which is quite a different flower in appearance, though it belongs to the same genus. Wormwood is common in England, flowering about August. The flowers are in clusters, each of them broad, hemispherical, and drooping, with a buff-coloured disc. The whole plant is of a pale whitish green and clothed with a short silky down. It is remarkable for its intense bitterness united to a peculiar strong aromatic odour. It is often used to keep insects from clothes and furniture, and as a medicine is one of the most active bitters. See James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xviii. (London, 1804) p. 1230.

<sup>181</sup> Breuil, "Du culte de St. – Jean-Baptiste," *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, viii. (1845) p. 224, note 1, quoting the curé of Manancourt, near Péronne.

<sup>182</sup> L. Pineau, *Le folk-lore du Poitou* (Paris, 1892), p. 499.

put them on their heads; and by doing so they ensure that their heads will not ache nor their eyes smart all that year. Another Bohemian practice is to make a decoction of mugwort which has been gathered on St. John's Day; then, when your cow is bewitched and will yield no milk, you have only to wash the animal thrice with the decoction and the spell will be broken.<sup>183</sup> In Germany, people used to crown their heads or gird their bodies with mugwort, which they afterwards threw into the midsummer bonfire, pronouncing certain rhymes and believing that they thus rid themselves of all their ill-luck.<sup>184</sup> Sometimes wreaths or girdles of mugwort were kept in houses, cattle-sheds, and sheep-folds throughout the year.<sup>185</sup> In Normandy such wreaths are a protection against thunder and thieves;<sup>186</sup> and stalks of mugwort hinder witches from laying their spells on the butter.<sup>187</sup> In the Isle of Man on Midsummer Eve people gathered *barran fealoin* or

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<sup>183</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague and Leipsic, 1864), pp. 90 sq., §§ 635-637.

<sup>184</sup> F. Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie*, i. p. 249, § 283; J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> ii. 1013; I. V. Zingerle, in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, i. (1853) p. 331. and *ib.* iv. (1859) p. 42 (quoting a work of the seventeenth century); F. J. Vonbun, *Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie* (Chur, 1862), p. 133, note 1. See also above, vol. i. pp. 162, 163, 165, 174, 177.

<sup>185</sup> A. de Gubernatis, *Mythologie der Plantes* (Paris, 1878-1882), i. 190, quoting Du Cange.

<sup>186</sup> A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France* (Paris and Lyons, 1846), p. 262.

<sup>187</sup> Jules Lecœur, *Esquisses du Bocage Normand* (Condé-sur-Noireau, 1883-1886), ii. 8.

mugwort “as a preventive against the influence of witchcraft”;<sup>188</sup> in Belgium bunches of mugwort gathered on St. John's Day or Eve and hung on the doors of stables and houses are believed to bring good luck and to furnish a protection against sorcery.<sup>189</sup> It is curious to find that in China a similar use is, or was formerly, made of mugwort at the same season of the year. In an old Chinese calendar we read that “on the fifth day of the fifth month the four classes of the people gambol in the herbage, and have competitive games with plants of all kinds. They pluck mugwort and make dolls of it, which they suspend over their gates and doors, in order to expel poisonous airs or influences.”<sup>190</sup> On this custom Professor J. J. M. de Groot observes: “Notice that the plant owed its efficacy to the time when it was plucked: a day denoting the midsummer festival, when light and fire of the universe are in their apogee.”<sup>191</sup> On account of this valuable property mugwort is used by Chinese surgeons in cautery.<sup>192</sup> The Ainos of Japan employ bunches of mugwort in exorcisms, “because it is thought that demons of disease dislike the smell

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<sup>188</sup> Joseph Train, *Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man* (Douglas, Isle of Man, 1845), ii. 120.

<sup>189</sup> Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge* (Brussels, 1861-1862), i. 422.

<sup>190</sup> J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vi. (Leyden, 1910) p. 1079, compare p. 947.

<sup>191</sup> J. J. M. de Groot, *op. cit.* vi. 947.

<sup>192</sup> J. J. M. de Groot, *op. cit.* vi. 946 sq.

and flavour of this herb.”<sup>193</sup> It is an old German belief that he who carries mugwort in his shoes will not grow weary.<sup>194</sup> In Mecklenburg, they say that if you will dig up a plant of mugwort at noon on Midsummer Day, you will find under the root a burning coal, which vanishes away as soon as the church bells have ceased to ring. If you find the coal and carry it off in silence, it will prove a remedy for all sorts of maladies.<sup>195</sup> According to another German superstition, such a coal will turn to gold.<sup>196</sup> English writers record the popular belief that a rare coal is to be found under the root of mugwort at a single hour of a single day in the year, namely, at noon or midnight on Midsummer Eve, and that this coal will protect him who carries it on his person from plague, carbuncle, lightning, fever, and ague.<sup>197</sup> In

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<sup>193</sup> Rev. John Batchelor, *The Ainu and their Folk-lore* (London, 1901), p. 318, compare pp. 315 *sq.*, 329, 370, 372.

<sup>194</sup> *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, iv. (1859) p. 42; Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste*, p. 141. The German name of mugwort (*Beifuss*) is said to be derived from this superstition.

<sup>195</sup> K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen, und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg* (Vienna, 1879-1880), ii. 290, § 1445.

<sup>196</sup> Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste*, p. 141.

<sup>197</sup> J. Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1882-1883), i. 334 *sq.*, quoting Lupton, Thomas Hill, and Paul Barbette. A precisely similar belief is recorded with regard to wormwood (*armoise*) by the French writer J. B. Thiers, who adds that only small children and virgins could find the wonderful coal. See J. B. Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions*<sup>5</sup> (Paris, 1741), i. 300. In Annam people think that wormwood puts demons to flight; hence they hang up bunches of its leaves in their houses at the New Year. See Paul Giran, *Magie et Religion Annamites* (Paris, 1912), p. 118, compare pp. 185, 256.

Eastern Prussia, on St. John's Eve, people can foretell a marriage by means of mugwort; they bend two stalks of the growing plant outward, and then observe whether the stalks, after straightening themselves again, incline towards each other or not.<sup>198</sup>

Orpine (*Sedum telephium*) used in divination at Midsummer.

A similar mode of divination has been practised both in England and in Germany with the orpine (*Sedum telephium*), a plant which grows on a gravelly or chalky soil about hedges, the borders of fields, and on bushy hills. It flowers in August, and the blossoms consist of dense clustered tufts of crimson or purple petals; sometimes, but rarely, the flowers are white.<sup>199</sup> In England the plant is popularly known as Midsummer Men, because people used to plant slips of them in pairs on Midsummer Eve, one slip standing for a young man and the other for a young woman. If the plants, as they grew up, bent towards each other, the couple would marry; if either of them withered, he or she whom it represented would die.<sup>200</sup> In Masuren, Westphalia, and

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<sup>198</sup> C. Lemke, *Volksthümliches in Ostpreussen* (Mohrunen, 1884-1887), i. 21. As to mugwort (German *Beifuss*, French *armoise*), see further A. de Gubernatis, *Mythologie des Plantes*, ii. 16 *sqq.*; J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> iii. 356 *sq.*

<sup>199</sup> James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xix. (London, 1804) p. 1319.

<sup>200</sup> John Aubrey, *Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (London, 1881), pp. 25 *sq.*; J. Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1882-1883), i. 329 *sqq.*; Rev. Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore*, Third Edition (London, 1886), p. 136; D. H. Moutray Read, "Hampshire Folk-lore," *Folk-lore*, xxii. (1911) p. 325. Compare J. Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xix. (London, 1804), p. 1319: "Like all succulent plants this is very tenacious of life, and will keep growing long after it has been torn from its native spot. The country people in Norfolk sometimes hang it up in their cottages,



Switzerland the method of forecasting the future by means of the orpine is precisely the same.<sup>201</sup>

Vervain gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer. Magical virtue of four-leaved clover on Midsummer Eve.

Another plant which popular superstition has often associated with the summer solstice is vervain.<sup>202</sup> In some parts of Spain people gather vervain after sunset on Midsummer Eve, and wash their faces next morning in the water in which the plants have been allowed to steep overnight.<sup>203</sup> In Belgium vervain is

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judging by its vigour of the health of some absent friend.” It seems that in England the course of love has sometimes been divined by means of sprigs of red sage placed in a basin of rose-water on Midsummer Eve (J. Brand, *op. cit.* i. 333).

<sup>201</sup> M. Töppen, *Aberglauben aus Masuren*<sup>2</sup> (Danzig, 1867), pp. 71 *sq.*; A. Kuhn, *Sagen, Gebräuche und Märchen aus Westfalen* (Leipsic, 1859), ii. 176, § 487; E. Hoffmann-Krayer, *Feste und Bräuche des Schweizervolkes* (Zurich, 1913), p. 163. In Switzerland the species employed for this purpose on Midsummer day is *Sedum reflexum*. The custom is reported from the Emmenthal. In Germany a root of orpine, dug up on St. John's morning and hung between the shoulders, is sometimes thought to be a cure for hemorrhoids (Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste*, p. 145). Perhaps the “oblong, tapering, fleshy, white lumps” of the roots (J. Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xix. London, 1804, p. 1319) are thought to bear some likeness to the hemorrhoids, and to heal them on the principle that the remedy should resemble the disease.

<sup>202</sup> See above, vol. i. pp. 162, 163, 165. In England vervain (*Verbena officinalis*) grows not uncommonly by road sides, in dry sunny pastures, and in waste places about villages. It flowers in July. The flowers are small and sessile, the corolla of a very pale lilac hue, its tube enclosing the four short curved stamens. The root of the plant, worn by a string round the neck, is an old superstitious medicine for scrofulous disorders. See James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xi. (London, 1800) p. 767.

<sup>203</sup> Dr. Otero Acevado, in *Le Temps*, September 1898. See above, vol. i. p. 208, note 1.

gathered on St. John's Day and worn as a safeguard against rupture.<sup>204</sup> In Normandy the peasants cull vervain on the Day or the Eve of St. John, believing that, besides its medical properties, it possesses at this season the power of protecting the house from thunder and lightning, from sorcerers, demons, and thieves.<sup>205</sup> Bohemian poachers wash their guns with a decoction of vervain and southernwood, which they have gathered naked before sunrise on Midsummer Day; guns which have been thus treated never miss the mark.<sup>206</sup> In our own country vervain used to be sought for its magical virtues on Midsummer Eve.<sup>207</sup> In the Tyrol they think that he who finds a four-leaved clover while the vesper-bell is ringing on Midsummer Eve can work magic from that time forth.<sup>208</sup> People in Berry say that the four-leaved clover is endowed with all its marvellous virtues only when it has

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<sup>204</sup> Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge* (Brussels, 1861-1862), i. 422.

<sup>205</sup> A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France*, p. 262, Amélie Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque et merveilleuse*, p. 294; J. Lecœur, *Esquisses du Bocage Normand*, i. 287, ii. 8. In Saintonge and Aunis the plant was gathered on Midsummer Eve for the purpose of evoking or exorcising spirits (J. L. M. Noguès, *Les mœurs d'autrefois en Saintonge et en Aunis*, p. 72).

<sup>206</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren*, p. 207, § 1437.

<sup>207</sup> A. Kuhn, *Sagen, Gebräuche und Märchen aus Westfalen* (Leipsic, 1859), ii. 177, citing Chambers, *Edinburgh Journal*, 2nd July 1842.

<sup>208</sup> I. V. Zingerle, *Sitten, Bräuche und Meinungen des Tiroler Volkes*<sup>2</sup> (Innsbruck, 1871), p. 107, § 919.

been plucked by a virgin on the night of Midsummer Eve.<sup>209</sup> In Saintonge and Aunis the four-leaved clover, if it be found on the Eve of St. John, brings good luck at play;<sup>210</sup> in Belgium it brings a girl a husband.<sup>211</sup>

Camomile gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer.

At Kirchvers, in Hesse, people run out to the fields at noon on Midsummer Day to gather camomile; for the flowers, plucked at the moment when the sun is at the highest point of his course, are supposed to possess the medicinal qualities of the plant in the highest degree. In heathen times the camomile flower, with its healing qualities, its yellow calix and white stamens, is said to have been sacred to the kindly and shining Balder and to have borne his name, being called *Balders-brâ*, that is, Balder's eyelashes.<sup>212</sup> In Westphalia, also, the belief prevails that camomile is most potent as a drug when it has been gathered on Midsummer Day;<sup>213</sup> in Masuren the plant must always be one of

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<sup>209</sup> Laisnel de la Salle, *Croyances et Légendes du Centre de la France* (Paris, 1875), i. 288.

<sup>210</sup> J. L. M. Noguès, *Les mœurs d'autrefois en Saintonge et en Aunis*, pp. 71 sq.

<sup>211</sup> Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge*, i. 423.

<sup>212</sup> W. Kolbe, *Hessische Volks-Sitten und Gebräuche*<sup>2</sup> (Marburg, 1888), p. 72; Sophus Bugge, *Studien über die Entstehung der nordischen Götter- und Heldensagen* (Munich, 1889), pp. 35, 295 sq.; Fr. Kauffmann, *Balder* (Strasburg, 1902), pp. 45, 61. The flowers of common camomile (*Anthemis nobilis*) are white with a yellow disk, which in time becomes conical. The whole plant is intensely bitter, with a peculiar but agreeable smell. As a medicine it is useful for stomachic troubles. In England it does not generally grow wild. See James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xiv. (London, 1802) p. 980.

<sup>213</sup> A. Kuhn, *Sagen, Gebräuche und Märchen aus Westfalen* (Leipsic, 1859), ii. 177,

the nine different kinds of plants that are culled on Midsummer Eve to form wreaths, and tea brewed from the flower is a remedy for many sorts of maladies.<sup>214</sup>

Mullein (*Verbascum*) gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer.

Thuringian peasants hold that if the root of the yellow mullein (*Verbascum*) has been dug up in silence with a ducat at midnight on Midsummer Eve, and is worn in a piece of linen next to the skin, it will preserve the wearer from epilepsy.<sup>215</sup> In Prussia girls go out into the fields on Midsummer Day, gather mullein, and hang it up over their beds. The girl whose flower is the first to wither will be the first to die.<sup>216</sup> Perhaps the bright yellow flowers of mullein, clustering round the stem like lighted candles, may partly account for the association of the plant with the summer solstice. In Germany great mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) is called the King's Candle; in England it is popularly known as High Taper. The yellow, hoary mullein (*Verbascum pulverulentum*) "forms a golden pyramid a yard high, of many hundreds of flowers, and is one of the most magnificent of British herbaceous plants."<sup>217</sup> We may trace a relation between mullein and the sun in

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§ 488.

<sup>214</sup> M. Töppen, *Aberglauben aus Masuren*<sup>2</sup> (Danzig, 1867), p. 71.

<sup>215</sup> A. Witzschel, *Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Thüringen* (Vienna, 1878), p. 289, § 139.

<sup>216</sup> W. J. A. von Tettau und J. D. H. Temme, *Volkssagen Ostpreussens, Litthauens und Westpreussens* (Berlin, 1837), p. 283.

<sup>217</sup> James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. vii. (London, 1798), p. 487. As to great

the Prussian custom of bending the flower, after sunset, towards the point where the sun will rise, and praying at the same time that a sick person or a sick beast may be restored to health.<sup>218</sup>

Seeds of fir-cones, wild thyme, elder-flowers, and purple loosestrife gathered for magical purposes at Midsummer.

In Bohemia poachers fancy that they can render themselves invulnerable by swallowing the seed from a fir-cone which they have found growing upwards before sunrise on the morning of St. John's Day.<sup>219</sup> Again, wild thyme gathered on Midsummer Day is used in Bohemia to fumigate the trees on Christmas Eve in order that they may grow well;<sup>220</sup> in Voigtland a tea brewed from wild thyme which has been pulled at noon on Midsummer Day is given to women in childbed.<sup>221</sup> The Germans of Western Bohemia brew a tea or wine from elder-flowers, but they say that the brew has no medicinal virtue unless the flowers have been gathered on Midsummer Eve. They do say, too, that whenever you see an elder-tree, you should take off your hat.<sup>222</sup> In the Tyrol

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mullein or high taper, see *id.*, vol. viii. (London, 1799), p. 549.

<sup>218</sup> Tettau und Temme, *loc. cit.* As to mullein at Midsummer, see also above, vol. i. pp. 190, 191.

<sup>219</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren*, p. 205, § 1426.

<sup>220</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *op. cit.* p. 93, § 648.

<sup>221</sup> J. A. E. Köhler, *Volksbrauch, Aberglauben, Sagen und andre alte Ueberlieferungen im Voigtlande* (Leipsic, 1867), p. 377.

<sup>222</sup> Alois John, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube im deutschen Westböhmen* (Prague, 1905), p. 84.

dwarf-elder serves to detect witchcraft in cattle, provided of course that the shrub has been pulled up or the branches broken on Midsummer Day.<sup>223</sup> Russian peasants regard the plant known as purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) with respect and even fear. Wizards make much use of it. They dig the root up on St. John's morning, at break of day, without the use of iron tools; and they believe that by means of the root, as well as of the blossom, they can subdue evil spirits and make them serviceable, and also drive away witches and the demons that guard treasures.<sup>224</sup>

Magical properties attributed to fern seed at Midsummer.

More famous, however, than these are the marvellous properties which popular superstition in many parts of Europe has attributed to the fern at this season. At midnight on Midsummer Eve the plant is supposed to bloom and soon afterwards to seed; and whoever catches the bloom or the seed is thereby endowed with supernatural knowledge and miraculous powers; above all, he knows where treasures lie hidden in the ground, and he can render himself invisible at will by putting the seed in his shoe. But great precautions must be observed in procuring the wondrous bloom or seed, which else quickly

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<sup>223</sup> J. N. Ritter von Alpenburg, *Mythen und Sagen Tirols* (Zurich, 1857), p. 397.

<sup>224</sup> C. Russwurm, "Aberglaube aus Russland," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, iv. (1859) pp. 153 *sq.* The purple loosestrife is one of our most showy English wild plants. In July and August it may be seen flowering on the banks of rivers, ponds, and ditches. The separate flowers are in axillary whorls, which together form a loose spike of a reddish variable purple. See James Sowerby, *English Botany*, vol. xv. (London, 1802) p. 1061.

vanishes like dew on sand or mist in the air. The seeker must neither touch it with his hand nor let it touch the ground; he spreads a white cloth under the plant, and the blossom or the seed falls into it. Beliefs of this sort concerning fern-seed have prevailed, with trifling variations of detail, in England, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Russia.<sup>225</sup> In Bohemia the magic

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<sup>225</sup> J. Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, i. 314 *sqq.*; Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore*, Third Edition (London, 1886), pp. 60, 78, 150, 279-283; Miss C. S. Burne and Miss G. F. Jackson, *Shropshire Folk-lore* (London, 1883), p. 242; Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), pp. 89 *sq.*; J. B. Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions* (Paris, 1679), p. 314; J. Lecœur, *Esquisses du Bocage Normand*, i. 290; P. Sébillot, *Coutumes populaires de la Haute-Bretagne* (Paris, 1886), p. 217; *id.*, *Traditions et Superstitions de la Haute-Bretagne* (Paris, 1882), ii. 336; A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1869), pp. 94 *sq.*, § 123; F. J. Vonbun, *Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie* (Chur, 1862), pp. 133 *sqq.*; Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfesten*, p. 144; K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg*, ii. 288, § 1437; M. Töppen, *Aberglauben aus Masuren*,<sup>2</sup> p. 72; A. Schlossar, "Volksmeinung und Volksaberglaube aus der deutschen Steiermark," *Germania*, N.R., xxiv. (1891) p. 387; Theodor Vernaleken, *Mythen und Bräuche des Volkes in Oesterreich* (Vienna, 1859), p. 309; J. N. Ritter von Alpenburg, *Mythen und Sagen Tirols* (Zurich, 1857), pp. 407 *sq.*; I. V. Zingerle, *Sitten, Bräuche und Meinungen des Tiroler Volkes*<sup>2</sup> (Innsbruck, 1871), p. 103, § 882, p. 158, § 1350; Christian Schneller, *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol* (Innsbruck, 1867), p. 237; J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren*, p. 97, §§ 673-677; Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Fest-Kalendar aus Böhmen* (Prague, n. d.), pp. 311 *sq.*; W. Müller, *Beiträge zur Volkskunde der Deutschen in Mähren* (Vienna and Olmutz, 1893), p. 265; R. F. Kaindl, *Die Huzulen* (Vienna, 1894), p. 106; *id.*, "Zauberglaube bei den Huzulen," *Globus*, lxxvi. (1899) p. 275; P. Drechsler, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien* (Leipsic, 1903-1906), i. 142, § 159; G. Finamore, *Credenze, Usi e Costumi Abruzzesi* (Palermo, 1890), p. 161; C. Russwurm, "Aberglaube in Russland," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, iv. (1859) pp. 152 *sq.*; A. de Gubernatis, *Mythologie des Plantes* (Paris, 1878-1882), ii. 144 *sqq.* The practice of

bloom is said to be golden, and to glow or sparkle like fire.<sup>226</sup> In Russia, they say that at dead of night on Midsummer Eve the plant puts forth buds like glowing coals, which on the stroke of twelve burst open with a clap like thunder and light up everything near and far.<sup>227</sup> In the Azores they say that the fern only blooms at midnight on St. John's Eve, and that no one ever sees the flower because the fairies instantly carry it off. But if any one, watching till it opens, throws a cloth over it, and then, when the magic hour has passed, burns the blossoms carefully, the ashes will serve as a mirror in which you can read the fate of absent friends; if your friends are well and happy, the ashes will resume the shape of a lovely flower; but if they are unhappy or dead, the ashes will remain cold and lifeless.<sup>228</sup> In Thuringia people think that he who has on his person or in his house the male fern (*Aspidium filix mas*) cannot be bewitched. They call it St. John's root (*Johanniswurzel*), and say that it blooms thrice in

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gathering ferns or fern seed on the Eve of St. John was forbidden by the synod of Ferrara in 1612. See J. B. Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions*<sup>5</sup> (Paris, 1741), i. 299 *sq.* In a South Slavonian story we read how a cowherd understood the language of animals, because fern-seed accidentally fell into his shoe on Midsummer Day (F. S. Krauss, *Sagen und Märchen der Südslaven*, Leipsic, 1883-1884, ii. 424 *sqq.*, No. 159). On this subject I may refer to my article, "The Language of Animals," *The Archaeological Review*, i. (1888) pp. 164 *sqq.*

<sup>226</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *op. cit.* p. 97, §§ 673, 675.

<sup>227</sup> *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, iv. (1859) pp. 152 *sq.*; A. de Gubernatis, *Mythologie des Plantes*, ii. 146.

<sup>228</sup> M. Longworth Dames and E. Seemann, "Folk-lore of the Azores," *Folk-lore*, xiv. (1903) pp. 142 *sq.*



the year, on Christmas Eve, Easter Eve, and the day of St. John the Baptist; it should be dug up when the sun enters the sign of the lion. Armed with this powerful implement you can detect a sorcerer at any gathering, it may be a wedding feast or what not. All you have to do is to put the root under the tablecloth unseen by the rest of the company, and, if there should be a sorcerer among them, he will turn as pale as death and get up and go away. Fear and horror come over him when the fern-root is under the tablecloth. And when oxen, horses, or other domestic cattle are bewitched by wicked people, you need only take the root at full moon, soak it in water, and sprinkle the cattle with the water, or rub them down with a cloth that has been steeped in it, and witchcraft will have no more power over the animals.<sup>229</sup>

Branches of hazel cut at Midsummer to serve as divining-rods.

Once more, people have fancied that if they cut a branch of hazel on Midsummer Eve it would serve them as a divining rod to discover treasures and water. This belief has existed in Moravia, Mecklenburg, and apparently in Scotland.<sup>230</sup> In the Mark of Brandenburg, they say that if you would procure the mystic wand you must go to the hazel by night on Midsummer Eve, walking backwards, and when you have come to the bush

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<sup>229</sup> August Witzschel, *Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Thüringen* (Vienna, 1878), p. 275, § 82.

<sup>230</sup> W. Müller, *Beiträge zur Volkskunde der Deutschen in Mähren* (Vienna and Olmutz, 1893), p. 265; K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg*, ii. p. 285, § 1431, p. 288, § 1439; J. Napier, *Folk-lore, or Superstitious Beliefs in the West of Scotland* (Paisley, 1879), p. 125.

you must silently put your hands between your legs and cut a fork-shaped stick; that stick will be the divining-rod, and, as such, will detect treasures buried in the ground. If you have any doubt as to the quality of the wand, you have only to hold it in water; for in that case your true divining-rod will squeak like a pig, but your spurious one will not.<sup>231</sup> In Bavaria they say that the divining-rod should be cut from a hazel bush between eleven and twelve on St. John's Night, and that by means of it you can discover not only veins of metal and underground springs, but also thieves and murderers and unknown ways. In cutting it you should say, "God greet thee, thou noble twig! With God the Father I seek thee, with God the Son I find thee, with the might of God the Holy Ghost I break thee. I adjure thee, rod and sprig, by the power of the Highest that thou shew me what I order, and that as sure and clear as Mary the Mother of God was a pure virgin when she bare our Lord Jesus, in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Amen!"<sup>232</sup> In Berlin and the neighbourhood they say that every seventh year there grows a wonderful branch on a hazel bush, and that branch is the divining-rod. Only an innocent child, born on a Sunday and nursed in the true faith,

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<sup>231</sup> A. Kuhn, *Märkische Sagen und Märchen* (Berlin, 1843), p. 330. As to the divining-rod in general, see A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*<sup>2</sup> (Gütersloh, 1886), pp. 181 *sqq.*; J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> ii. 813 *sqq.*; S. Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (London, 1884), pp. 55 *sqq.* Kuhn plausibly suggests that the forked shape of the divining-rod is a rude representation of the human form. He compares the shape and magic properties of mandragora.

<sup>232</sup> F. Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie* (Munich, 1848-1855), i. 296 *sq.*

can find it on St. John's Night; to him then all the treasures of the earth lie open.<sup>233</sup> In the Tyrol the divining-rod ought to be cut at new moon, but may be cut either on St. John's Day or on Twelfth Night. Having got it you baptize it in the name of one of the Three Holy Kings according to the purpose for which you intend to use it: if the rod is to discover gold, you name it Caspar; if it is to reveal silver, you call it Balthasar; and if it is to point out hidden springs of water, you dub it Melchior.<sup>234</sup> In Lechrain the divining-rod is a yearling shoot of hazel with two branches; a good time for cutting it is new moon, and if the sun is rising, so much the better. As for the day of the year, you may take your choice between St. John's Day, Twelfth Night, and Shrove Tuesday. If cut with the proper form of words, the rod will as usual discover underground springs and hidden treasures.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> E. Krause, "Abergläubische Kuren und sonstiger Aberglaube in Berlin und nächster Umgebung," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xv. (1883) p. 89.

<sup>234</sup> J. N. Ritter von Alpenburg, *Mythen und Sagen Tirols* (Zurich, 1857), p. 393.

<sup>235</sup> Karl Freiherr von Leoprechting, *Aus dem Lechrain* (Munich, 1855), p. 98. Some people in Swabia say that the hazel branch which is to serve as a divining-rod should be cut at midnight on Good Friday, and that it should be laid on the altar and mass said over it. If that is done, we are told that a Protestant can use it to quite as good effect as a Catholic. See E. Meier, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1852), pp. 244 *sq.*, No. 268. Some of the Wends of the Spreewald agree that the divining-rod should be made of hazel-wood, and they say that it ought to be wrapt in swaddling-bands, laid on a white plate, and baptized on Easter Saturday. Many of them, however, think that it should be made of "yellow willow." See Wilibald von Schulenburg, *Wendische Volkssagen und Gebräuche aus dem Spreewald* (Leipsic, 1880), pp. 204 *sq.* A remarkable property of the hazel in the opinion of Bavarian peasants is that it is never struck by lightning; this immunity it has enjoyed ever since

The divining-rod in Sweden obtained on Midsummer Eve.

Midsummer Eve is also the favourite time for procuring the divining-rod in Sweden. Some say that it should then be cut from a mistletoe bough.<sup>236</sup> However, other people in Sweden are of opinion that the divining-rod (*Slag ruta*) which is obtained on Midsummer Eve ought to be compounded out of four different kinds of wood, to wit, mistletoe, mountain-ash, the aspen, and another; and they say that the mountain-ash which is employed for this purpose should, like the mistletoe, be a parasite growing from the hollow root of a fallen tree, whither the seed was carried by a bird or wafted by the wind. Armed with this fourfold implement of power the treasure-seeker proceeds at sundown to the spot where he expects to find hidden wealth; there he lays the rod on the ground in perfect silence, and when it lies directly over treasure, it will begin to hop about as if it were alive.<sup>237</sup>

The mythical springwort supposed to bloom on Midsummer Eve.

A mystical plant which to some extent serves the same purpose as the divining-rod is the springwort, which is sometimes supposed to be caper-spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris*). In the Harz Mountains they say that many years ago there was a

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the day when it protected the Mother of God against a thunderstorm on her flight into Egypt. See *Bavaria, Landes- und Volkskunde des Königreichs Bayern*, i. (Munich, 1860) p. 371.

<sup>236</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> iii. 289, referring to Dybeck's *Runa*, 1844, p. 22, and 1845, p. 80.

<sup>237</sup> L. Lloyd, *Peasant Life in Sweden* (London, 1870), pp. 266 *sq.*

wondrous flower called springwort or Johnswort, which was as rare as it was marvellous. It bloomed only on St. John's Night (some say under a fern) between the hours of eleven and twelve; but when the last stroke of twelve was struck, the flower vanished away. Only in mountainous regions, where many noble metals reposed in the bosom of the earth, was the flower seen now and then in lonely meadows among the hills. The spirits of the hills wished by means of it to shew to men where their treasures were to be found. The flower itself was yellow and shone like a lamp in the darkness of night. It never stood still, but kept hopping constantly to and fro. It was also afraid of men and fled before them, and no man ever yet plucked it unless he had been set apart by Providence for the task. To him who was lucky enough to cull it the flower revealed all the treasures of the earth, and it made him rich, oh so rich and so happy!<sup>238</sup>

Another way of catching the springwort. The white bloom of chicory.

However, the usual account given of the springwort is somewhat different. They say that the way to procure it is this. You mark a hollow in a tree where a green or black woodpecker has built its nest and hatched its young; you plug up the hole with a wooden wedge; then you hide behind the tree and wait. The woodpecker meantime has flown away but very soon returns with the springwort in its bill. It flutters up to the tree-trunk holding the springwort to the wedge, which at once, as if struck

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<sup>238</sup> Heinrich Pröhle, *Harzsagen* (Leipsic, 1859), i. 99, No. 23.

by a hammer, jumps out with a bang. Now is your chance. You rush from your concealment, you raise a loud cry, and in its fright the bird opens its bill and drops the springwort. Quick as thought you reach out a red or white cloth, with which you have taken care to provide yourself, and catch the magic flower as it falls. The treasure is now yours. Before its marvellous power all doors and locks fly open; it can make the bearer of it invisible; and neither steel nor lead can wound the man who carries it in the right-hand pocket of his coat. That is why people in Swabia say of a thief who cannot be caught, "He must surely have a springwort."<sup>239</sup> The superstition which associates the springwort with the woodpecker is very ancient, for it is recorded by Pliny. It was a vulgar belief, he tells us, that if a shepherd plugged up a

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<sup>239</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> ii. 812 *sq.*, iii. 289; A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*<sup>2</sup> (Gütersloh, 1886), pp. 188-193; Walter K. Kelly, *Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-lore* (London, 1863), pp. 174-178; J. F. L. Woeste, *Volksüberlieferungen in der Grafschaft Mark* (Iserlohn, 1848), p. 44; A. Kuhn und W. Schwartz, *Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche* (Leipscic, 1848), p. 459, No. 444; Ernst Meier, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1852), pp. 240 *sq.*, No. 265; C. Russwurm, "Aberglaube in Russland," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, iv. (Göttingen, 1859) p. 153; J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague and Leipscic, 1864), p. 88, No. 623; Paul Drechsler, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien* (Leipscic, 1903-1906), ii. 207 *sq.* In Swabia some people say that the bird which brings the springwort is not the woodpecker but the hoopoe (E. Meier, *op. cit.* p. 240). Others associate the springwort with other birds. See H. Pröhle, *Harzsagen* (Leipscic, 1859), ii. 116, No. 308; A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers*,<sup>2</sup> p. 190. It is from its power of springing or bursting open all doors and locks that the springwort derives its name (German *Springwurzeln*).

woodpecker's nest in the hollow of a tree with a wedge, the bird would bring a herb which caused the wedge to slip out of the hole; Trebius indeed affirmed that the wedge leaped out with a bang, however hard and fast you might have driven it into the tree.<sup>240</sup> Another flower which possesses the same remarkable power of bursting open all doors and locks is chicory, provided always that you cut the flower with a piece of gold at noon or midnight on St. James's Day, the twenty-fifth of July. But in cutting it you must be perfectly silent; if you utter a sound, it is all up with you. There was a man who was just about to cut the flower of the chicory, when he looked up and saw a millstone hovering over his head. He fled for his life and fortunately escaped; but had he so much as opened his lips, the millstone would have dropped on him and crushed him as flat as a pancake. However, it is only a rare white variety of the chicory flower which can act as a picklock; the common bright blue flower is perfectly useless for the purpose.<sup>241</sup>

The magical virtues ascribed to plants at Midsummer may be thought to be derived from the sun, then at the height of his power and glory. Hence it is possible that the Midsummer bonfires stand in direct relation to the sun.

Many more examples might perhaps be cited of the marvellous virtues which certain plants have been supposed to acquire at the summer solstice, but the foregoing instances may

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<sup>240</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* x. 40.

<sup>241</sup> Ernst Meier, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1852), pp. 238 sq., No. 264.

suffice to prove that the superstition is widely spread, deeply rooted, and therefore probably very ancient in Europe. Why should plants be thought to be endowed with these wonderful properties on the longest day more than on any other day of the year? It seems difficult or impossible to explain such a belief except on the supposition that in some mystic way the plants catch from the sun, then at the full height of his power and glory, some fleeting effluence of radiant light and heat, which invests them for a time with powers above the ordinary for the healing of diseases and the unmasking and baffling of all the evil things that threaten the life of man. That the supposition is not purely hypothetical will appear from a folk-tale, to be noticed later on, in which the magic bloom of the fern is directly derived from the sun at noon on Midsummer Day. And if the magic flowers of Midsummer Eve thus stand in direct relation to the sun, which many of them resemble in shape and colour, blooming in the meadows like little yellow suns fallen from the blue sky, does it not become probable that the bonfires kindled at the same time are the artificial, as the flowers are the natural, imitations of the great celestial fire then blazing in all its strength? At least analogy seems to favour the inference and so far to support Mannhardt's theory, that the bonfires kindled at the popular festivals of Europe, especially at the summer solstice, are intended to reinforce the waning or waxing fires of the sun. Thus if in our enquiry into these fire-festivals the scales of judgment are loaded with the adverse theories of Mannhardt



and Westermarck, we may say that the weight, light as it is, of the magic flowers of Midsummer Eve seems to incline the trembling balance back to the side of Mannhardt.

This consideration tends to bring us back to an intermediate position between the rival theories of Mannhardt and Westermarck.

Nor is it, perhaps, an argument against Mannhardt's view that the midsummer flowers and plants are so often employed as talismans to break the spells of witchcraft.<sup>242</sup> For granted that employment, which is undeniable, we have still to explain it, and that we can hardly do except by reference to the midsummer sun. And what is here said of the midsummer flowers applies equally to the midsummer bonfires. They too are used to destroy the charms of witches and warlocks; but if they can do so, may it not be in part because fires at midsummer are thought to burn with fiercer fury than at other times by sympathy with the fiercer fervour of the sun? This consideration would bring us back to an intermediate position between the opposing theories, namely, to the view that while the purely destructive aspect of fire is generally the most prominent and apparently the most important at these festivals, we must not overlook the additional force which by virtue of homoeopathic or imitative magic the bonfires may be supposed both to derive from and to impart to the sun, especially at the moment of the summer solstice when his strength is greatest and begins to decline, and when accordingly

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<sup>242</sup> See above, pp. [45](#), [46](#), [49](#), [54](#), [55](#), [59](#), [60](#), [62](#), [64](#), [65](#), [66](#), [67](#).

he can at once give and receive help to the greatest advantage.

Miscellaneous examples of the baleful activity of witches at Midsummer and of the precautions which it is necessary to take against them at that time. Witches in Voigtland. The witches' Sabbath in Prussia on Walpurgis Night and Midsummer Eve. Midsummer Eve a witching time among the South Slavs.

To conclude this part of our subject it may not be amiss to illustrate by a few more miscellaneous examples the belief that Midsummer Eve is one of the great days of the year in which witches and warlocks pursue their nefarious calling; indeed in this respect Midsummer Eve perhaps stands second only to the famous Walpurgis Night (the Eve of May Day). For instance, in the neighbourhood of Lierre, in Belgium, the people think that on the night of Midsummer Eve all witches and warlocks must repair to a certain field which is indicated to them beforehand. There they hold their infernal Sabbath and are passed in review by a hellish magician, who bestows on them fresh powers. That is why old women are most careful, before going to bed on that night, to stop up doors and windows and every other opening in order to bar out the witches and warlocks, who but for this sage precaution might steal into the house and make the first trial of their new powers on the unfortunate inmates.<sup>243</sup> At Rottenburg, in Swabia, people thought that the devil and the witches could do much harm on Midsummer Eve; so they made fast their shutters

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<sup>243</sup> Le Baron de Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Calendrier Belge* (Brussels, 1861-1862), i. 423 sq.

and bunged up even the chinks and crannies, for wherever air can penetrate, there the devil and witches can worm their way in. All night long, too, from nine in the evening till break of day, the church bells rang to disturb the dreadful beings at their evil work, since there is perhaps no better means of putting the whole devilish crew to flight than the sound of church bells.<sup>244</sup> Down to the second half of the nineteenth century the belief in witches was still widespread in Voigtland, a bleak mountainous region of Central Germany. It was especially on the Eve of May Day (Walpurgis), St. Thomas's Day, St. John's Day, and Christmas Eve, as well as on Mondays, that they were dreaded. Then they would come into a neighbour's house to beg, borrow, or steal something, no matter what; but woe to the poor wretch who suffered them to carry away so much as a chip or splinter of wood; for they would certainly use it to his undoing. On these witching nights the witches rode to their Sabbath on baking-forks and the dashers of churns; but if when they were hurtling through the darkness any one standing below addressed one of the witches by name, she would die within the year. To counteract and undo the spells which witches cast on man and beast, people resorted to all kinds of measures. Thus on the before-mentioned days folk made three crosses on the doors of the byres or guarded them by hanging up St. John's wort, marjoram, or other equally powerful talismans. Very often, too, the village youth would

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<sup>244</sup> Anton Birlinger, *Völksthümliches aus Schwaben*, Freiburg im Breisgau, (1861-1862), i. 278, § 437.

carry the war into the enemy's quarters by marching out in a body, cracking whips, firing guns, waving burning besoms, shouting and making an uproar, all for the purpose of frightening and driving away the witches.<sup>245</sup> In Prussia witches and warlocks used regularly to assemble twice a year on Walpurgis Night and the Eve of St. John. The places where they held their infernal Sabbath were various; for example, one was Pogdanzig, in the district of Schlochau. They generally rode on a baking-fork, but often on a black three-legged horse, and they took their departure up the chimney with the words, "Up and away and nowhere to stop!" When they were all gathered on the Blocksberg or Mount of the Witches, they held high revelry, feasting first and then dancing on a tight rope lefthanded-wise to the inspiring strains which an old warlock drew from a drum and a pig's head.<sup>246</sup> The South Slavs believe that on the night of Midsummer Eve a witch will slink up to the fence of the farmyard and say, "The cheese to me, the lard to me, the butter to me, the milk to me, but the cowhide to thee!" After that the cow will perish miserably and you will be obliged to bury the flesh and sell the hide. To prevent this disaster the thing to do is to go out into the meadows very early on Midsummer morning while the dew is on the grass, collect a quantity of dew in a waterproof mantle, carry it home, and having tethered your cow wash her down with the dew. After

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<sup>245</sup> Robert Eisel, *Sagenbuch des Voigtlandes* (Gera, 1871), p. 210, Nr. 551.

<sup>246</sup> W. J. A. von Tettau und J. D. H. Temme, *Die Volkssagen Ostpreussens, Lithauens und Westpreussens* (Berlin, 1837), pp. 263 sq.

that you have only to place a milkpail under her udders and to milk away as hard as you can; the amount of milk that you will extract from that cow's dugs is quite surprising. Again, the Slovenians about Görz and the Croats of Istria believe that on the same night the witches wage pitched battles with baptized folk, attacking them fiercely with broken stakes of palings and stumps of trees. It is therefore a wise precaution to grub up all the stumps in autumn and carry them home, so that the witches may be weaponless on St. John's Night. If the stumps are too heavy to be grubbed up, it is well to ram them down tighter into the earth, for then the witches will not be able to pull them up.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> F. S. Krauss, *Volks Glaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven* (Münster i. W., 1890), p. 128.

# Chapter IX. Balder and the Mistletoe

Relation of the fire-festivals to the myth of Balder.

The reader may remember that the preceding account of the popular fire-festivals of Europe was suggested by the myth of the Norse god Balder, who is said to have been slain by a branch of mistletoe and burnt in a great fire. We have now to enquire how far the customs which have been passed in review help to shed light on the myth. In this enquiry it may be convenient to begin with the mistletoe, the instrument of Balder's death.

Veneration of the Druids for the mistletoe.

From time immemorial the mistletoe has been the object of superstitious veneration in Europe. It was worshipped by the Druids, as we learn from a famous passage of Pliny. After enumerating the different kinds of mistletoe, he proceeds: "In treating of this subject, the admiration in which the mistletoe is held throughout Gaul ought not to pass unnoticed. The Druids, for so they call their wizards, esteem nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree on which it grows, provided only that the tree is an oak. But apart from this they choose oak-woods for their sacred groves and perform no sacred rites without oak-leaves; so that the very name of Druids may be regarded as a Greek appellation derived from their worship of the oak."<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Pliny derives the name Druid from the Greek *drus*, "oak." He did not know that the Celtic word for oak was the same (*daur*), and that therefore Druid, in the

For they believe that whatever grows on these trees is sent from heaven, and is a sign that the tree has been chosen by the god himself. The mistletoe is very rarely to be met with; but when it is found, they gather it with solemn ceremony. This they do above all on the sixth day of the moon, from whence they date the beginnings of their months, of their years, and of their thirty years' cycle, because by the sixth day the moon has plenty of vigour and has not run half its course. After due preparations have been made for a sacrifice and a feast under the tree, they hail it as the universal healer and bring to the spot two white bulls, whose horns have never been bound before. A priest clad in a white robe climbs the tree and with a golden sickle cuts the mistletoe, which is caught in a white cloth. Then they sacrifice the victims, praying that God may make his own gift to prosper with those upon whom he has bestowed it. They believe that a potion prepared from mistletoe will make barren animals to

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sense of priest of the oak, might be genuine Celtic, not borrowed from the Greek. This etymology is accepted by some modern scholars. See G. Curtius, *Grundzüge der Griechischen Etymologie*<sup>5</sup> (Leipsic, 1879), pp. 238 *sq.*; A. Vaniček, *Griechisch-Lateinisch Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leipsic, 1877), pp. 368 *sqq.*; (Sir) John Rhys, *Celtic Heathendom* (London and Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 221 *sqq.* However, this derivation is disputed by other scholars, who prefer to derive the name from a word meaning knowledge or wisdom, so that Druid would mean “wizard” or “magician.” See J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> iii. 305; Otto Schrader, *Reallexikon der Indogermanischen Altertumskunde* (Strasburg, 1901), pp. 638 *sq.*; H. D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Les Druides et les Dieux Celtiques à forme d'animaux* (Paris, 1906), pp. 1, 11, 83 *sqq.* The last-mentioned scholar formerly held that the etymology of Druid was unknown. See his *Cours de Littérature Celtique*, i. (Paris, 1883) pp. 117-127.

bring forth, and that the plant is a remedy against all poison. So much of men's religion is commonly concerned with trifles.”<sup>249</sup>

Medical and magical virtues ascribed to mistletoe in ancient Italy.

In another passage Pliny tells us that in medicine the mistletoe which grows on an oak was esteemed the most efficacious, and

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<sup>249</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xvi. 249-251. In the first edition of this book I understood Pliny to say that the Druidical ceremony of cutting the mistletoe fell in the sixth month, that is, in June; and hence I argued that it probably formed part of the midsummer festival. But in accordance with Latin usage the words of Pliny (*sexta luna*, literally “sixth moon”) can only mean “the sixth day of the month.” I have to thank my friend Mr. W. Warde Fowler for courteously pointing out my mistake to me. Compare my note in the *Athenaeum*, November 21st, 1891, p. 687. I also misunderstood Pliny's words, “*et saeculi post tricesimum annum, quia jam virium abunde habeat nec sit sui dimidia*,” applying them to the tree instead of to the moon, to which they really refer. After *saeculi* we must understand *principium* from the preceding *principia*. With the thirty years' cycle of the Druids we may compare the sixty years' cycle of the Boeotian festival of the Great Daedala (Pausanias, ix. 3. 5; see *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 140 *sq.*), which, like the Druidical rite in question, was essentially a worship, or perhaps rather a conjuration, of the sacred oak. Whether any deeper affinity, based on common Aryan descent, may be traced between the Boeotian and the Druidical ceremony, I do not pretend to determine. In India a cycle of sixty years, based on the sidereal revolution of Jupiter, has long been in use. The sidereal revolution of Jupiter is accomplished in approximately twelve solar years (more exactly 11 years and 315 days), so that five of its revolutions make a period of approximately sixty years. It seems, further, that in India a much older cycle of sixty lunar years was recognized. See Christian Lassen, *Indische Alter-thumskunde*, i.<sup>2</sup> (Leipsic, 1867), pp. 988 *sqq.*; Prof. F. Kielhorn (Göttingen), “The Sixty-year Cycle of Jupiter,” *The Indian Antiquary*, xviii. (1889) pp. 193-209; J. F. Fleet, “A New System of the Sixty-year Cycle of Jupiter,” *ibid.* pp. 221-224. In Tibet the use of a sixty-years' cycle has been borrowed from India. See W. Woodville Rockhill, “Tibet,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society for 1891* (London, 1891), p. 207 note 1.



that its efficacy was by some superstitious people supposed to be increased if the plant was gathered on the first day of the moon without the use of iron, and if when gathered it was not allowed to touch the earth; oak-mistletoe thus obtained was deemed a cure for epilepsy; carried about by women it assisted them to conceive, and it healed ulcers most effectually, if only the sufferer chewed a piece of the plant and laid another piece on the sore.<sup>250</sup> Yet, again, he says that mistletoe was supposed, like vinegar and an egg, to be an excellent means of extinguishing a fire.<sup>251</sup>

Agreement between the Druids and the ancient Italians as to the valuable properties of mistletoe.

If in these latter passages Pliny refers, as he apparently does, to the beliefs current among his contemporaries in Italy, it will follow that the Druids and the Italians were to some extent agreed as to the valuable properties possessed by mistletoe which grows on an oak; both of them deemed it an effectual remedy for a number of ailments, and both of them ascribed to it a quickening virtue, the Druids believing that a potion prepared from mistletoe would fertilize barren cattle, and the Italians holding that a piece of mistletoe carried about by a woman would help her to conceive a child. Further, both peoples thought that if the plant were to exert its medicinal properties it must be gathered in a certain way and at a certain time. It might not be cut with iron, hence the Druids cut it with gold; and it might not touch the earth, hence

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<sup>250</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxiv. 11 sq.

<sup>251</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxxiii. 94.

the Druids caught it in a white cloth. In choosing the time for gathering the plant, both peoples were determined by observation of the moon; only they differed as to the particular day of the moon, the Italians preferring the first, and the Druids the sixth.

Similar beliefs as to mistletoe among the Ainos of Japan.

With these beliefs of the ancient Gauls and Italians as to the wonderful medicinal properties of mistletoe we may compare the similar beliefs of the modern Ainos of Japan. We read that they, “like many nations of the Northern origin, hold the mistletoe in peculiar veneration. They look upon it as a medicine, good in almost every disease, and it is sometimes taken in food and at others separately as a decoction. The leaves are used in preference to the berries, the latter being of too sticky a nature for general purposes... But many, too, suppose this plant to have the power of making the gardens bear plentifully. When used for this purpose, the leaves are cut up into fine pieces, and, after having been prayed over, are sown with the millet and other seeds, a little also being eaten with the food. Barren women have also been known to eat the mistletoe, in order to be made to bear children. That mistletoe which grows upon the willow is supposed to have the greatest efficacy. This is because the willow is looked upon by them as being an especially sacred tree.”<sup>252</sup>

Similar beliefs as to mistletoe among the Torres Straits Islanders and the Walos of Senegambia. These beliefs perhaps originate in a notion that the mistletoe has fallen from heaven.

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<sup>252</sup> Rev. John Batchelor, *The Ainu and their Folk-lore* (London, 1901), p. 222.

Thus the Ainos agree with the Druids in regarding mistletoe as a cure for almost every disease, and they agree with the ancient Italians that applied to women it helps them to bear children. A similar belief as to the fertilizing influence of mistletoe, or of similar plants, upon women is entertained by the natives of Mabuiag, an island in Torres Straits. These savages imagine that twins can be produced “by the pregnant woman touching or breaking a branch of a loranthaceous plant (*Viscum sp.*, probably *V. orientale*) parasitic on a tree, *mader*. The wood of this tree is much esteemed for making digging sticks and as firewood, no twin-producing properties are inherent in it, nor is it regarded as being infected with the properties of its twin-producing parasite.”<sup>253</sup> Again, the Druidical notion that the mistletoe was an “all-healer” or panacea may be compared with a notion entertained by the Walos of Senegambia. These people “have much veneration for a sort of mistletoe, which they call *tob*; they carry leaves of it on their persons when they go to war as a preservative against wounds, just as if the leaves were real talismans (*gris-gris*).” The French writer who records this practice adds: “Is it not very curious that the mistletoe should be in this part of Africa what it was in the superstitions of the Gauls? This prejudice, common to the two countries, may have the same origin; blacks and whites will doubtless have seen, each of them for themselves, something supernatural in a plant which

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<sup>253</sup> *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, v. (Cambridge, 1904) pp. 198 sq.

grows and flourishes without having roots in the earth. May they not have believed, in fact, that it was a plant fallen from the sky, a gift of the divinity?"<sup>254</sup>

Such a notion would explain the ritual used in cutting mistletoe and other parasites.

This suggestion as to the origin of the superstition is strongly confirmed by the Druidical belief, reported by Pliny, that whatever grew on an oak was sent from heaven and was a sign that the tree had been chosen by the god himself.<sup>255</sup> Such a belief explains why the Druids cut the mistletoe, not with a common knife, but with a golden sickle,<sup>256</sup> and why, when cut,

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<sup>254</sup> M. le baron Roger (ancien Gouverneur de la Colonie française du Sénégal), "Notice sur le Gouvernement, les Mœurs, et les Superstitions des Nègres du pays de Walo," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, viii. (Paris, 1827) pp. 357 *sq.*

<sup>255</sup> Above, p. [77](#).

<sup>256</sup> Compare *The Times*, 2nd April, 1901, p. 9: "The Tunis correspondent of the *Temps* reports that in the course of certain operations in the Belvedere Park in Tunis the workmen discovered a huge circle of enormous stumps of trees ranged round an immense square stone showing signs of artistic chisel work. In the neighbourhood were found a sort of bronze trough containing a gold sickle in perfect preservation, and a sarcophagus containing a skeleton. About the forehead of the skeleton was a gold band, having in the centre the image of the sun, accompanied by hieratic signs, which are provisionally interpreted as the monogram of Teutates. The discovery of such remains in North Africa has created a sensation." As to the Celtic god Teutates and the human sacrifices offered to him, see Lucan, *Pharsalia*, i. 444 *sq.*: "Et quibus immitis placatur sanguine diro Teutates horrensque feris altaribus Hesus." Compare (Sir) John Rhys, *Celtic Heathendom* (London and Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 44 *sqq.*, 232. Branches of the sacred olive at Olympia, which were to form the victors' crowns, had to be cut with a golden sickle by a boy whose parents were both alive. See the Scholiast on Pindar, *Olymp.* iii. 60, p. 102, ed. Aug. Boeck (Leipsic, 1819). In Assyrian ritual it was laid

it was not suffered to touch the earth; probably they thought that the celestial plant would have been profaned and its marvellous virtue lost by contact with the ground. With the ritual observed by the Druids in cutting the mistletoe we may compare the ritual which in Cambodia is prescribed in a similar case. They say that when you see an orchid growing as a parasite on a tamarind tree, you should dress in white, take a new earthenware pot, then climb the tree at noon, break off the plant, put it in the pot, and let the pot fall to the ground. After that you make in the pot a decoction which confers the gift of invulnerability.<sup>257</sup> Thus just as in Africa the leaves of one parasitic plant are supposed to render the wearer

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down that, before felling a sacred tamarisk to make magical images out of the wood, the magician should pray to the sun-god Shamash and touch the tree with a golden axe. See C. Fossey, *La Magie Assyrienne* (Paris, 1902), pp. 132 sq. Some of the ancients thought that the root of the marsh-mallow, which was used in medicine, should be dug up with gold and then preserved from contact with the ground (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xx. 29). At the great horse-sacrifice in ancient India it was prescribed by ritual that the horse should be slain by a golden knife, because "gold is light" and "by means of the golden light the sacrificer also goes to the heavenly world." See *The Satapatha-Brâhmana* translated by Julius Eggeling, Part v. (Oxford, 1900) p. 303 (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlv.). It has been a rule of superstition both in ancient and modern times that certain plants, to which medical or magical virtues were attributed, should not be cut with iron. See the fragment of Sophocles's *Root-cutters*, quoted by Macrobius, *Saturn.* v. 19. 9 sq.; Virgil, *Aen.* iv. 513 sq.; Ovid, *Metamorph.* vii. 227; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxiv. 68, 103, 176; and above, p. 65 (as to purple loosestrife in Russia). On the objection to the use of iron in such cases compare F. Liebrecht, *Des Gervasius von Tilbury Otia Imperialia* (Hanover, 1856), pp. 102 sq.; *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 225 sqq.

<sup>257</sup> Étienne Aymonier, "Notes sur les Coutumes et Croyances Superstitieuses des Cambodgiens," *Cochinchine Française, Excursions et Reconnaissance* No. 16 (Saigon, 1883), p. 136.

invulnerable, so in Cambodia a decoction made from another parasitic plant is considered to render the same service to such as make use of it, whether by drinking or washing. We may conjecture that in both places the notion of invulnerability is suggested by the position of the plant, which, occupying a place of comparative security above the ground, appears to promise to its fortunate possessor a similar security from some of the ills that beset the life of man on earth. We have already met with many examples of the store which the primitive mind sets on such vantage grounds.<sup>258</sup>

The ancient beliefs and practices concerning mistletoe have their analogies in modern European folk-lore.

Whatever may be the origin of these beliefs and practices concerning the mistletoe, certain it is that some of them have their analogies in the folk-lore of modern European peasants. For example, it is laid down as a rule in various parts of Europe that mistletoe may not be cut in the ordinary way but must be shot or knocked down with stones from the tree on which it is growing. Thus, in the Swiss canton of Aargau "all parasitic plants are esteemed in a certain sense holy by the country folk, but most particularly so the mistletoe growing on an oak. They ascribe great powers to it, but shrink from cutting it off in the usual manner. Instead of that they procure it in the following manner. When the sun is in Sagittarius and the moon is on the wane, on the first, third, or fourth day before the new moon, one ought to

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<sup>258</sup> See above, vol. i. pp. 2 *sqq.*

shoot down with an arrow the mistletoe of an oak and to catch it with the left hand as it falls. Such mistletoe is a remedy for every ailment of children.”<sup>259</sup> Here among the Swiss peasants, as among the Druids of old, special virtue is ascribed to mistletoe which grows on an oak: it may not be cut in the usual way: it must be caught as it falls to the ground; and it is esteemed a panacea for all diseases, at least of children. In Sweden, also, it is a popular superstition that if mistletoe is to possess its peculiar virtue, it must either be shot down out of the oak or knocked down with stones.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, “so late as the early part of the nineteenth century, people in Wales believed that for the mistletoe to have any power, it must be shot or struck down with stones off the tree where it grew.”<sup>261</sup>

Medicinal virtues ascribed to mistletoe by ancients and moderns. Mistletoe as a cure for epilepsy.

Again, in respect of the healing virtues of mistletoe the opinion of modern peasants, and even of the learned, has to some extent agreed with that of the ancients. The Druids appear to have called the plant, or perhaps the oak on which it grew, the “all-healer”;<sup>262</sup> and “all-healer” is said to be still a name of

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<sup>259</sup> Ernst Meier, “Über Pflanzen und Kräuter,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, i. (Göttingen, 1853), pp. 443 *sq.* The sun enters the sign of Sagittarius about November 22nd.

<sup>260</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> iii. 533, referring to Dybeck, *Runa*, 1845, p. 80.

<sup>261</sup> Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), p. 87.

<sup>262</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xvi. 250, “*Omnia sanantem appellantes suo vocabulo.*” See above, p. [77](#).

the mistletoe in the modern Celtic speech of Brittany, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland.<sup>263</sup> On St. John's morning (Midsummer morning) peasants of Piedmont and Lombardy go out to search the oak-leaves for the "oil of St. John," which is supposed to heal all wounds made with cutting instruments.<sup>264</sup> Originally, perhaps, the "oil of St. John" was simply the mistletoe, or a decoction made from it. For in Holstein the mistletoe, especially oak-mistletoe, is still regarded as a panacea for green wounds and as a sure charm to secure success in hunting;<sup>265</sup> and at Lacaune, in the south of France, the old Druidical belief in the mistletoe as an antidote to all poisons still survives among the peasantry; they apply the plant to the stomach of the sufferer or give him a decoction of it to drink.<sup>266</sup> Again, the ancient belief that mistletoe is a cure for epilepsy has survived in modern times not only among the ignorant but among the learned. Thus in Sweden

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<sup>263</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> ii. 1009: "Sonst aber wird das welsche olhiach, *bretagn.* ollyiach, *ir.* uileiceach, *gal.* uileice, *d. i.* allheiland, von ol, uile universalis, als benennung des mistels angegeben." My lamented friend, the late R. A. Neil of Pembroke College, Cambridge, pointed out to me that in N. M'Alpine's *Gaelic Dictionary* (Seventh Edition, Edinburgh and London, 1877, p. 432) the Gaelic word for mistletoe is given as *an t' uil*, which, Mr. Neil told me, means "all-healer."

<sup>264</sup> A. de Gubernatis, *La Mythologie des Plantes* (Paris, 1878-1882), ii. 73.

<sup>265</sup> Rev. Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore*, Third Edition (London, 1886), p. 378. Compare A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*<sup>2</sup> (Gütersloh, 1886), p. 206, referring to Keysler, *Antiq. Sept.* p. 308.

<sup>266</sup> A. de Nore, *Coutumes, Mythes et Traditions des Provinces de France* (Paris and Lyons, 1846), pp. 102 *sq.* The local name for mistletoe here is *besq*, which may be derived from the Latin *viscum*.



persons afflicted with the falling sickness think they can ward off attacks of the malady by carrying about with them a knife which has a handle of oak mistletoe;<sup>267</sup> and in Germany for a similar purpose pieces of mistletoe used to be hung round the necks of children.<sup>268</sup> In the French province of Bourbonnais a popular remedy for epilepsy is a decoction of mistletoe which has been gathered on an oak on St. John's Day and boiled with rye-flour.<sup>269</sup> So at Bottesford in Lincolnshire a decoction of mistletoe is supposed to be a palliative for this terrible disease.<sup>270</sup> Indeed mistletoe was recommended as a remedy for the falling sickness by high medical authorities in England and Holland down to the eighteenth century.<sup>271</sup> At Kirton-in-Lindsey, in Lincolnshire, it is thought that St. Vitus's dance may be cured by the water in which mistletoe berries have been boiled.<sup>272</sup> In the Scotch shires

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<sup>267</sup> A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*<sup>2</sup> (Gütersloh, 1886), p. 205; Walter K. Kelly, *Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-lore* (London, 1863), p. 186.

<sup>268</sup> "Einige Notizen aus einem alten Kräuterbuche," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, iv. (Göttingen, 1859) pp. 41 *sq.*

<sup>269</sup> Francis Pérot, "Prières, Invocations, Formules Sacrées, Incantations en Bourbonnais," *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, xviii. (1903) p. 299.

<sup>270</sup> *County Folk-lore*, v. *Lincolnshire*, collected by Mrs. Gutch and Mabel Peacock (London, 1908), p. 120.

<sup>271</sup> Prof. P. J. Veth, "De Leer der Signatuur, iii. De Mistel en de Riembloem," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, vii. (1894) p. 111. He names Ray in England (about 1700), Boerhaave in Holland (about 1720), and Van Swieten, a pupil of Boerhaave's (about 1745).

<sup>272</sup> *County Folk-lore*, vol. v. *Lincolnshire*, collected by Mrs. Gutch and Mabel

of Elgin and Moray, down to the second half of the eighteenth century, at the full moon of March people used to cut withes of mistletoe or ivy, make circles of them, keep them all the year, and profess to cure hectics and other troubles by means of them.<sup>273</sup> In Sweden, apparently, for other complaints a sprig of mistletoe is hung round the patient's neck or a ring of it is worn on his finger.<sup>274</sup>

The medicinal virtues ascribed to mistletoe seem to be mythical, being fanciful inferences from the parasitic nature of the plant.

However, the opinion of the medical profession as to the curative virtues of mistletoe has undergone a radical alteration. Whereas the Druids thought that mistletoe cured everything, modern doctors appear to think that it cures nothing.<sup>275</sup> If they are right, we must conclude that the ancient and widespread faith in the medicinal virtue of mistletoe is a pure superstition based on nothing better than the fanciful inferences which ignorance has drawn from the parasitic nature of the plant, its position high

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Peacock (London, 1908), p. 120.

<sup>273</sup> Rev. Mr. Shaw, Minister of Elgin, quoted by Thomas Pennant in his "Tour in Scotland, 1769," printed in J. Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels*, iii. (London, 1809) p. 136; J. Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1882-1883), iii. 151.

<sup>274</sup> Walter K. Kelly, *Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-lore* (London, 1863), p. 186.

<sup>275</sup> On this point Prof. P. J. Veth ("De Leer der Signatuur," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, vii. (1894) p. 112) quotes Cauvet, *Éléments d'Histoire naturelle médicale*, ii. 290: "La famille des Loranthacées ne nous offre aucun intérêt."

up on the branch of a tree seeming to protect it from the dangers to which plants and animals are subject on the surface of the ground. From this point of view we can perhaps understand why mistletoe has so long and so persistently been prescribed as a cure for the falling sickness. As mistletoe cannot fall to the ground because it is rooted on the branch of a tree high above the earth, it seems to follow as a necessary consequence that an epileptic patient cannot possibly fall down in a fit so long as he carries a piece of mistletoe in his pocket or a decoction of mistletoe in his stomach. Such a train of reasoning would probably be regarded even now as cogent by a large portion of the human species.

The belief that mistletoe extinguishes fire seems based on a fancy that it falls on the tree in a flash of lightning.

Again the ancient Italian opinion that mistletoe extinguishes fire appears to be shared by Swedish peasants, who hang up bunches of oak-mistletoe on the ceilings of their rooms as a protection against harm in general and conflagration in particular.<sup>276</sup> A hint as to the way in which mistletoe comes to be possessed of this property is furnished by the epithet “thunder-besom,” which people of the Aargau canton in Switzerland apply to the plant.<sup>277</sup> For a thunder-besom is a shaggy, bushy excrescence on branches of trees, which is popularly believed

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<sup>276</sup> A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*<sup>2</sup> (Gütersloh, 1886), p. 205, referring to Dybeck, *Runa*, 1845, p. 80.

<sup>277</sup> A. Kuhn, *op. cit.* p. 204, referring to Rochholz, *Schweizersagen aus d. Aargau*, ii. 202.

to be produced by a flash of lightning;<sup>278</sup> hence in Bohemia a thunder-besom burnt in the fire protects the house against being struck by a thunder-bolt.<sup>279</sup> Being itself a product of lightning it naturally serves, on homoeopathic principles, as a protection against lightning, in fact as a kind of lightning-conductor. Hence the fire which mistletoe in Sweden is designed especially to avert from houses may be fire kindled by lightning; though no doubt the plant is equally effective against conflagration in general.

Other wonderful properties ascribed to mistletoe; in particular it is thought to be a protection against witchcraft.

Again, mistletoe acts as a master-key as well as a lightning-conductor; for it is said to open all locks.<sup>280</sup> However, in the Tyrol it can only exert this power “under certain circumstances,” which are not specified.<sup>281</sup> But perhaps the most precious of all the virtues of mistletoe is that it affords efficient protection against sorcery and witchcraft.<sup>282</sup> That, no doubt, is the reason

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<sup>278</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> i. 153.

<sup>279</sup> J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague and Leipsic, 1864), p. 37, § 218. In Upper Bavaria the mistletoe is burned for this purpose along with the so-called palm-branches which were consecrated on Palm Sunday. See *Bavaria, Landes- und Volkskunde des Königreichs Bayern*, i. (Munich, 1860), p. 371.

<sup>280</sup> A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*,<sup>2</sup> p. 206, referring to Albertus Magnus, p. 155; Prof. P. J. Veth, “De Leer der Signatuur,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, vii. (1904) p. 111.

<sup>281</sup> J. N. Ritter von Alpenburg, *Mythen und Sagen Tirols* (Zurich, 1857), p. 398.

<sup>282</sup> A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1869), p. 97, § 128; Prof. P. J. Veth, “De Leer der Signatuur,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, vii. (1894)

why in Austria a twig of mistletoe is laid on the threshold as a preventive of nightmare;<sup>283</sup> and it may be the reason why in the north of England they say that if you wish your dairy to thrive you should give your bunch of mistletoe to the first cow that calves after New Year's Day,<sup>284</sup> for it is well known that nothing is so fatal to milk and butter as witchcraft. Similarly in Wales, for the sake of ensuring good luck to the dairy, people used to give a branch of mistletoe to the first cow that gave birth to a calf after the first hour of the New Year; and in rural districts of Wales, where mistletoe abounded, there was always a profusion of it in the farmhouses. When mistletoe was scarce, Welsh farmers used to say, "No mistletoe, no luck"; but if there was a fine crop of mistletoe, they expected a fine crop of corn.<sup>285</sup> In Sweden mistletoe is diligently sought after on St. John's Eve, the people "believing it to be, in a high degree, possessed of mystic qualities; and that if a sprig of it be attached to the ceiling of the dwelling-house, the horse's stall, or the cow's crib, the Troll will then be powerless to injure either man or beast."<sup>286</sup>

A favourite time for gathering mistletoe is Midsummer Eve.

With regard to the time when the mistletoe should be gathered opinions have varied. The Druids gathered it above all on the

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p. 111.

<sup>283</sup> A. Wuttke, *op. cit.* p. 267, § 419.

<sup>284</sup> W. Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (London, 1879), p. 114.

<sup>285</sup> Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), p. 88.

<sup>286</sup> L. Lloyd, *Peasant Life in Sweden* (London, 1870), p. 269.

sixth day of the moon, the ancient Italians apparently on the first day of the moon.<sup>287</sup> In modern times some have preferred the full moon of March and others the waning moon of winter when the sun is in Sagittarius.<sup>288</sup> But the favourite time would seem to be Midsummer Eve or Midsummer Day. We have seen that both in France and Sweden special virtues are ascribed to mistletoe gathered at Midsummer.<sup>289</sup> The rule in Sweden is that “mistletoe must be cut on the night of Midsummer Eve when sun and moon stand in the sign of their might.”<sup>290</sup> Again, in Wales it was believed that a sprig of mistletoe gathered on St. John's Eve (Midsummer Eve), or at any time before the berries appeared, would induce dreams of omen, both good and bad, if it were placed under the pillow of the sleeper.<sup>291</sup> Thus mistletoe is one of the many plants whose magical or medicinal virtues are believed to culminate with the culmination of the sun on the longest day of the year. Hence it seems reasonable to conjecture that in the eyes of the Druids, also, who revered the plant so highly, the sacred mistletoe may have acquired a double portion of its mystic qualities at the solstice in June, and that accordingly they may have regularly cut it with solemn ceremony on Midsummer Eve.

The two main incidents of Balder's myth, namely the pulling

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<sup>287</sup> Above, pp. [77](#), [78](#).

<sup>288</sup> Above, pp. [82](#), [84](#).

<sup>289</sup> Above, pp. [83](#), [86](#).

<sup>290</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> iii. 353, referring to Dybeck, *Runa*, 1844, p. 22.

<sup>291</sup> Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), p. 88.

of the mistletoe and the lighting of the bonfire, are reproduced in the great Midsummer celebration of Scandinavia.

Be that as it may, certain it is that the mistletoe, the instrument of Balder's death, has been regularly gathered for the sake of its mystic qualities on Midsummer Eve in Scandinavia, Balder's home.<sup>292</sup> The plant is found commonly growing on pear-trees, oaks, and other trees in thick damp woods throughout the more temperate parts of Sweden.<sup>293</sup> Thus one of the two main incidents of Balder's myth is reproduced in the great midsummer festival of Scandinavia. But the other main incident of the myth, the burning of Balder's body on a pyre, has also its counterpart in the bonfires which still blaze, or blazed till lately, in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden on Midsummer Eve.<sup>294</sup> It does not appear, indeed, that any effigy is burned in these bonfires; but the burning of an effigy is a feature which might easily drop out after its meaning was forgotten. And the name of Balder's balefires (*Balder's Bålar*), by which these midsummer fires were formerly known in Sweden,<sup>295</sup> puts their connexion with Balder beyond the reach of doubt, and makes it probable that in former times either a living representative or an effigy of Balder was annually burned in them. Midsummer was the season sacred to Balder,

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<sup>292</sup> See above, p. [86](#).

<sup>293</sup> G. Wahlenberg, *Flora Suecica* (Upsala, 1824-1826), ii. No. 1143 *Viscum album*, pp. 649 sq.: "*Hab. in sylvarum densiorum et humidiorum arboribus frondosis, ut Pyris, Quercu, Fago etc. per Sueciam temperatiorem passim.*"

<sup>294</sup> Above, vol. i. pp. 171 sq.

<sup>295</sup> L. Lloyd, *Peasant Life in Sweden* (London, 1870), p. 259.

and the Swedish poet Tegner, in placing the burning of Balder at midsummer,<sup>296</sup> may very well have followed an old tradition that the summer solstice was the time when the good god came to his untimely end.

Hence the myth of Balder was probably the explanation given of a similar rite.

Thus it has been shewn that the leading incidents of the Balder myth have their counterparts in those fire-festivals of our European peasantry which undoubtedly date from a time long prior to the introduction of Christianity. The pretence of throwing the victim chosen by lot into the Beltane fire,<sup>297</sup> and the similar treatment of the man, the future Green Wolf, at the midsummer bonfire in Normandy,<sup>298</sup> may naturally be interpreted as traces of an older custom of actually burning human beings on these occasions; and the green dress of the Green Wolf, coupled with the leafy envelope of the young fellow who trod out the midsummer fire at Moosheim,<sup>299</sup> seems to hint that the persons who perished at these festivals did so in the character of tree-spirits or deities of vegetation. From all this we may reasonably infer that in the Balder myth on the one hand, and the fire-festivals and custom of gathering mistletoe on the

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<sup>296</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> iii. 78, who adds, “*Mahnen die Johannisfeuer an Baldrs Leichenbrand?*” This pregnant hint perhaps contains in germ the solution of the whole myth.

<sup>297</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 148.

<sup>298</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 186.

<sup>299</sup> Above, p. [26](#).



other hand, we have, as it were, the two broken and dissevered halves of an original whole. In other words, we may assume with some degree of probability that the myth of Balder's death was not merely a myth, that is, a description of physical phenomena in imagery borrowed from human life, but that it was at the same time the story which people told to explain why they annually burned a human representative of the god and cut the mistletoe with solemn ceremony. If I am right, the story of Balder's tragic end formed, so to say, the text of the sacred drama which was acted year by year as a magical rite to cause the sun to shine, trees to grow, crops to thrive, and to guard man and beast from the baleful arts of fairies and trolls, of witches and warlocks. The tale belonged, in short, to that class of nature myths which are meant to be supplemented by ritual; here, as so often, myth stood to magic in the relation of theory to practice.

If a human representative of a tree-spirit was burned in the bonfires, what kind of tree did he represent? The oak the principal sacred tree of the Aryans.

But if the victims – the human Balders – who died by fire, whether in spring or at midsummer, were put to death as living embodiments of tree-spirits or deities of vegetation, it would seem that Balder himself must have been a tree-spirit or deity of vegetation. It becomes desirable, therefore, to determine, if we can, the particular kind of tree or trees, of which a personal representative was burned at the fire-festivals. For we may be quite sure that it was not as a representative of vegetation in

general that the victim suffered death. The idea of vegetation in general is too abstract to be primitive. Most probably the victim at first represented a particular kind of sacred tree. Now of all European trees none has such claims as the oak to be considered as pre-eminently the sacred tree of the Aryans. Its worship is attested for all the great branches of the Aryan stock in Europe. We have seen that it was not only the sacred tree, but the principal object of worship of both Celts and Lithuanians.<sup>300</sup> The roving Celts appear to have carried their worship of the oak with them even to Asia; for in the heart of Asia Minor the Galatian senate met in a place which bore the pure Celtic name of Drynemetum or "temple of the oak."<sup>301</sup> Among the Slavs the oak seems to have been the sacred tree of the great god Perun.<sup>302</sup> According to Grimm, the oak ranked first among the holy trees of the Germans. It is certainly known to have been adored by them in the age of heathendom, and traces of its worship have survived in various parts of Germany almost to the present day.<sup>303</sup> Among

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<sup>300</sup> As to the worship of the oak in Europe, see *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 349 *sqq.* Compare P. Wagler, *Die Eiche in alter und neuer Zeit*, in two parts (Wurzen, n. d., and Berlin, 1891).

<sup>301</sup> Strabo, xii. 5.1, p. 567. The name is a compound of *dryu*, "oak," and *nemed*, "temple" (H. F. Tozer, *Selections from Strabo*, Oxford, 1893, p. 284). We know from Jerome (*Commentar. in Epist. ad Galat.* book ii. praef.) that the Galatians retained their native Celtic speech as late as the fourth century of our era.

<sup>302</sup> *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 365.

<sup>303</sup> J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> i. 55 *sq.*, 58 *sq.*, ii. 542, iii. 187 *sq.*; P. Wagler, *Die Eiche in alter und neuer Zeit* (Berlin, 1891), pp. 40 *sqq.*; *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 363 *sqq.*, 371.

the ancient Italians the oak was sacred above all other trees.<sup>304</sup> The image of Jupiter on the Capitol at Rome seems to have been originally nothing but a natural oak-tree.<sup>305</sup> At Dodona, perhaps the oldest of all Greek sanctuaries, Zeus was worshipped as immanent in the sacred oak, and the rustling of its leaves in the wind was his voice.<sup>306</sup> If, then, the great god of both Greeks and Romans was represented in some of his oldest shrines under the form of an oak, and if the oak was the principal object of worship of Celts, Germans, and Lithuanians, we may certainly conclude that this tree was venerated by the Aryans in common before the dispersion; and that their primitive home must have lain in a land which was clothed with forests of oak.<sup>307</sup>

Hence the tree represented by the human victim who was burnt at the fire-festivals was probably the oak.

Now, considering the primitive character and remarkable

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<sup>304</sup> L. Preller, *Römische Mythologie*<sup>3</sup> (Berlin, 1881-1883), i. 108.

<sup>305</sup> Livy, i. 10. Compare C. Bötticher, *Der Baumkultus der Hellenen* (Berlin, 1856), pp. 133 sq.

<sup>306</sup> C. Bötticher, *op. cit.* pp. 111 sqq.; L. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*,<sup>4</sup> ed. C. Robert, i. (Berlin, 1894) pp. 122 sqq.; P. Wagler, *Die Eiche in alter und neuer Zeit* (Berlin, 1891), pp. 2 sqq. It is noteworthy that at Olympia the only wood that might be used in sacrificing to Zeus was the white poplar (Pausanias, v. 14. 2). But it is probable that herein Zeus, who was an intruder at Olympia, merely accepted an old local custom which, long before his arrival, had been observed in the worship of Pelops (Pausanias, v. 13. 3).

<sup>307</sup> Without hazarding an opinion on the vexed question of the cradle of the Aryans, I may observe that in various parts of Europe the oak seems to have been formerly more common than it is now. See the evidence collected in *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 349 sqq.

similarity of the fire-festivals observed by all the branches of the Aryan race in Europe, we may infer that these festivals form part of the common stock of religious observances which the various peoples carried with them in their wanderings from their old home. But, if I am right, an essential feature of those primitive fire-festivals was the burning of a man who represented the tree-spirit. In view, then, of the place occupied by the oak in the religion of the Aryans, the presumption is that the tree so represented at the fire-festivals must originally have been the oak. So far as the Celts and Lithuanians are concerned, this conclusion will perhaps hardly be contested. But both for them and for the Germans it is confirmed by a remarkable piece of religious conservatism. The most primitive method known to man of producing fire is by rubbing two pieces of wood against each other till they ignite; and we have seen that this method is still used in Europe for kindling sacred fires such as the need-fire, and that most probably it was formerly resorted to at all the fire-festivals under discussion. Now it is sometimes required that the need-fire, or other sacred fire, should be made by the friction of a particular kind of wood; and when the kind of wood is prescribed, whether among Celts, Germans, or Slavs, that wood appears to be generally the oak.<sup>308</sup> Thus we have seen

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<sup>308</sup> However, some exceptions to the rule are recorded. See above, vol. i. pp. 169, 278 (oak and fir), 220 (plane and birch), 281, 283, 286 (limewood), 282 (poplar and fir), 286 (cornel-tree), 291 (birch or other hard wood), 278, 280 (nine kinds of wood). According to Montanus, the need-fire, Easter, and Midsummer fires were kindled by the friction of oak and limewood. See Montanus, *Die deutschen Volksfeste*,

that amongst the Slavs of Masuren the new fire for the village is made on Midsummer Day by causing a wheel to revolve rapidly round an axle of oak till the axle takes fire.<sup>309</sup> When the perpetual fire which the ancient Slavs used to maintain chanced to go out, it was rekindled by the friction of a piece of oak-wood, which had been previously heated by being struck with a grey (not a red) stone.<sup>310</sup> In Germany and the Highlands of Scotland the need-fire was regularly, and in Russia and among the South Slavs it was sometimes, kindled by the friction of oak-wood;<sup>311</sup> and both in Wales and the Highlands of Scotland the Beltane fires were lighted by similar means.<sup>312</sup> Now, if the sacred fire was regularly kindled by the friction of oak-wood, we may infer that originally the fire was also fed with the same material. In point of fact, it appears that the perpetual fire of Vesta at Rome was fed with oak-wood,<sup>313</sup> and that oak-wood was the fuel consumed in the perpetual fire which burned under the sacred oak at the great

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*Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube* (Iserlohn, n. d.), p. 159. But elsewhere (pp. 33 *sq.*, 127) the same writer says that the need-fire and Midsummer fires were produced by the friction of oak and fir-wood.

<sup>309</sup> Above, vol. i. p. 177.

<sup>310</sup> M. Prätorius, *Deliciae Prussicae*, herausgegeben von Dr. William Pierson (Berlin, 1871), pp. 19 *sq.* W. R. S. Ralston says (on what authority I do not know) that if the fire maintained in honour of the Lithuanian god Perkunas went out, it was rekindled by sparks struck from a stone which the image of the god held in his hand (*Songs of the Russian People*, London, 1872, p. 88).

<sup>311</sup> See above, vol. i. pp. 148, 271, 272, 274, 275, 276, 281, 289, 294.

<sup>312</sup> Above, vol. i. pp. 148, 155.

<sup>313</sup> *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 186.

Lithuanian sanctuary of Romove.<sup>314</sup> Further, that oak-wood was formerly the fuel burned in the midsummer fires may perhaps be inferred from the custom, said to be still observed by peasants in many mountain districts of Germany, of making up the cottage fire on Midsummer Day with a heavy block of oak-wood. The block is so arranged that it smoulders slowly and is not finally reduced to charcoal till the expiry of a year. Then upon next Midsummer Day the charred embers of the old log are removed to make room for the new one, and are mixed with the seed-corn or scattered about the garden. This is believed to guard the food cooked on the hearth from witchcraft, to preserve the luck of the house, to promote the growth of the crops, and to preserve them from blight and vermin.<sup>315</sup> Thus the custom is almost exactly parallel to that of the Yule-log, which in parts of Germany, France, England, Servia, and other Slavonic lands was commonly of oak-wood.<sup>316</sup> At the Boeotian festival of the

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<sup>314</sup> *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 366. However, sacred fires of other wood than oak are not unknown among Aryan peoples. Thus at Olympia white poplar was the wood burnt in sacrifices to Zeus (above, p. 90 n.<sup>1</sup>); at Delphi the perpetual fire was fed with pinewood (Plutarch, *De El apud Delphos*, 2), and it was over the glowing embers of pinewood that the Soranian Wolves walked at Soracte (above, p. 14).

<sup>315</sup> Montanus, *Diedeutschen Volksfeste, Volksbräuche und deutscher Volksglaube* (Iserlohn, n. d.), pp. 127, 159. The log is called in German *Scharholz*. The custom appears to have prevailed particularly in Westphalia, about Sieg and Lahn. Compare Montanus, *op. cit.* p. 12, as to the similar custom at Christmas. The use of the *Scharholz* is reported to be found also in Niederlausitz and among the neighbouring Saxons. See Paul Wagler, *Die Eiche in alter und neuer Zeit* (Berlin, 1891), pp. 86 sq.

<sup>316</sup> Above, vol. i. pp. 248, 250, 251, 257, 258, 260, 263. Elsewhere the Yule log

Daedala, the analogy of which to the spring and midsummer festivals of modern Europe has been already pointed out, the great feature was the felling and burning of an oak.<sup>317</sup> The general conclusion is, that at those periodic or occasional ceremonies the ancient Aryans both kindled and fed the fire with the sacred oak-wood.<sup>318</sup>

If the human victims burnt at the fire-festival represented the oak, the reason for pulling the mistletoe may have been a belief that the life of the oak was in the mistletoe, and that the tree could not perish either by fire or water so long as the mistletoe remained intact among its boughs.

But if at these solemn rites the fire was regularly made of oak-wood, it follows that any man who was burned in it as a personification of the tree-spirit could have represented no tree but the oak. The sacred oak was thus burned in duplicate; the wood of the tree was consumed in the fire, and along with it

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has been made of fir, beech, holly, yew, crab-tree, or olive. See above, vol. i. pp. 249, 257, 263.

<sup>317</sup> *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, ii. 140 sq.

<sup>318</sup> A curious use of an oak-wood fire to detect a criminal is reported from Germany. If a man has been found murdered and his murderer is unknown, you are recommended to proceed as follows. You kindle a fire of dry oak-wood, you pour some of the blood from the wounds on the fire, and you change the poor man's shoes, putting the right shoe on the left foot, and *vice versa*. As soon as that is done, the murderer is struck blind and mad, so that he fancies he is riding up to the throat in water; labouring under this delusion he returns to the corpse, when you can apprehend him and deliver him up to the arm of justice with the greatest ease. See Montanus, *op. cit.* pp. 159 sq.

was consumed a living man as a personification of the oak-spirit. The conclusion thus drawn for the European Aryans in general is confirmed in its special application to the Scandinavians by the relation in which amongst them the mistletoe appears to have stood to the burning of the victim in the midsummer fire. We have seen that among Scandinavians it has been customary to gather the mistletoe at midsummer. But so far as appears on the face of this custom, there is nothing to connect it with the midsummer fires in which human victims or effigies of them were burned. Even if the fire, as seems probable, was originally always made with oak-wood, why should it have been necessary to pull the mistletoe? The last link between the midsummer customs of gathering the mistletoe and lighting the bonfires is supplied by Balder's myth, which can hardly be disjoined from the customs in question. The myth suggests that a vital connexion may once have been believed to subsist between the mistletoe and the human representative of the oak who was burned in the fire. According to the myth, Balder could be killed by nothing in heaven or earth except the mistletoe; and so long as the mistletoe remained on the oak, he was not only immortal but invulnerable. Now, if we suppose that Balder was the oak, the origin of the myth becomes intelligible. The mistletoe was viewed as the seat of life of the oak, and so long as it was uninjured nothing could kill or even wound the oak. The conception of the mistletoe as the seat of life of the oak would naturally be suggested to primitive people by the observation that while the oak is deciduous, the



mistletoe which grows on it is evergreen. In winter the sight of its fresh foliage among the bare branches must have been hailed by the worshippers of the tree as a sign that the divine life which had ceased to animate the branches yet survived in the mistletoe, as the heart of a sleeper still beats when his body is motionless. Hence when the god had to be killed – when the sacred tree had to be burnt – it was necessary to begin by breaking off the mistletoe. For so long as the mistletoe remained intact, the oak (so people might think) was invulnerable; all the blows of their knives and axes would glance harmless from its surface. But once tear from the oak its sacred heart – the mistletoe – and the tree nodded to its fall. And when in later times the spirit of the oak came to be represented by a living man, it was logically necessary to suppose that, like the tree he personated, he could neither be killed nor wounded so long as the mistletoe remained uninjured. The pulling of the mistletoe was thus at once the signal and the cause of his death.

Ancient Italian belief that mistletoe could not be destroyed by fire or water.

On this view the invulnerable Balder is neither more nor less than a personification of a mistletoe-bearing oak. The interpretation is confirmed by what seems to have been an ancient Italian belief, that the mistletoe can be destroyed neither by fire nor water;<sup>319</sup> for if the parasite is thus deemed

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<sup>319</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xiii. 119: “Alexander Cornelius arborem leonem appellavit ex qua facta esset Argo, similem robori viscum ferenti, quae neque aqua neque igni possit

indestructible, it might easily be supposed to communicate its own indestructibility to the tree on which it grows, so long as the two remain in conjunction. Or to put the same idea in mythical form we might tell how the kindly god of the oak had his life securely deposited in the imperishable mistletoe which grew among the branches; how accordingly so long as the mistletoe kept its place there, the deity himself remained invulnerable; and how at last a cunning foe, let into the secret of the god's invulnerability, tore the mistletoe from the oak, thereby killing the oak-god and afterwards burning his body in a fire which could have made no impression on him so long as the incombustible parasite retained its seat among the boughs.

Conception of a being whose life is outside himself.

But since the idea of a being whose life is thus, in a sense, outside himself, must be strange to many readers, and has, indeed, not yet been recognized in its full bearing on primitive superstition, it will be worth while to illustrate it by examples drawn both from story and custom. The result will be to shew that, in assuming this idea as the explanation of Balder's relation to the mistletoe, I assume a principle which is deeply engraved on the mind of primitive man.

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*corrumpi, sicuti nec viscum, nulli alii cognitam, quod equidem sciam.*" Here the tree out of which the ship Argo was made is said to have been destructible neither by fire nor water; and as the tree is compared to a mistletoe-bearing oak, and the mistletoe itself is said to be indestructible by fire and water, it seems to follow that the same indestructibility may have been believed to attach to the oak which bore the mistletoe, so long at least as the mistletoe remained rooted on the boughs.

## Chapter X. The Eternal Soul in Folk-Tales

Belief that a man's soul may be deposited for safety in a secure place outside his body, and that so long as it remains there intact he himself is invulnerable and immortal.

In a former part of this work we saw that, in the opinion of primitive people, the soul may temporarily absent itself from the body without causing death.<sup>320</sup> Such temporary absences of the soul are often believed to involve considerable risk, since the wandering soul is liable to a variety of mishaps at the hands of enemies, and so forth. But there is another aspect to this power of disengaging the soul from the body. If only the safety of the soul can be ensured during its absence, there is no reason why the soul should not continue absent for an indefinite time; indeed a man may, on a pure calculation of personal safety, desire that his soul should never return to his body. Unable to conceive of life abstractly as a “permanent possibility of sensation” or a “continuous adjustment of internal arrangements to external relations,” the savage thinks of it as a concrete material thing of a definite bulk, capable of being seen and handled, kept in a box or jar, and liable to be bruised, fractured, or smashed in pieces. It is not needful that the life, so conceived, should be in the man; it

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<sup>320</sup> *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 26 sqq.

may be absent from his body and still continue to animate him by virtue of a sort of sympathy or action at a distance. So long as this object which he calls his life or soul remains unharmed, the man is well; if it is injured, he suffers; if it is destroyed, he dies. Or, to put it otherwise, when a man is ill or dies, the fact is explained by saying that the material object called his life or soul, whether it be in his body or out of it, has either sustained injury or been destroyed. But there may be circumstances in which, if the life or soul remains in the man, it stands a greater chance of sustaining injury than if it were stowed away in some safe and secret place. Accordingly, in such circumstances, primitive man takes his soul out of his body and deposits it for security in some snug spot, intending to replace it in his body when the danger is past. Or if he should discover some place of absolute security, he may be content to leave his soul there permanently. The advantage of this is that, so long as the soul remains unharmed in the place where he has deposited it, the man himself is immortal; nothing can kill his body, since his life is not in it.

This belief is illustrated by folk-tales told by many peoples.

Evidence of this primitive belief is furnished by a class of folk-tales of which the Norse story of "The giant who had no heart in his body" is perhaps the best-known example. Stories of this kind are widely diffused over the world, and from their number and the variety of incident and of details in which the leading idea is embodied, we may infer that the conception of an external soul is one which has had a powerful hold on the

minds of men at an early stage of history. For folk-tales are a faithful reflection of the world as it appeared to the primitive mind; and we may be sure that any idea which commonly occurs in them, however absurd it may seem to us, must once have been an ordinary article of belief. This assurance, so far as it concerns the supposed power of disengaging the soul from the body for a longer or shorter time, is amply corroborated by a comparison of the folk-tales in question with the actual beliefs and practices of savages. To this we shall return after some specimens of the tales have been given. The specimens will be selected with a view of illustrating both the characteristic features and the wide diffusion of this class of tales.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> A number of the following examples were collected by Mr. E. Clodd in his paper, "The Philosophy of Punchkin," *Folk-lore Journal*, ii. (1884) pp. 288-303; and again in his *Myths and Dreams* (London, 1885), pp. 188-198. The subject of the external soul, both in folk-tales and in custom, has been well handled by G. A. Wilken in his two papers, "De betrekking tusschen menschen- dieren- en plantenleven naar het volksgeloof," *De Indische Gids*, November 1884, pp. 595-612, and "De Simsonsage," *De Gids*, 1888, No. 5. In "De Simsonsage" Wilken has reproduced, to a great extent in the same words, most of the evidence cited by him in "De betrekking," yet without referring to that paper. When I wrote this book in 1889-1890 I was unacquainted with "De betrekking," but used with advantage "De Simsonsage," a copy of it having been kindly sent me by the author. I am the more anxious to express my obligations to "De Simsonsage," because I have had little occasion to refer to it, most of the original authorities cited by the author being either in my own library or easily accessible to me in Cambridge. It would be a convenience to anthropologists if Wilken's valuable papers, dispersed as they are in various Dutch periodicals which are seldom to be met with in England, were collected and published together. After the appearance of my first anthropological essay in 1885, Professor Wilken entered into correspondence with me, and thenceforward sent me copies of his papers as they appeared; but of

Stories of an external soul common among Aryan peoples. The external soul in Hindoo stories. Punchkin and the parrot. The ogre whose soul was in a bird.

In the first place, the story of the external soul is told, in various forms, by all Aryan peoples from Hindoostan to the Hebrides. A very common form of it is this: A warlock, giant, or other fairyland being is invulnerable and immortal because he keeps his soul hidden far away in some secret place; but a fair princess, whom he holds enthralled in his enchanted castle, wiles his secret from him and reveals it to the hero, who seeks out the warlock's soul, heart, life, or death (as it is variously called), and, by destroying it, simultaneously kills the warlock. Thus a Hindoo story tells how a magician called Punchkin held a queen captive for twelve years, and would fain marry her, but she would not have him. At last the queen's son came to rescue her, and the

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his papers published before that date I have not a complete set. (Note to the Second Edition.) The wish expressed in the foregoing note has now been happily fulfilled. Wilken's many scattered papers have been collected and published in a form which leaves nothing to be desired (*De verspreide Geschriften van Prof. Dr. G. A. Wilken*, verzameld door Mr. F. D. E. van Ossenbruggen, in four volumes, The Hague, 1912). The two papers "De betrekking" and "De Simsonsage" are reprinted in the third volume, pp. 289-309 and pp. 551-579. The subject of the external soul in relation to Balder has been fully illustrated and discussed by Professor F. Kauffmann in his *Balder, Mythus und Sage* (Strasburg, 1902), pp. 136 *sqq.* Amongst the first to collect examples of the external soul in folk-tales was the learned Dr. Reinhold Köhler (in *Orient und Occident*, ii., Göttingen, 1864, pp. 100-103; reprinted with additional references in the writer's *Kleinere Schriften*, i., Weimar, 1898, pp. 158-161). Many versions of the tale were also cited by W. R. S. Ralston (*Russian Folk-tales*, London, 1873, pp. 109 *sqq.*). (Note to the Third Edition.)

two plotted together to kill Punchkin. So the queen spoke the magician fair, and pretended that she had at last made up her mind to marry him. "And do tell me," she said, "are you quite immortal? Can death never touch you? And are you too great an enchanter ever to feel human suffering?" "It is true," he said, "that I am not as others. Far, far away, hundreds of thousands of miles from this, there lies a desolate country covered with thick jungle. In the midst of the jungle grows a circle of palm trees, and in the centre of the circle stand six chattees full of water, piled one above another: below the sixth chattee is a small cage, which contains a little green parrot; – on the life of the parrot depends my life; – and if the parrot is killed I must die. It is, however," he added, "impossible that the parrot should sustain any injury, both on account of the inaccessibility of the country, and because, by my appointment, many thousand genii surround the palm trees, and kill all who approach the place." But the queen's young son overcame all difficulties, and got possession of the parrot. He brought it to the door of the magician's palace, and began playing with it. Punchkin, the magician, saw him, and, coming out, tried to persuade the boy to give him the parrot. "Give me my parrot!" cried Punchkin. Then the boy took hold of the parrot and tore off one of his wings; and as he did so the magician's right arm fell off. Punchkin then stretched out his left arm, crying, "Give me my parrot!" The prince pulled off the parrot's second wing, and the magician's left arm tumbled off. "Give me my parrot!" cried he, and fell on his knees. The prince pulled off the parrot's

right leg, the magician's right leg fell off; the prince pulled off the parrot's left leg, down fell the magician's left. Nothing remained of him except the trunk and the head; but still he rolled his eyes, and cried, "Give me my parrot!" "Take your parrot, then," cried the boy; and with that he wrung the bird's neck, and threw it at the magician; and, as he did so, Punchkin's head twisted round, and, with a fearful groan, he died!<sup>322</sup> In another Hindoo tale an ogre is asked by his daughter, "Papa, where do you keep your soul?" "Sixteen miles away from this place," he said, "is a tree. Round the tree are tigers, and bears, and scorpions, and snakes; on the top of the tree is a very great fat snake; on his head is a little cage; in the cage is a bird; and my soul is in that bird." The end of the ogre is like that of the magician in the previous tale. As the bird's wings and legs are torn off, the ogre's arms and legs drop off; and when its neck is wrung he falls down dead.<sup>323</sup>

The princess whose soul was in a golden necklace. The prince whose soul was in a fish.

In another Hindoo story a princess called Sodewa Bai was born with a golden necklace about her neck, and the astrologer told her parents, "This is no common child; the necklace of gold about her neck contains your daughter's soul; let it therefore be guarded with the utmost care; for if it were taken off, and worn

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<sup>322</sup> Mary Frere, *Old Deccan Days*, Third Edition (London, 1881), pp. 12-16.

<sup>323</sup> Maive Stokes, *Indian Fairy Tales* (London, 1880), pp. 58-60. For similar Hindoo stories, see *id.*, pp. 187 *sq.*; Lai Behari Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal* (London, 1883), pp. 121 *sq.*; F. A. Steel and R. C. Temple, *Wide-awake Stories* (Bombay and London, 1884), pp. 58-60.



by another person, she would die.” So her mother caused it to be firmly fastened round the child's neck, and, as soon as the child was old enough to understand, she told her its value, and warned her never to let it be taken off. In course of time Sodewa Bai was married to a prince who had another wife living. The first wife, jealous of her young rival, persuaded a negress to steal from Sodewa Bai the golden necklace which contained her soul. The negress did so, and, as soon as she put the necklace round her own neck, Sodewa Bai died. All day long the negress used to wear the necklace; but late at night, on going to bed, she would take it off and put it by till morning; and whenever she took it off, Sodewa Bai's soul returned to her and she lived. But when morning came, and the negress put on the necklace, Sodewa Bai died again. At last the prince discovered the treachery of his elder wife and restored the golden necklace to Sodewa Bai.<sup>324</sup> In another Hindoo story a holy mendicant tells a queen that she will bear a son, adding, “As enemies will try to take away the life of your son, I may as well tell you that the life of the boy will be bound up in the life of a big *boal* fish which is in your tank, in front of the palace. In the heart of the fish is a small box of wood, in the box is a necklace of gold, that necklace is the life of your son.” The boy was born and received the name of Dalim. His mother was the Suo or younger queen. But the Duo or elder queen hated the child, and learning the secret of his life, she caused the *boal* fish, with which his life was bound up, to

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<sup>324</sup> Mary Frere, *Old Deccan Days*, pp. 239 *sqq.*

be caught. Dalim was playing near the tank at the time, but “the moment the *boal* fish was caught in the net, that moment Dalim felt unwell; and when the fish was brought up to land, Dalim fell down on the ground, and made as if he was about to breathe his last. He was immediately taken into his mother's room, and the king was astonished on hearing of the sudden illness of his son and heir. The fish was by the order of the physician taken into the room of the Duo queen, and as it lay on the floor striking its fins on the ground, Dalim in his mother's room was given up for lost. When the fish was cut open, a casket was found in it; and in the casket lay a necklace of gold. The moment the necklace was worn by the queen, that very moment Dalim died in his mother's room.” The queen used to put off the necklace every night, and whenever she did so, the boy came to life again. But every morning when the queen put on the necklace, he died again.<sup>325</sup>

Cashmeer stories of ogres whose lives were in cocks, a pigeon, a starling, a spinning-wheel, and a pillar. Cashmeer and Bengalee stories of ogres whose lives were in bees.

In a Cashmeer story a lad visits an old ogress, pretending to be her grandson, the son of her daughter who had married a king. So the old ogress took him into her confidence and shewed him seven cocks, a spinning wheel, a pigeon, and a starling. “These

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<sup>325</sup> Lal Behari Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, pp. 1 *sqq.* For similar stories of necklaces, see Mary Frere, *Old Deccan Days*, pp. 233 *sq.*; F. A. Steel and R. C. Temple, *Wide-awake Stories*, pp. 83 *sqq.*

seven cocks,” said she, “contain the lives of your seven uncles, who are away for a few days. Only as long as the cocks live can your uncles hope to live; no power can hurt them as long as the seven cocks are safe and sound. The spinning-wheel contains my life; if it is broken, I too shall be broken, and must die, but otherwise I shall live on for ever. The pigeon contains your grandfather's life, and the starling your mother's; as long as these live, nothing can harm your grandfather or your mother.” So the lad killed the seven cocks and the pigeon and the starling, and smashed the spinning-wheel; and at the moment he did so the ogres and ogresses perished.<sup>326</sup> In another story from Cashmeer an ogre cannot die unless a particular pillar in the verandah of his palace be broken. Learning the secret, a prince struck the pillar again and again till it was broken in pieces. And it was as if each stroke had fallen on the ogre, for he howled lamentably and shook like an aspen every time the prince hit the pillar, until at last, when the pillar fell down, the ogre also fell down and gave up the ghost.<sup>327</sup> In another Cashmeer tale an ogre is represented as laughing very heartily at the idea that he might possibly die. He said that “he should never die. No power could oppose him; no years could age him; he should remain ever strong and ever young, for the thing wherein his life dwelt was most difficult to obtain.” It was in a queen bee, which was in a honeycomb on a tree. But the bees in the honeycomb were many and fierce, and it

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<sup>326</sup> J. H. Knowles, *Folk-tales of Kashmir*, Second Edition (London, 1893), pp. 49 *sq.*

<sup>327</sup> J. H. Knowles, *op. cit.* p. 134.

was only at the greatest risk that any one could catch the queen. However, the hero achieved the enterprise and crushed the queen bee; and immediately the ogre fell stone dead to the ground, so that the whole land trembled with the shock.<sup>328</sup> In some Bengalee tales the life of a whole tribe of ogres is described as concentrated in two bees. The secret was thus revealed by an old ogress to a captive princess who pretended to fear lest the ogress should die. "Know, foolish girl," said the ogress, "that we ogres never die. We are not naturally immortal, but our life depends on a secret which no human being can unravel. Let me tell you what it is, that you may be comforted. You know yonder tank; there is in the middle of it a crystal pillar, on the top of which in deep waters are two bees. If any human being can dive into the waters, and bring up to land the two bees from the pillar in one breath, and destroy them so that not a drop of their blood falls to the ground, then we ogres shall certainly die; but if a single drop of blood falls to the ground, then from it will start up a thousand ogres. But what human being will find out this secret, or, finding it, will be able to achieve the feat? You need not, therefore, darling, be sad; I am practically immortal." As usual, the princess reveals the secret to the hero, who kills the bees, and that same moment all the ogres drop down dead, each on the spot where he happened to be standing.<sup>329</sup> In another Bengalee story it is said that all the ogres

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<sup>328</sup> J. H. Knowles, *op. cit.* pp. 382 *sqq.*

<sup>329</sup> Lal Behari Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, pp. 85 *sq.*; compare *id.*, pp. 253 *sqq.*; *Indian Antiquary*, i. (1872) p. 117. For an Indian story in which a giant's life is in five black

dwell in Ceylon, and that all their lives are in a single lemon. A boy cuts the lemon in pieces, and all the ogres die.<sup>330</sup>

The external soul in a Siamese or Cambodian story. Indian stories of a tree and a barley plant that were life-tokens.

In a Siamese or Cambodian story, probably derived from India, we are told that Thossakan or Ravana, the King of Ceylon, was able by magic art to take his soul out of his body and leave it in a box at home, while he went to the wars. Thus he was invulnerable in battle. When he was about to give battle to Rama, he deposited his soul with a hermit called Fire-eye, who was to keep it safe for him. So in the fight Rama was astounded to see that his arrows struck the king without wounding him. But one of Rama's allies, knowing the secret of the king's invulnerability, transformed himself by magic into the likeness of the king, and going to the hermit asked back his soul. On receiving it he soared up into the air and flew to Rama, brandishing the box and squeezing it so hard that all the breath left the King of Ceylon's body, and he died.<sup>331</sup> In a Bengalee story a prince going into a far country planted with his own hands a tree in the courtyard of his father's palace, and said to his parents, "This tree is my life. When you see the tree green and fresh, then know that it is well with me; when you see the tree fade in some parts, then know

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bees, see W. A. Clouston, *Popular Tales and Fictions* (Edinburgh and London, 1887), i. 350.

<sup>330</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, i. (1872), p. 171.

<sup>331</sup> A. Bastian, *Die Voelker des oestlichen Asien*, iv. (Jena, 1868) pp. 304 *sq.*

that I am in an ill case; and when you see the whole tree fade, then know that I am dead and gone.”<sup>332</sup> In another Indian tale a prince, setting forth on his travels, left behind him a barley plant, with instructions that it should be carefully tended and watched; for if it flourished, he would be alive and well, but if it drooped, then some mischance was about to happen to him. And so it fell out. For the prince was beheaded, and as his head rolled off, the barley plant snapped in two and the ear of barley fell to the ground.<sup>333</sup> In the legend of the origin of Gilgit there figures a fairy king whose soul is in the snows and who can only perish by fire.<sup>334</sup>

The external soul in Greek stories. Meleager and the firebrand. Nisus and his purple or golden hair. Pterelaus and his golden hair. Modern Greek parallels. The external soul in doves.

In Greek tales, ancient and modern, the idea of an external soul is not uncommon. When Meleager was seven days old, the Fates appeared to his mother and told her that Meleager would die when the brand which was blazing on the hearth had burnt

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<sup>332</sup> Lal Behari Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, p. 189.

<sup>333</sup> F. A. Steel and R. C. Temple, *Wide-awake Stories* (Bombay and London, 1884), pp. 52, 64. In the Indian *Jataka* there is a tale (book ii. No. 208) which relates how Buddha in the form of a monkey deceived a crocodile by pretending that monkeys kept their hearts in figs growing on a tree. See *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's former Births* translated from the Pali by various hands, vol. ii. translated by W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge, 1895), pp. 111 *sq.*

<sup>334</sup> G. W. Leitner, *The Languages and Races of Dardistan*, Third Edition (Lahore, 1878), p. 9.

down. So his mother snatched the brand from the fire and kept it in a box. But in after-years, being enraged at her son for slaying her brothers, she burnt the brand in the fire and Meleager expired in agonies, as if flames were preying on his vitals.<sup>335</sup> Again, Nisus King of Megara had a purple or golden hair on the middle of his head, and it was fated that whenever the hair was pulled out the king should die. When Megara was besieged by the Cretans, the king's daughter Scylla fell in love with Minos, their king, and pulled out the fatal hair from her father's head. So he died.<sup>336</sup> Similarly Poseidon made Pterelaus immortal by giving him a golden hair on his head. But when Taphos, the home of Pterelaus, was besieged by Amphitryo, the daughter of Pterelaus fell in love with Amphitryo and killed her father by plucking out the golden hair with which his life was bound up.<sup>337</sup> In a modern Greek folk-tale a man's strength lies in three golden hairs on his head.

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<sup>335</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, i. 8; Diodorus Siculus, iv. 34; Pausanias, x. 31. 4; Aeschylus, *Choeph.* 604 *sqq.*; Antoninus Liberalis, *Transform.* ii.; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* lxvii. vol. ii. p. 231, ed. L. Dindorf (Leipsic, 1857); Hyginus, *Fab.* 171, 174; Ovid, *Metam.* viii. 445 *sqq.* In his play on this theme Euripides made the life of Meleager to depend on an olive-leaf which his mother had given birth to along with the babe. See J. Malalas, *Chronographia*, vi. pp. 165 *sq.* ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1831); J. Tzetzes, *Scholia on Lycophron*, 492 *sq.* (vol. ii. pp. 646 *sq.*, ed. Chr. G. Müller, Leipsic, 1811); G. Knaack, "Zur Meleagersage," *Rheinisches Museum*, N. F. xlix. (1894) pp. 310-313.

<sup>336</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, iii. 15. 8; Aeschylus, *Choeph.* 612 *sqq.*; Pausanias, i. 19. 4; *Ciris*, 116 *sqq.*; Ovid, *Metam.* viii. 8 *sqq.* According to J. Tzetzes (*Schol. on Lycophron*, 650) not the life but the strength of Nisus was in his golden hair; when it was pulled out, he became weak and was slain by Minos. According to Hyginus (*Fab.* 198) Nisus was destined to reign only so long as he kept the purple lock on his head.

<sup>337</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, ii. 4. 5 and 7.

When his mother pulls them out, he grows weak and timid and is slain by his enemies.<sup>338</sup> Another Greek story, in which we may perhaps detect a reminiscence of Nisus and Scylla, relates how a certain king, who was the strongest man of his time, had three long hairs on his breast. But when he went to war with another king, and his own treacherous wife had cut off the three hairs, he became the weakest of men.<sup>339</sup> In another modern Greek story the life of an enchanter is bound up with three doves which are in the belly of a wild boar. When the first dove is killed, the magician grows sick; when the second is killed, he grows very sick; and when the third is killed, he dies.<sup>340</sup> In another Greek story of the same sort an ogre's strength is in three singing birds which are in a wild boar. The hero kills two of the birds, and then coming to the ogre's house finds him lying on the ground in great pain. He shews the third bird to the ogre, who begs that the hero will either let it fly away or give it to him to eat. But the

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<sup>338</sup> J. G. von Hahn, *Griechische und albanesische Märchen* (Leipsic, 1864), i. 217; a similar story, *ibid.* ii. 282.

<sup>339</sup> B. Schmidt, *Griechische Märchen, Sagen und Volkslieder* (Leipsic, 1877), pp. 91 sq. The same writer found in the island of Zacynthus a belief that the whole strength of the ancient Greeks resided in three hairs on their breasts, and that it vanished whenever these hairs were cut; but if the hairs were allowed to grow again, their strength returned (B. Schmidt, *Das Volksleben der Neugriechen*, Leipsic, 1871, p. 206). The Biblical story of Samson and Delilah (Judges xvi.) implies a belief of the same sort, as G. A. Wilken abundantly shewed in his paper, "De Simsonsage," *De Gids*, 1888, No. 5 (reprinted in his *Verspreide Geschriften*, The Hague, 1912, vol. iii. pp. 551-579).

<sup>340</sup> J. G. von Hahn, *op. cit.* ii. 215 sq.



hero wrings the bird's neck, and the ogre dies on the spot.<sup>341</sup> In a variant of the latter story the monster's strength is in two doves, and when the hero kills one of them, the monster cries out, "Ah, woe is me! Half my life is gone. Something must have happened to one of the doves." When the second dove is killed, he dies.<sup>342</sup> In another Greek story the incidents of the three golden hairs and three doves are artificially combined. A monster has on his head three golden hairs which open the door of a chamber in which are three doves: when the first dove is killed, the monster grows sick; when the second is killed, he grows worse; and when the third is killed, he dies.<sup>343</sup> In another Greek tale an old man's strength is in a ten-headed serpent. When the serpent's heads are being cut off, he feels unwell; and when the last head is struck off, he expires.<sup>344</sup> In another Greek story a dervish tells a queen that she will have three sons, that at the birth of each she must plant a pumpkin in the garden, and that in the fruit borne by the pumpkins will reside the strength of the children. In due time the infants are born and the pumpkins planted. As the children grow up, the pumpkins grow with them. One morning the eldest

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 275 *sq.* Similar stories, *ibid.* ii. 204, 294 *sq.* In an Albanian story a monster's strength is in three pigeons, which are in a hare, which is in the silver tusk of a wild boar. When the boar is killed, the monster feels ill; when the hare is cut open, he can hardly stand on his feet; when the three pigeons are killed, he expires. See Aug. Dozon, *Contes albanais* (Paris, 1881), pp. 132 *sq.*

<sup>342</sup> J. G. von Hahn, *op. cit.* ii. 260 *sqq.*

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* i. 187.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 23 *sq.*

son feels sick, and on going into the garden they find that the largest pumpkin is gone. Next night the second son keeps watch in a summer-house in the garden. At midnight a negro appears and cuts the second pumpkin. At once the boy's strength goes out of him, and he is unable to pursue the negro. The youngest son, however, succeeds in slaying the negro and recovering the lost pumpkins.<sup>345</sup>

The external soul in Italian stories. Silvia's son. The dragon twin. The soul in a gem.

Ancient Italian legend furnishes a close parallel to the Greek story of Meleager. Silvia, the young wife of Septimius Marcellus, had a child by the god Mars. The god gave her a spear, with which he said that the fate of the child would be bound up. When the boy grew up he quarrelled with his maternal uncles and slew them. So in revenge his mother burned the spear on which his life depended.<sup>346</sup> In one of the stories of the *Pentamerone* a certain queen has a twin brother, a dragon. The astrologers declared at her birth that she would live just as long as the dragon and no longer, the death of the one involving the death of the other. If the dragon were killed, the only way to restore the queen to life would be to smear her temples, breast, pulses, and nostrils

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<sup>345</sup> Émile Legrand, *Contes populaires grecs* (Paris, 1881), pp. 191 *sqq.*

<sup>346</sup> Plutarch, *Parallela*, 26. In both the Greek and Italian stories the subject of quarrel between nephew and uncles is the skin of a boar, which the nephew presented to his lady-love and which his uncles took from her.

with the blood of the dragon.<sup>347</sup> In a modern Roman version of "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp," the magician tells the princess, whom he holds captive in a floating rock in mid-ocean, that he will never die. The princess reports this to the prince her husband, who has come to rescue her. The prince replies, "It is impossible but that there should be some one thing or other that is fatal to him; ask him what that one fatal thing is." So the princess asked the magician, and he told her that in the wood was a hydra with seven heads; in the middle head of the hydra was a leveret, in the head of the leveret was a bird, in the bird's head was a precious stone, and if this stone were put under his pillow he would die. The prince procured the stone, and the princess laid it under the magician's pillow. No sooner did the enchanter lay his head on the pillow than he gave three terrible yells, turned himself round and round three times, and died.<sup>348</sup>

Italian story of a wicked fairy whose death was in an egg. A sorcerer Body-without-Soul whose death was in an egg.

Another Italian tale sets forth how a great cloud, which was really a fairy, used to receive a young girl as tribute every year from a certain city; and the inhabitants had to give the girls up, for if they did not, the cloud would throw things at them and kill them all. One year it fell to the lot of the king's daughter to be handed over to the cloud, and they took her in procession, to the roll of muffled drums, and attended by her weeping father and

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<sup>347</sup> G. Basile, *Pentamerone*, übertragen von Felix Liebrecht (Breslau, 1846), ii. 60 sq.

<sup>348</sup> R. H. Busk, *Folk-lore of Rome* (London, 1874), pp. 164 sqq.

mother, to the top of a mountain, and left her sitting in a chair there all alone. Then the fairy cloud came down on the top of the mountain, set the princess in her lap, and began to suck her blood out of her little finger; for it was on the blood of girls that this wicked fairy lived. When the poor princess was faint with the loss of blood and lay like a log, the cloud carried her away up to her fairy palace in the sky. But a brave youth had seen all that happened from behind a bush, and no sooner did the fairy spirit away the princess to her palace than he turned himself into an eagle and flew after them. He lighted on a tree just outside the palace, and looking in at the window he beheld a room full of young girls all in bed; for these were the victims of former years whom the fairy cloud had half killed by sucking their blood; yet they called her mamma. When the fairy went away and left the girls, the brave young man had food drawn up for them by ropes, and he told them to ask the fairy how she might be killed and what was to become of them when she died. It was a delicate question, but the fairy answered it, saying, "I shall never die." However, when the girls pressed her, she took them out on a terrace and said, "Do you see that mountain far off there? On that mountain is a tigress with seven heads. If you wish me to die, a lion must fight that tigress and tear off all seven of her heads. In her body is an egg, and if any one hits me with it in the middle of my forehead, I shall die; but if that egg falls into my hands, the tigress will come to life again, resume her seven heads, and I shall live." When the young girls heard this they pretended to be glad and

said, "Good! certainly our mamma can never die," but naturally they were discouraged. However, when she went away again, they told it all to the young man, and he bade them have no fear. Away he went to the mountain, turned himself into a lion, and fought the tigress. Meantime the fairy came home, saying, "Alas! I feel ill!" For six days the fight went on, the young man tearing off one of the tigress's heads each day, and each day the strength of the fairy kept ebbing away. Then after allowing himself two days' rest the hero tore off the seventh head and secured the egg, but not till it had rolled into the sea and been brought back to him by a friendly dog-fish. When he returned to the fairy with the egg in his hand, she begged and prayed him to give it her, but he made her first restore the young girls to health and send them away in handsome carriages. When she had done so, he struck her on the forehead with the egg, and she fell down dead.<sup>349</sup> Similarly in a story from the western Riviera a sorcerer called Body-without-Soul can only be killed by means of an egg which is in an eagle, which is in a dog, which is in a lion; and the egg must be broken on the sorcerer's forehead. The hero, who achieves the adventure, has received the power of changing himself into a lion, a dog, an eagle, and an ant from four creatures of these sorts among whom

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<sup>349</sup> T. F. Crane, *Italian Popular Tales* (London, 1885), pp. 31-34. The hero had acquired the power of turning himself into an eagle, a lion, and an ant from three creatures of these sorts whose quarrel about their shares in a dead ass he had composed. This incident occurs in other tales of the same type. See below, note 2 and pp. [120](#) with note 2, [132](#), [133](#) with note 1.

he had fairly divided the carcase of a dead ass.<sup>350</sup>

The external soul in Slavonic stories. Russian story of Koshchei the Deathless, whose death was in an egg.

Stories of the same sort are current among Slavonic peoples. In some of them, as in the biblical story of Samson and Delilah, the warlock is questioned by a treacherous woman as to the place where his strength resides or his life or death is stowed away; and his suspicions being roused by her curiosity, he at first puts her off with false answers, but is at last beguiled into telling her the truth, thereby incurring his doom through her treachery. Thus a Russian story tells how a certain warlock called Kashtshei or Koshchei the Deathless carried off a princess and kept her prisoner in his golden castle. However, a prince made up to her one day as she was walking alone and disconsolate in the castle garden, and cheered by the prospect of escaping with him she went to the warlock and coaxed him with false and flattering words, saying, "My dearest friend, tell me, I pray you, will you never die?" "Certainly not," says he. "Well," says she, "and where is your death? is it in your dwelling?" "To be sure it is," says he, "it is in the broom under the threshold." Thereupon the princess seized the broom and threw it on the fire, but although the broom

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<sup>350</sup> J. B. Andrews, *Contes Ligures* (Paris, 1892), No. 46, pp. 213 *sqq.* In a parallel Sicilian story the hero Beppino slays a sorcerer in the same manner after he had received from an eagle, a lion, and an ant the same gift of transformation in return for the same service. See G. Pitri, *Fiabe, Novelle e Racconti popolari Siciliani*, ii. (Palermo, 1875) p. 215; and for another Sicilian parallel, Laura Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen* (Leipsic, 1870), No. 6, pp. 34-38.

burned, the deathless Koshchei remained alive; indeed not so much as a hair of him was singed. Balked in her first attempt, the artful hussy pouted and said, "You do not love me true, for you have not told me where your death is; yet I am not angry, but love you with all my heart." With these fawning words she besought the warlock to tell her truly where his death was. So he laughed and said, "Why do you wish to know? Well then, out of love I will tell you where it lies. In a certain field there stand three green oaks, and under the roots of the largest oak is a worm, and if ever this worm is found and crushed, that instant I shall die." When the princess heard these words, she went straight to her lover and told him all; and he searched till he found the oaks and dug up the worm and crushed it. Then he hurried to the warlock's castle, but only to learn from the princess that the warlock was still alive. Then she fell to wheedling and coaxing Koshchei once more, and this time, overcome by her wiles, he opened his heart to her and told her the truth. "My death," said he, "is far from here and hard to find, on the wide ocean. In that sea is an island, and on the island there grows a green oak, and beneath the oak is an iron chest, and in the chest is a small basket, and in the basket is a hare, and in the hare is a duck, and in the duck is an egg; and he who finds the egg and breaks it, kills me at the same time." The prince naturally procured the fateful egg and with it in his hands he confronted the deathless warlock. The monster would have killed him, but the prince began to squeeze the egg. At that the warlock shrieked with pain, and turning to the false princess,

who stood by smirking and smiling, “Was it not out of love for you,” said he, “that I told you where my death was? And is this the return you make to me?” With that he grabbed at his sword, which hung from a peg on the wall; but before he could reach it, the prince had crushed the egg, and sure enough the deathless warlock found his death at the same moment.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Anton Dietrich, *Russian Popular Tales* (London, 1857), pp. 21-24.



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