The Pardon Festivals of Brittany
- Fires of the Pardon and Fires of the Summer Solstice -

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This paper is a trial of the relation between the folk belief and the Christian religion. In Brittany, France, there is a tradition with a strong Christian element that has been passed down called the Pardon Festivals. There are a number of different types of these festivals, some notable for their links to diverse popular beliefs such as a belief in sacred springs and a belief in sacred rocks. One interesting variation is called the tontad, which involves the building of fires. A typical example of this type is the Saint-Jean-du-Doigt Pardon Festival that takes place in the northern part of Finistere, in which there is the shocking sight of a sacred cross burning in the red flames of the tontad. A custom that is instructive when considering the origins of the tontad fires of the Pardon festivals in various parts of Brittany is the Feu de la Saint Jean (the fire of St Jean) held on the night of the summer solstice. A comparison of these two festivals reveals the following. In terms of traditional customs, the tradition of fires on the night of the summer solstice provided a foundation on which religious rituals such as the Pardon festivals came to be added, so that the fires of tontad came to be located within the Pardon festivals. It has been recognized that the traditional "fires of the summer solstice" contain an element of popular belief in that ancestral spirits are warmed, ailments of the eye are cured, and illnesses and bad things are burnt, corresponding to the three basic attributes of fire: heat, light, and burning.

The following features have come to light from the results of an analysis of a survey of the Pardon festivals held in various areas, some of which do not include the practice of the tontad fire. Elements that are indispensable to a Pardon festival are the existence of a chapel, a belief in saints and their relics, and a procession. A Pardon festival is not a religious event based solely on Catholic doctrine, but while it is predicated on the existence of traditional popular beliefs from Brittany, these elements have become interwoven so that it has been passed down as a religious event centering on the Catholic Church. Accordingly, it is possible to extract important elements of traditional popular beliefs from the diversity of traditions in the Pardon festivals. Beliefs surrounding fire is one such element, and it may be said that religious practices of the Catholic church have, conversely, served the function of preserving and passing down traditional folk beliefs.