

The Midsummer “Tantad” or Bonfire

By A. Le Braz

On St John’s night (June 24th), in all the villages and hamlets of Lower Brittany, the “*Tantad*” or Bonfire is lighted. When the flames have abated, all the people meet round the pile of ashes, and begin to recite the Litany for the Dead. It is always an old man who says it, the people answering. When the prayers are over, the old man rises, and every one present rises also, and all in a ring go round the “*Tantad*” in silence. At the third turn they stop, and each person picks up a flint and throws it upon the fire. This flint is called by the name given to the Dead, “Anaon.”

This rite over, the crowd disperses.

As soon as the living have departed, the dead come forward, for fire attracts the dead (it is said), the dead being always cold, even in the hot nights of June. They are glad to be able to warm themselves amongst the remains of the “Tantad.” They sit upon the stones on which it was built, on the “Anaon” placed there expressly for them. And there they warm themselves till morning.

The next day the living come and visit the place.

Whoever finds his flint (Anaon) turned over, may expect to die during the year.