

In a Valley in Vorarlberg: From the Day before Yesterday to Today*

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We ask history a lot of questions. It cannot always answer them. We would like to ask it to give us an account of the relationship between the economy, social life and ideas. We would like it to tell us how the contact between lower cultures and more developed cultures takes place. These are big questions, among a myriad of others. The history of the past generally does not provide us with the means to answer them. Why not use the history of the present? Observing for some time, with methods familiar to the ethnologist, the life of a restricted and relatively simple group of people in contemporary society, may provide us with useful material for the type of in-depth investigations that are needed.¹

The historian would benefit from using two principles of the method used by ethnologists. The first is the conviction that nothing is natural and obvious, that nothing is “self-evident”. Everything is to be noted and recorded: the structure of the family as well as the way children are brought up; categories of thought as well as modes of faith; ideas about luxury and misery; as well as the rhythm of work and leisure....

The second principle is the scrupulousness and reserve with which the ethnologist, while recording what they can learn, avoids simply substituting

1 I would like to offer my thanks to Professor B. Malinowski (School of Economics, London) for the helpful suggestions he has made during the planning of this research.

their notions for those of the “subjects” they are studying, even if they find expressions in their language which seem to correspond to their ideas. They do not translate, they describe. This is a salutary precaution which would help the historian avoid anachronisms.²

We want to attempt a description of a group of Austrian – alpine – villages in this way. The Austrian village, over the course of the last few years, has been undergoing an economic crisis. It has undergone a profound transformation in its mentality and social structure. New elites have emerged. Previous authorities have been supplanted by others. Certain elements of urban provenance have been integrated into the previously exclusively rural environment. These are the subject matter of this piece of research. Let us try.

I

The valley in question is located in Vorarlberg, the small Austrian region bordering Switzerland, Germany and Tyrol. It rises from 750 to 1,600 m and is 10 km long. It has several villages, one of 1,200, one of 300 and one of 190 inhabitants. In summer and at Christmas, a bus now connects the valley to a small railway line that dates back to the end of the 19th century. This “rattlettrap” leads in half an hour to the main line: Innsbruck–Bludenz–Zurich. The villages are 200 km from Innsbruck, 22 km from Bludenz (seat of the “Bezirkhauptmannschaft”), 70 km from Bregenz (where the “Landeshauptmannschaft” and the barracks are located), and 50 km from Feldkirch (where the hospital is located). In Innsbruck there are tertiary-level educational institutions for those who want to study, to follow courses at the polytechnic or to become artists. Goods are brought from the industrial region between Bludenz, Dornbirn and Bregenz: There are breweries, cheese factories, canning factories, chocolate factories, weaving and spinning mills, earthenware and porcelain factories, watch and furniture factories, and so on. There are people

2 For the past, we can only interrogate documents and interpret texts, whereas the good ethnologist working in the field, gifted with psychological intuition, will never limit himself to the immediate findings and data provided by their objects of study. They will note the accent, the gesture that accompanies the word – and words will sometimes, of all the elements of knowledge, be the least important. Rather than questioning subjects directly, they will live with the “tribe” and penetrate its ways of being.

who settled in the valley between 1890 and 1905, the period of the founding of these businesses.

Everyone in the valley knows the small and medium-sized towns and cities mentioned above. Everyone has been to them at least once. As for capital cities, Vienna is no longer an attraction; the big city to visit is Zurich. It should be noted, by the way – and we will come back to this later – that, if the distance in kilometres from these centres to the valley does not change, their remoteness does not cease to vary; it is sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the economic and ideological changes that take place. One city comes closer, one city retreats, and it is not, in the final analysis, the means of transport that are responsible for such fluctuations.

Our valley is a mountain valley, which means there is no wheat. The properties are small with just enough to provide hay for the cattle owned by each one, usually 3 to 14 heads. In the lower part of the valley, apple trees still grow and produce bitter, green fruit. The peasants make sweet cider from them, or slice them and dry them; the latter are a great delicacy for children in winter. There are also small vegetable gardens with potatoes, some cabbages, lettuce, peas and beans. Wealthy families also have one or two pigs and a few chickens.

This distribution of land holdings has changed little or not at all in recent years. However, the village has been transformed from top to bottom. The peasants themselves have become acutely aware of this. No conversation takes place without them putting the past and the present into perspective, “das Früher und das Jetzt”, highlighting the revolutions that have taken place in their valley. This “historical sense”, or rather this sense of the times is striking: It is easy to believe that it is itself a consequence of the profound changes it records.

The time that farmers refer to as “before” covers three different periods, which they themselves distinguish between very clearly.

First, the “Früher” is the generation of the grandfathers – and of all the centuries that have passed since. This time mostly provides anecdotes. It is

the age of traditional dress, old customs and folklore. And, for the people of the valley, it looks like prehistory: It is the absolute past.³

Second, the "Früher" is the time before the war. A time which, at this moment, is a living past, one of history. It was the time of their parents; the "normal" time, if you like, that of well-being, based on two elements: on the one hand, possession of land and livestock, on the other, paid work. A peasant's income was made up primarily of income in kind: milk, cheese, butter, bacon, fat and meat from pigs fed at home; eggs, chickens; some potatoes and vegetables; and, lower down, cider. Then there was the income in cash, first of all from the sale of the cattle at the big market in September: The breed of the valley was renowned and sought-after. However, there were also the salaries that the men earned during the summer, that is to say from May to September, by going to France, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, etc., working as carpenters, stucco workers or "Krautschneider" (sauerkraut cutters). Austrian geography books used to lament the sad fate of these "absentees" who accepted hard work abroad for starvation wages. In reality, the valley was living through its heroic period. For the mountain dwellers, certain of returning to their homes in the autumn, it was an adventure and, at the same time, a guarantee of well-being for the family. It was contact with that which was foreign; it was a struggle – a privilege of men – and it was victory: The trophies are still there, in the form of postcards from Nyon, Tours, Marseille, Ulm, Budapest and Kecskemet, fixed to the corners of the walls in the old houses.

What had been seen abroad? Countries that had no mountains, a wonderful thing. Food that was completely different. Drinks unknown in the valley, types of wines of which they were ignorant: French wines, Hungarian wines. Different mores and temperaments of women and girls: If we look at the past through the eyes of men between 50 and 60 years old, they were valiant knights and troubadours.

What was brought back from abroad, aside from money? What had been "learned" abroad? Absolutely nothing. In the valley, the old traditions continued unchanged. Not one temporary emigrant ever brought a foreign girl to

3 The present government has been trying to revive old customs, but it is not succeeding; people are being evasive. At displays of traditional costumes it is as if they are visiting an exhibition of something foreign. I recently heard a fiancé being reproached for not having put on his costume for the ceremony; he replied: 'Hey, do you think I'm here to play the fool in front of you?' ('Glaubt ihr ich bin da euch den Narren abzugeben?').

his homeland. Only two of them married in France, and one, having left as a stucco worker, now owns a large construction company in Paris.⁴

They would return in autumn on the eve of the big market. They had half of the wages they earned in their pockets; the other half had been spent on clothes, on the return journey, on expenses for lodging and cabaret, on "amusements". The house, the animals, the meadows were, however, looked after by the women, or, under their direction, by the children who remained at home. This was a sort of summer matriarchy whose consequences can still be seen today. For example, it is especially the wife's parents who are invited by the family; they are the ones whom it is preferred to help in the case of misfortune.

They were the good times of economic stability. Good times when money was heavy in people's pockets, blessed times when God provided necessities – and luxury. What was this "luxury"? First of all, nice clothes. For the men, clothes made of strong, durable fabrics. For the women, clothing with rich embroidery and silk aprons; in addition, shoes as they were worn in the city, woollen jackets, blouses. Added to this were beautiful pots for cooking, buckets, and "Zuber" in which to make cheese.

In the majority of families, money was plentiful enough, not only for the enjoyment of all these luxury purchases, but also for establishing new families. In fact, on the death of the father the eldest son traditionally takes over the paternal home; out of the money he has earned over the last few years, or which he is certain of earning in those to come, he pays his brothers and sisters their share of the inheritance. The other sons, when they are thinking of getting married, buy a plot of land and build their house on it. For "getting married" means having your own house. To marry and live with parents or in-laws is inconceivable for the people of the valley, now as it was before the war. Intimate relationships outside of marriage – no matter what the parish priest says – were and are considered much less "immoral" than a marriage without "funds", a marriage of misery. The girls were chosen from the villages of the valley. What was considered above all when choosing a wife, at the

4 For a long time he only employed workers from his valley. The non-renewal of their work permits will force them to return to Vorarlberg one of these days. Naturally, he will be one of the great men of the valley, one of its most popular figures.

time we are talking about, was the quality of her work and the social position of her family.

Not only the valley, but the whole of Vorarlberg prospered then. It was the time of the founding of the factories. It was the heyday of the renowned Vorarlberg embroidery business ("Vorarlberger Stickerei Industrie"), with its centre in Lustenau near Bregenz. Embroidery was produced there which was sold as far away as America, China and Morocco, but also found markets in Austria and Germany. As the sayings went: "Proud as a young man from Lustenau", or, "She holds herself like a young girl from Lustenau".

The whole of Vorarlberg took part in the development of this industry; the whole of Vorarlberg envied its early successes. The farmers of Lustenau, Gotzis and Hohenems bought embroidery machines. They were entrusted to the daughters of the family; workers were only hired if that were not possible.

Embroidery had had its ups and downs even before the war; it was much worse afterwards, between 1920 and 1927. The whole province was shaken by this. For the past eight years, the industry has been in complete ruin. Ask the reason for this decline, and the answer will vary depending on the age of the respondent. Young people will tell you, "It's the crisis", a magic word that seems to explain everything. Older people have their own theory, a moral theory, where betrayal and greed play a big role. In the decline of their industry, they see a kind of punishment for the greed of men. A few Vorarlberg men, eager to earn even more, betrayed the secret of the embroidery machines and sold them, even in America. Needless to say, this myth does not refer to a real America, but to a symbolic America, the embodiment of "business", of great industry, of brutal and irresponsible capitalist forces. However, now being in possession of the Vorarlberg machines (simple machines – need it be said? – which betray their secrets in the blink of an eye), America produces Vorarlberg embroidery and makes double the profit.

Immoral and treacherous America; a myth of exactly the same order, and of the same lineage as other "anti-capitalist" myths or anti-Semitic theories.

Politically, the region (with the exception of Bludenz, a railway centre and, as such, Social-Democrat) was "christlich-social". The "Christlichsocialen" here were the party of the well-to-do, happy with economic progress, but otherwise traditionalist and with strong conservative convictions.

However, the village's ideas were not organized around theories or national parties. Rather, its centre was "the religion" – Catholicism in its peasant form – whose representative was the parish priest. The parsonage, the "Pfarrhof", was, next to the church, the most prominent building in the village. It also usually housed the school. The priest's cook looked for herbs with numerous virtues and the women of the village would turn to her in the case of fever, difficult childbirth or accidents, to obtain medicinal herbal teas or soothing dressings. The parish priest was generally a jovial and indulgent man with human weaknesses. He only asked for one thing, which was granted to him without discussion, recognition of the power, which was in some way magical, of the Church. This was power of which he was the sovereign holder.

He was called when the cows were sick. He invoked the patron saints of cattle: Saint Martin, Saint Guandelin (Hendelin) and Saint Fridolin. He blessed stables. He blessed the mountain pastures, when the cows and bulls were brought there in the spring. He blessed newly built houses, and his blessing protected them from disasters and avalanches. He blessed those who went out to do dangerous work, or those who went abroad: For his blessing ensured them work and good wages. They went to Mass at least every Sunday and they went to confession once a month, at least in winter. The women received communion every fortnight, but in the summer the men did not go to church.

The priest lived with the village. Usually there was no tension between him and his parishioners. He spoke their language. He was, more often than not, a peasant's son from one of the villages in the nearby valley. Materially speaking, he also had a close relationship with the village. He received his salary every month, but his table and cellar were supplied by the faithful: 800 eggs a year, 14 kg of butter, 700 litres of milk and 30 cheeses. This is what a village of 180 inhabitants was obliged to provide, and still provides today. In addition, the parish priest has the right to have repairs and work done to his house at the expense of the parish.

Next to the priest's house was the the inn, which was slowly gaining social importance. Before it was established, winter leisure time was spent at home or in a neighbour's house. Card games were played: "Jazzen" a clever and complicated game that required quick calculation of your options and a reliable estimate of your opponent's chances. The young girls of the village were courted, some people played guitar and accordion a little, and sometimes danced peasant dances in spacious rooms. They also chatted, talked a little politics, some economics, and told each other legends and old tales. In spring and autumn, they sometimes went to the mountains, especially to look for edelweiss. There were not many inns then. Young girls never went to them. They were suspicious places, often quite far from the village, and no-one owned a bicycle.

II

One gets the feeling that even after the war, life in the village went back to more or less the same as before. The war, for the old people who took part in it, is above all a memory of great tiredness and of nostalgia. They fought against Italy and against France, some of them in Poland, but they had active hatred only against Italy. The Italians were "traitors". At the moment, in Vorarlberg, there is feverish interest in the question of Abyssinia, and sympathies are with the Negus

So it seems that in the countryside, the war did not immediately change much; and it turns out, that once again, "after the war" is, above all, a convenient way of saying this. It was some time later, around 1920, that new elements came to be incorporated into the life of the village. These elements became more and more numerous and began to dissolve the old categories of thinking, already shaken by the events of 1914 to 1920. These new elements were German tourists.

First of all, they did not come for long stays. They only spent a few nights in the rare inns of the region: time to make a few ascents among the peaks of the Alps. However, they talked a lot, they told the villagers a lot: they imposed themselves; very proud of their homeland, they cited it as an example; they constantly made proposals for reorganization and transformation of the village; they flirted with young girls; and they did not go to Mass on

Sundays.... In the region, German tourists still have the reputation of being ideal tourists today. Insensitive to the comfort of the rooms and the delicacy of the menus, they ask for few comforts. All they need are two things: large portions and many newspapers. So, while seeking the joys of nature they brought the atmosphere of the cities to the countryside. They urbanised the village. They described and boasted of their ascents, and the number of ascents by young peasants multiplied. Skiing, already practised during the war, was slowly imported again by urban dwellers on holiday. The young men of the village adopted it themselves.

There was a shortage of hotels. The more enterprising of the village, the adventurous, those who had been considered moderate up until then, founded them. Being a hotelier was a new way to move up the ladder in peasant society. The inns prospered. Their owners began to speak out loudly in council meetings. What is more, the inns were improved, attracting tourists and inviting them to come back. They lost their character as bad places. Moreover, they were not hostile to outsiders. They brought money, money earned much more easily than it had been before. They were willing to listen and to be told how things should be. And the Germans were only too eager to teach. A German doctor arrived, made fun of the herbal teas of the priest's housekeeper and provided other remedies; this new magic was just as successful as the old. The German vet came as well, laughed at St Martin and gave learned treatments for sick cows. The peasants now gave their cattle two exorcisms: that of the priest and that of the doctor. Sometimes the cows recovered....

Should we draw a lesson from this and say that belief in magical rites is never shaken even though they do not produce satisfactory results? And that, in this situation, the peasants contented themselves with doubling the rites? On the contrary, one magic gives way to another when a new magician appears with all the attributes of greater power – money, knowledge, the ability to teach, the halo of success – all of which create confidence in the effectiveness of the new magic.

When tourists flocked to the village, the inns would hire people: two waiters, sometimes a cook. They expanded, and for that workers were also needed for a limited time. The village's consumption of agricultural products increased. The milk could be sold locally, the producers were no longer forced to consume the butter or cream themselves. If the inn was full, German tour-

ists stayed with farmers and only took meals at the hotel. Money flowed in and they bought land, an extra cow, a pig, and they ate more meat. They purchased "Maisäss", summer cottages higher up in the mountains, where part of the family go in May with some of the cattle.... As they expected to earn some money, they could borrow or buy using credit.

Who did the lending? Banks, or "Reifkassen", were rarely used, it was rather neighbours who advanced the money. These were neighbours who, for the moment, had cash and no plans. However, the sums involved were very small.

What marked the years before inflation came was the advent of tourism and its aftermath. Summer and then winter sports meant a reorganisation of leisure activities, but above all, with far greater consequences, a transformation of village society. This was the formation of a new elite, that of enterprising spirits such as innkeepers or hoteliers. In the village there was strong economic activity and an appetite for profit. Relations with the city became closer and closer. It was necessary to go to them to order provisions for shops, food for inns, the fitting out rooms etc. Thus, peasants sought them out. Above all, however, the city was taking over the village.

Then came inflation. The losses, fundamentally, were not great. The only ones who were caught out were those who did not yet have sufficient means to buy land and a house, or those who had lent money to their neighbours. But inflation brought with it a fever of enterprise, a kind of excitement for profit, a state of mind for which the early days of tourism had prepared them well.

A new opportunity for profit initially began in the valley: smuggling from town to town in the valley of the border between Switzerland, Germany and Austria. It was based on imported goods – machinery, metals, etc. – and the smugglers collected large sums. Their contact with the city became stronger, and the earnings made so easily in the village ended up there. No-one bought land or a house with this money. They bought gold watches in Innsbruck, city clothes, fine shoes and gramophones. The money was squandered on absurd things, nothing, or almost nothing, was retained for the women or the family. It was all wasted in the city, with "women" of the city.

Another practice that worked to strengthen the contact with the city was that of lawsuits, with which the village was overflowing: lawsuits of rich elders against their successors; lawsuits over water; over the roads; over the right of way, etc. This happened over lighting too, for it is at this point that the region became electrified. The old peasant hierarchy only stepped back gradually before the hoteliers and innkeepers. Lawsuits over debt followed and a veritable avalanche of cases overwhelmed the lawyers and judges of the "Kreisgericht" in Bludenz. It almost collapsed under the burden.

During this period, the parish priest's influence was significantly reduced. He ceased to be "one of the village" and became someone apart. Criticism existed, although was rarely expressed. He opposed innovation and upheaval, and was judged as living on another plane according to laws that no longer governed this world. Many convents and some parish priests tried to participate in the new world and to get their hands on land or houses at a low price. The faithful reproached them for their overly secular lifestyle, their concern for earthly well-being, their lack of spirituality: ghosts of the Reformation which had never been able to win in this country. The old ideological frameworks broke down. Indifference took the place of practical religiosity. Life, moreover, became more and more oriented towards the city, and the village priest was powerless when faced with urban affairs.

On the other hand, a half-religious idea moved from the city to the village, a dynamic idea with revolutionary potential: the notion of progress. Progress meant new hotels, tourism, sport, money. Progress meant urban civilization: city clothes, gramophones, modern dances, cinema. Progress was being assimilated by the city. A refrain often heard then, as today, is, "The city is a hundred years ahead of us, just as Europe is a hundred years ahead of the barbarians". Progress meant being part of Europe, and Europe, for this region, is essentially Germany and Switzerland, to a much lesser degree, Austria. Red Vienna never seduced Vorarlberg, which was resistant to socialism. And the vision of imperial Vienna had been lost since that world no longer existed.

As a result, peasant costumes are disappearing. Sometimes strange situations result: The wives and daughters of tourists dress in peasant style, while the peasant youth adopt the fashions of the city. The foreigner is increasingly thwarted in their hopes of being a folklorist. If the women are questioned,

they immediately develop a whole list of arguments to explain the changes: city clothes are more hygienic; they are less durable, but also less expensive. City clothes do not represent a real investment, as a peasant's costume from the valley costs roughly 600 schillings, or 1,600 francs.

But the real reasons run even deeper. Ever since the city intruded into the village, young men have increasingly begun to turn away from the young girls of the valley. The servant at the inn who is an incomer, the tourist maid, is much more successful. A girl from the valley is only valued when she has seen "the world" and proved that she can cope outside the village. When she returns after a few years of service in the city or in another valley, and abandons her costume, she adapts to the desires of the young men who no longer want a peasant girl, but a girl from the city.

Lured by the low prices, with inflation came tourists other than just Germans, in particular the Swiss. They came to the valley in the summer, praising the landscape and, with a gesture of the lord of the manor they bought land and built villas. They created small "Burschaften", small farming enterprises similar to those of the region. but they also set up poor peasants and gave them, in addition to a monthly salary, a litre of milk per person per day. It was understood that accounts would be kept of the operating revenue.... The experience of these Swiss, still strangers in the village after being present for twenty years, gives them a curious insight into the mechanism of mixing in the village.

In fact, in Vorarlberg, the Swiss have not found their way into the villagers' hearts. They are "Fremde", bosses, certainly very correct and there is nothing to reproach them for: "Es ist nichts zu klagen". They are Protestants without a doubt, but that does not matter. The villagers do not know how to explain their coldness towards the outsiders. But, for the observer, it is not difficult to see that these Swiss, who come from the city, who are irreproachable in the legal sense of the word, remain foreigners because they do not submit to the uncodified morality of the village. This morality, unshaken in the face of all the changes, still governs relations between neighbours and the

entire social life of the village, as it did in the past. I would call it the morality of the neighbourhood.

What does it consist of? Today, as in the past, a neighbour is a guarantor for an indebted neighbour; today, as in the past, a neighbour can count on a neighbour in case of emergency. If needed, they give hours of work helping to build a house, harvest hay or lend a bull. It is the same in the world of women. A sum of money, saved for a long time for some much-desired luxury purchase, is sacrificed without hesitation for the childbirth of a sister or the clothing of nieces and nephews. Sick neighbours are cared for with exemplary devotion. This is social morality and not individual morality, but Christian charity? Not any more. The help given to a neighbour is not like alms given to strangers; I have seen the itinerant unemployed dismissed with two spoonfuls of milk soup in an unfriendly way. The help one gives a neighbour is a kind of insurance in case you need to be helped yourself. What you do to a person in the village, someone in the village would do for you when the day comes. This is not a Christian expectation, it is an economic reality.

The confederation of neighbours, this is what constitutes the village. Anyone who is not morally upright does not belong to the village, even if he or she appears on the administrative lists as "Standesbürger". However, tourists passing through may be admitted to this confederation if they understand its meaning and show a desire to participate: by bringing medicinal plants to an old woman who complains that she can no longer look for them herself; by writing letters or insisting on being invited to a wedding; by bringing chocolate to a sick child and giving them advice, etc. Once admitted, once adopted, you can be sure that everyone in the village will be ready to help you with all their strength. If, as a stranger, you demand someone does a job for money, it will be done badly and very slowly. But, if you ask a neighbour to do the same work as a favour, it will be done immediately and in the most conscientious way.

So, if we want to single out the characteristics of village life on the eve of the crisis and the National-Socialist revolution in Germany (which, in the peasants' conception, marks a new era), they are the following: material well-being, close relations with the city, a profound shaking of traditions and the old attitudes towards life. There is an inclination in favour of an "Anschluss" with the city. New notions are imported from the city, notably those

of progress among others, which is all very "18th century". There is no discussion, no hatred against the clergy, only indifference, with a relaxing of religious observance in the confessional, etc. Interests, partly opposed to Catholicism, absorb more and more of the energies of the village.

The crisis and Nazi propaganda occurred at almost the same time. The old ways, first shaken by material prosperity and its many consequences, were again disrupted by economic difficulties: firstly, because agricultural prices were falling; secondly, because there were fewer opportunities for paid work; and thirdly, because tourism was declining appreciably. With the closing of the German borders, German tourism disappeared completely overnight.

One could therefore say, any economic upheaval affects people's minds and any economic change, for good or for ill, prepares people's minds for the adoption of new ideas, which are welcomed initially by the social elites born through the course of economic transformation. But, does not the theory of the economic base and ideological superstructure actually create a historical short-circuit? It neglects the intermediate stages between the base and the superstructure through which the current of living history flows.

So the crisis is coming to our valley; it will have its effect on people's minds. What will be its ideological consequences? A revival of Catholicism, or conversions, and the resumption of the old authorities taking back control of people's souls? Repentance for having allowed oneself to be seduced by new things?

This can be seen, at least in part, in some of the valleys of Tyrol: "Let us return to religion, to tradition. Let us not discuss the authorities imposed upon us. With religion, with authority, we will go back to the good old days. We've been disobedient, let's go back to obedience. God and the authorities will reward us".⁵

Obedience is the essence of Catholicism in Tyrol. As far as can be seen, there is little personal religious experience at the bottom of the revival of Catholicism there. This renaissance, supported by the present government, gives work and benefits to those who "obey". But the Austrian tradition was strong in the Tyrolean valleys "won back" by Catholicism and the idea of an economic, social and ideological renaissance. Vorarlberg lacks this. It has al-

⁵ For example, in Stubaital and Ötztal; while Pongau, Pinzgau and Paznaun had opposing reactions.

ways been more closely linked to Germany and Switzerland than with Austria. It has always been jealous of Tyrol. It felt neglected by Austria, which was building roads in Tyrol and helping it with all the power at its disposal, without doing anything for Vorarlberg. Therefore, the region has always been prepared to listen to what the Germans say and to be influenced by them. Above all, it was the social structure which was not the same.

In Tyrol, as in Vorarlberg, it was the “downgraded” who converted to National Socialism. It was not the poor or the destitute, these are stagnated, absorbed in the struggle for their material existence. By downgraded we mean those whose social framework has been shattered. And, for example, in the Tyrolean village, these include: the owner of the inn or hotel (what are they, peasants or entrepreneurs?); the village shopkeeper and their employee; and, finally, the “intellectuals” of the village such as the doctor, the vet, the dentist, the notary, etc.

For these people, National Socialism came to give what every religion must provide: the revelation of the true path of salvation; a feeling of being initiated, of being part of a social community and of reaching a higher morality; the hope of a near victory; and, finally, the unveiling of the enemy’s forces, forces which are undefinable. These prevent the small shopkeeper from succeeding, the employee from becoming an entrepreneur, and ensure the country doctor remains a half-peasant. National Socialist propaganda has revealed to its followers the cause of all these defeats: the Jew.

Those downgraded in the village took this propaganda to heart, and quickly encouraged some of the young farmers to follow them. For National Socialism is a youth movement and, in the Austrian village tradition, a movement of revolt and disobedience. They feel that they are the pioneers of progress. In Tyrol, they are also anti-clerical, but their anti-clericalism does not have the same fierce tone as in the Vorarlberg valley.

National Socialism in Tyrol – and this is due to the difference in the social terrain – mainly affects the urbanized elements of the towns and some of the young peasants from poor backgrounds. The rest, the mass of peasants who were comfortably off, and who had always remained more or less

on the sidelines of the movements of the last few decades, stayed aligned with the Christian Social Party, and were easily won over to the authoritarian, Catholic national programme of the government. Since urbanization was much more established in Vorarlberg, it was not anti-Semitism, but anti-clericalism that was at the forefront of National-Socialist propaganda from the very beginning. The first conversions to National Socialism were conversions to anticlericalism. The first apostles were, as in Tyrol, the downgraded, the sidelined, of the village.

I have been able to follow the story of several of them. One of the very first converts was an orphan. His parents, peasants from a neighbouring valley, pursued by misfortune, had died in extreme poverty. Their house and land had been auctioned off and the boy placed with the priest. He was treated harshly. There was a lot of work and no joy, a perpetual feeling of being a burden, with hateful words about his parents and a lot of authoritarian morality administered without charity. From this came a deep sense of restlessness. Everything he applied himself to had no hope of success: All his rebellions had no hope of victory. His restlessness lacked a formula, his revolt lacked a programme. One Sunday, escaping from the parish priest's house after Mass, he attempted to climb one of the mountains and met a German tourist. He was a writer on mountaineering who had settled in the valley, attracted by the crown of peaks that surrounds the village. Because of his unquestioned mountaineering abilities, he became the boy's idol. The elder began to talk to the younger, he "opened his eyes". "Suddenly the scales fell from my eyes", said the young peasant. "I saw how I had been abused up to now, and questioned the morality I had been taught up to this point.... I recognized where I belonged..." This is the phraseology of conversion; Catholic as well as Lutheran, Marxist as well as National-Socialist.

So, for the neophyte, the world made sense again. He was no longer an outcast, he found his place once again in a social community... one that was fictitious in the long run, but welcoming at the beginning. It was no longer a question of the parish, the village, Catholic morality or service without a chance of success. The new convert belonged to the great German people:

he was lord by the very fact that he participated in it; he was superior to the majority of the inhabitants of the village; he was the chosen one, the initiated. Through political work the world would change its face. And the young man went out to preach in the village. Firstly, at some friends' houses where he told them about his guru, but also in secret gatherings which were held in his own home. The enthusiasm of the neophyte and the emotions he knows how to inspire (he is a good speaker when hate fires him up) soon give him an enviable social position. The priest chased him away but friends lent him money and today he owns a boarding house, a very pretty house place with all modern conveniences, land, cows, and clients who share his political convictions. His wife was a cook for a noble German family.⁶

Other conversions are more difficult to track. However, on all sides, new ideas were planted: by the teacher, by the students, by the peasants who visited their parents in the city, or by those who came to the village. Thus, National Socialism in the village is another stage in the urbanization of the countryside.

In the villages of Vorarlberg, where the influence of the city had begun to make itself felt later than in Tyrol, but which happened in a quicker, more violent and deeply penetrating way, resistance to National Socialism was almost non-existent. The country was invaded. Each call was echoed multiple times. There was an atmosphere of expectation, that of a thousand-year-old dream being created.

1933: The German Revolution. The borders closed; the German tourists no longer came. The crisis worsened and there was no longer a market for cattle, milk and butter. The entire economic system of the valley, based on this triad of agricultural production, salaried work and tourism, was once again shaken to its roots.

6 Among those who visited the same teacher, there was another, the son of a large family who had been injured in a railway accident and had lost his position. He was then a hunter on a private estate, but was threatened all the time with unemployment. A third was the architect of the refuges of the region: restless and intelligent, he was not satisfied with what the village could offer him....

Money was lacking. Those who earned money from farming did not have enough to live on. Here is the budget of an average, relatively well-off peasant family in 1934. There is a father, mother, one daughter and two sons. They have 10 cows and enough hay to feed them. The daughter was a maid in a hotel: she was made unemployed; one of the sons worked in France: he was expelled. The family consumes the milk. Perhaps they give it to neighbours who are short of it, however, they are not paid in cash but sometimes with bacon, or with eggs, or with labour. In the autumn they try to sell a few cows; three out of the ten they own. They get 500 to 600 schillings per animal (1,400 to 1,700 francs). Let's say, in total, 4,500 francs, of which 900 francs must be deducted for tax, 300 francs for various fees, and the 600 francs that it costs for the cows to spend the summer on the alps. They want to continue to pay their insurance, another 300 francs per year. This leaves 2,400 francs for the whole family for the whole year. With that they have to buy meat, flour, all the pulses, coffee, sugar, shoes, clothes, soap, linen, wool, small sundries, needles, thread etc. Urgent repairs, sickness, childbirth, and luxuries such as tobacco also need to be paid for. For our family of five people and ten cows, that leaves about 160 francs a month. And the proportion between the number of children and the number of cows is generally reversed: three cows, but ten children.

In our accounts, heating and light seem to be omitted, but the wood really only costs the work of fetching it from the mountain and preparing it. Each house is allowed to use a sufficient quantity of the "Standeswald", a survival of the communal "Allmende". As for electricity, it is supplied to each house by a small private distributor set up during the years of prosperity.

So there is a need for economy. What are the first measures to be imposed? What are the priorities? First of all, they eat less meat: instead of three times a week, twice a week or even just once. Second, they no longer buy new clothes. The old ones must suffice. Then comes the bread. It is impossible to buy flour. And after the bread, the sugar goes. These are great hardships, but it is not yet complete destitution. Destitution is when you do not have coffee any more.

Economies, moreover, differ from one generation to the next. Older people do not give up their pipes, while younger people do without their cigarettes fairly easily. They go to the inn less often, but they keep their radios and subscriptions to newspapers.

It is a gesture of despair and anguish when they have to give up paying taxes. But then they experience something serious: the weakness of the state. It would have the right to seize houses and land, but there are so many debtors in arrears. And then the peasants issue an ultimatum, "If you take our houses from us, take care of our children", and families have ten, twelve, fourteen offspring. This is a fatal responsibility for the district. The conclusion is that, without access to funds, the state does nothing, and so the inhabitants despise it because it is powerless.

Meanwhile, the city retreats again. Nothing can be bought there; the village is reduced to a kind of autarchy. There are no more lawsuits, they cost too much and there is no trust anymore in the government courts. Disputes are settled among themselves. Nevertheless, the city remains very close via the radio. Broadcasts are transmitted from Zurich, Stuttgart and Innsbruck, and the cult of the city continues around the sets. They can hear the political news and listen to jazz and "modern" songs. The borders are closed, but German propaganda still crosses them....

The fact that the borders are closed is, moreover, blamed by all as the great and sole cause of poverty. "When the borders reopen" is the mantra. The economic difficulties and the government's attempts to bring the population back to the church have only made opposition in the valley more fanatical. There is no anti-Semitism among the peasants. But there is no lack of the myth of enemy forces which work against "progress" for their own benefit, using every trick to maintain the stupidity of the people so that they can be exploited more efficiently. These are the clerical forces, "die Schwarzen", a nickname which still echoes the "Dunkelmänner" of the Reformation. Spontaneously, as during the Reformation, a new superstition is born: seeing the priest, or his cook, is a portent and cause of doom.

Anticlericalism is the obsession of the village. Anticlericalism, not as a religious controversy, but as a social and political polemic. In essence, the people live on a diet of deism and vague biblicism. But no conversation with them can take place without many mocking allusions to the Church and the priest. They talk about the greed of the parish priest and they talk about the

lessons he gives. Someone enquires, "How much does he ask?" The enigmatic answer is, "Oh, he would do it for a virgin... Understand? Well, he would do it for the Virgin Mary". Everybody laughs and I finally understand: The virgin is the new Austrian 5 schilling coin with the image of the Virgin of Mariazell.

And there are more jokes on legendary themes. One boy shouts to the other, "Didn't you see the white deer with the cross on the mountain yesterday?" The other replies, "Oh yes, but with the swastika". Sometimes these jokes turn sacrilegious. Here is a scene I witnessed. Four cows fell ill on an alp at 2,200 m. and their owners, rich traditional peasants, called for the priest to perform an exorcism and bless the alp. So, the parish priest is there, on the pasture, in the middle of the owners and their family, giving the blessing in the names of St Fridolin and St Martin. However, a stone's throw away, in the "Stube" of the alp, there are two shepherds eating, the woman who keeps the refuge in order, the cowherd and a couple of visitors. At first, they do not pay attention to what is happening on the pasture. They continue eating. But soon they start to impersonate the priest. "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, won't you give us any more potatoes?" To which the old woman, beating her chest, answers, "Mea culpa, mea culpa, I have no more. Perhaps St Fridolin will provide us with some?" They take the statues of the saints down from their corner. "Dear Fridolin, we give you the rest of the juices of our potatoes: Bring us some more, we beg you from the bottom of our hearts", and they smear the statues with the leftovers of their meal. I take some chocolate out of my bag and offer it to this noble company of men. "It's a miracle, it's a miracle", they cry out, "Thank you St Fridolin, thank you St Martin, leave now, don't tire yourselves out". And they put the statuettes back in their corner. I ask the youngest of the guests, a bright boy of about 11, "And you, are you also anticlerical?" The little Nazi, who one might think is anti-Semitic, answers gleaming with pride, "Oh yes, I'm already completely Jewish" ("Ich bin schon ein ganzer Jud").

In opposition to the anticlerical majority, three families (out of 38) are fervent, fanatical Catholics. The women go to confession and attend Mass every day. These people, too, believe they are chosen, chosen from among the reprobates, their neighbours and Nazi relatives. They withdraw from village life, not believing in the possibility of making the world a better place. They

never go to the inn, they curse strangers, lock themselves in their homes, and see no one but the priest. How can this explain their attitude be explained? In one family, the eldest daughter was brought up in a convent. She had a lively personality and returned home at the advent of the anticlerical propaganda. In the home she fought this with success; neither her parents nor her brothers were seduced by modern ideas. The second family has been in disagreement and conflict with most of the people of the village since prehistoric times. Understandably, when the opportunity has arisen, they have always stood against the common ideas of the village. The third family is a family of priests.

Naturally, in the face of this wave of antipathy and hatred, the type of priest has changed too. The choice is already different. It is no longer the jovial, indulgent, fat and pink priest that we meet, but skinny, pale fanatics, the "Eiferer", who condemn the world and its sins and have no forgiveness for their "flock". And those who, perhaps, under an indulgent priest, would have continued to profess a rather detached Catholicism, turn away from it. The confessionals of the zealots are empty. Those who want to confess make a pilgrimage of two hours or more to find a priest who gives them an absolution with consoling words. "No, I'm not going to Father X", a gossipy villager told me, "No, not that one, he just makes me more frightened".

In recent months, the economic situation has improved a bit. On the one hand, French, Dutch or English tourists are coming to visit the region instead of Germans. On the other, the most resourceful young people of the village are taking their exams as ski instructors and mountain guides, and at the same time work as carpenters, stucco workers, electricians, and hire themselves out for the hay harvest. With so many strings to their bow, they always have a chance of earning a few pennies.

Moreover, without wishing to idealize the village, it is notable that its work ethic is necessarily superior to that of the city. It is that in the countryside the best workers are sought after, and not the ones with the lowest prices. The differences in wages are enormous: a good hay farmer earns 6 schillings (15 francs) a day and his food; a bad one, one or two schillings (2.80 to 5.60

francs). The one earning 6 schillings will find work much easier than the other. Hay is "work that is in a hurry". It is important to take advantage of the good weather and not dawdle...

However, even if the most intelligent people in the village have found relief from the communal poverty, the crisis continues nonetheless. It is disrupting the whole structure of the village more profoundly than ever. Up until now we have seen leisure changing, the cycle of the year changing, one religion replacing another, old authorities being ousted, new ones asserting themselves, public opinion adopting other principles. But the circle of life, childhood, marriage, old age, has remained the same....

Now young people today cannot and do not want to marry. What they earn is barely enough for their existence and their small pleasures. They cannot buy land or build a house, and without a house, as we have seen, marriage is inconceivable. Since the crisis, the number of marriages has gone down by 70%, and, increasingly, young men are turning away from girls in the village. They fear being forced into a marriage against their will, they also fear alimony lawsuits; the only lawsuits that continue to be brought in the city.... Money is scarce, and the court has forced the fathers of illegitimate children to pay up to 30 schillings a month: That is more than an entire family has at their disposal in the village today.

With marriage, the whole framework of life falls apart. This is far more serious than all the changes that have taken place in recent years. Also the progressive optimism of the people of the village, their 1,000-year politics, the courage of the desperate, all of this liable to change from one moment to the next, into a disgusted apathy for life, into fatalistic pessimism. The consequences? We will see – we are not prophets – they will be seen in five, ten or twenty years.

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