

Yesterday's Witchcraft: An Enquiry Into a Ladin Valley*

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The same problem faces all peasant civilizations: that of the city, of town planning. If the problem is general, the solutions are different, from region to region, from valley to valley. Depending on the geographical situation, depending on history, the transformation of ancient peasant traditions is multifaceted and the compromise between past and present has a thousand nuances.¹

In most Austrian and German regions, the victory of the city – one that is economic and of moral enchantment – has almost destroyed the former framework of peasant life. As the latter fades into the past, it takes its place in memories, in legends, in fairy tales. All that remains, in a word, is a more or less artificial folklore. But in a few rare regions, the old peasant existence (in many ways reminiscent of the Middle Ages) has not yet been destroyed. It was only shaken after the war and the reconstruction of some aspects of the past can still be made. One can almost observe the functioning of some institutions which, for us, are historical phenomena.

The Ladin valley of Badia, the old "Ennebergtal",² is one of these areas. This high valley of the Dolomites is narrow, inhospitable, flanked by bizarrely

1 Cf. Lucie Varga, *Une vallée du Vorarlberg* (*Annales*, t. VIII, 1936).

2 The Ennebergtal runs from Brunico in Pusteria to the Passo di Gardena, which is 34 km long and rises to an elevation of 1,100–1,600 m above sea level. It has eighteen villages.

Part of

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shaped rocks, threatened by moraines, exposed, from September to May, to frost and snow and, in summer, to storms and thunderstorms. It is always under the threat of badly tamed waters that make the village fear disaster and flooding.

Theories have been established about the ethnic origins of the valley's six thousand or so inhabitants. The Etruscans have even been invoked... However, what seems to be most important for their present history is that they have occupied a land that has been colonised for a long time, that they are steeped in tradition, and that they have managed to keep their own language, the Ladin dialect of the valley, Badiot,³ whose ramparts protect the individuality of this corner of the earth.

The basis of its economy is that of any high altitude valley. Out of necessity, cultivation of the land is declining and livestock farming is taking over. This is a rather primitive form which does not seek to arrive at purebred cattle but is adapted, more or less, to the conditions of the neighbouring markets. Each farm prepares the butter and cheese it needs. Enough wheat is sown to provide the flour for domestic need. The grain is ground in the village mill in partnership with the three richest farmers. For bread, they have had very rarely and only recently recourse to the baker. Once a year, each family bakes round flatbreads laden with caraway in its own oven in the courtyard. There

3 The Ladin scholars pride themselves on the fact that their language is related to French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian. Cf. C.J. Alton, *Die ladinischen Idiome*, Innsbruck, 1879. It derives directly from Latin, from which come the roots of its words. The pronunciation is very difficult and it has six different aspirated consonants. There are three declensions in five cases, and three conjugations in six tenses, the indicative and the subjunctive. It has a rich variety of idioms, but which are, alas, limited in vocabulary. There is a lexicon of barely 4,000 words, mostly designating objects of everyday life. Anything to do with livestock, food and farming can be expressed with absolute precision, but a sermon in Ladin 'would not work well', as one inhabitant told me. Half of the Ladin words in the artificial translations of German literature, undertaken at the end of the last century, are not known by the peasants. There is no fixed orthography. Letters that were exchanged in German, are now are written in Italian. As for literature, the "Volkslied" is fading away day by day and only its last vestiges can be gleaned. It is giving way, as elsewhere, to the verses of operettas and to the melodies of the cinema. Around 1900, it was the priests and high school teachers who sought to create a Ladin literature. This is a somewhat cold and artificial poetry, which tells of the joys of hunting and the beauties of the high mountains, and is still quite fashionable. Its authors, Freña Osopp and Frontull among others, are known throughout the valley. What still remains is a genre of occasional poetry. When a Ladin priest says his first Mass, his friends and relatives come from far and wide to congratulate him. Then poems of about twenty stanzas are recited, "beautiful enough to give you a fever", according to the peasants, but rather boring for us and all built on the same theme of cherishing old traditions, as well as old masters.

are still a few fields of peas, beans and, increasingly rarely, flax; only twenty years ago, wool was provided by the village sheep.

The cycle of the year follows the rhythms of the seasons. The initiative, the organization of work is left to the father, then to the son. The execution is in the hands of the women. The most solemn and joyful celebrations are, perhaps, those that mark the completion of a period of work: For example, the festival of "cut grass" which takes place when the hay is in the barns of the alps and the farmers come home. Similar, but less important, festivities take place every Saturday evening in summer. They are gatherings of singing and dancing, where young girls are courted freely, and these festivities seem necessary for moral wellbeing; they create a collective euphoria that helps people regain energy for the coming week... Festivals and leisure activities can be no more compared to our individual distractions in the big cities – they are collective festivals – than to the leisure activities organized by dictatorships or public authorities; for peasant festivals have an immediate end in themselves... Great festivity also occurs on market day, twice a year. On 6 January, the festival is picturesque and fun, interspersed with mask dances. It is, it is true, condemned to disappear in the face of the invading skiers whose season starts on this date.

Ladin peasants forget their parsimony and spend like great lords on the occasion of festivals. Saving during the year and spending during a celebration: Both attitudes also earn them the esteem of their neighbours. But the great opportunity to show off wealth is the wedding feast. Both the groom's and bride's families spend beyond their means. There are expensive rites to be followed, ransoms to be paid for fictitious kidnappings, copious meals, numerous guests, musicians, sleighs, etc. It is only in the last few years that a few have had the audacity to reject these traditions. The verse below reminds us of the costs involved in a wedding in a very pleasant way:

Cantia d'la Novicia
(Song of the Fiancée)

La lüna flores sön bank dalla küna
The moon shines over the cradle

se tes pa novicia co bona fortuna
When you get engaged, what good fortune

L'de della nokia, ban ballé (infinitive)
On the wedding day, one dances a lot

Domang della nokia, nia da gosté!
The day after the wedding, there is nothing for lunch.

L'de della nokia, mangé pan e vin
On the wedding day, one consumes bread and wine

Domang della nokia, nia te skrin.
The day after the wedding, there is nothing in the stomach (skrin:
Ger.).

L'de della nokia, i calze dall tak
On the day of the wedding, heeled shoes

Domang della nokia, pié⁴ ia col sak.
The day after the wedding, begging with the bag.

This cycle of life and of the year took place, and still does, in the shadow of the bell tower, within the framework of the idea of a protective and merciful Catholicism overseen by the Ladin parish priests. To be pious is to follow Catholic rites conscientiously. There is no great difference in piety among the faithful. Everyone goes to Mass on Sundays; if there is a choice between two churches, one seeks out the one where the priest's sermon is the most moving. There was a Sunday when peasants came from far away to hear a dying priest, lying by the altar, stammering broken phrases in a faint voice about

4 Magpie = begging, probably derived from *pìler*, *ia* = here and there.

heaven and hell... Four times a year people go to confession, four times a year they go to communion. A prayer is recited before and after meals. They say prayers morning and evening. God the Father recedes a little. The holy Virgin and baby Jesus are much closer to humanity. The images that are made of them are not very original. In fact, they are based on sweet lithographs and a 19th-century clichéd literature of edification. This is to such an extent that a peasant woman entering a tourist's room kneels down, taking a moment for the baby Jesus, on seeing on the bed a little boy with blond curls standing in his long nightgown and reciting I don't know what, with a serious and serene expression.

At present, the whole valley is discussing the miracle of Agordo. Agordo is about forty-five kilometres away. All the Ladins have gone there. It is not the possibility of miracles that is doubtful; what is doubtful is whether there was a miracle at Agordo. Three young girls between fourteen and seventeen years of age were guarding their flocks. The holy Virgin appeared to them in a white dress adorned with golden brocades, a crown on her head and roses at her feet. She was like one of those nineteenth-century Madonnas that can still be seen in some of the churches.⁵ She ordered them to pray fervently. To one she promised wealth; to the other, health for her parents; to the third, marriage. She also told them that she would return to the same place, at the same time, for twenty-one days, except on Sundays. From that day on, an ever-increasing crowd has besieged the place, so that a member of the Carabiniere believed he was forced to put it in order. At that moment, a young girl cried out: "You are tearing off the Virgin's crown." "Where did the crown fall?" The girl pointed to a place. Then, according to reports, the official felt an electric shock (note, electricity has only been available in the valley for three years). This was the height of the enthusiasm. The bishop of Bressanone pronounced himself against the miracle. He wrote to the parish priests to calm the crowd, and they, in their Sunday sermons, complied with the orders they had received. What was more important was that, in the long run, it was generally agreed that the girl did not correspond to the type of "shepherdess

⁵ At present, in Grödnertal, another type of Virgin is being presented, a "modern" Virgin, very thin and disproportionately elongated, covered in a narrow wrap with few folds that also covers the head. But it is said that this type is not appealing to the peasants and is reserved for export.

seer" of St Bernadette of Lourdes. "But she isn't pale", the disappointed people said. "When she speaks of the Virgin, she does not tremble, she does not swoon." Finally – and this was also a factor that favoured the opponents of the miracle – the Agardo region does not have a very good press in the surrounding area.

It is a province that is already all Italian, very poor. The inhabitants travel around the country as itinerant merchants, beggars: shady, dishonest people, who are looked upon with a suspicious eye. It was widely believed that they were simply trying to make a profit from staging a miracle. The doubt, which was already creeping in, was strengthened before the twenty-first day, which was to be marked with a sign. The sign came, but in a gloomy way: a car accident on the road, with four dead. The Mother of God, it was said, had wanted to punish the brazen abuse of her name. The majority turned away from the miracle, but some continued to believe in it. In discussions, they were a little embarrassed to provide evidence of their conviction. All they could find to say – and I have often heard them say this – was: "A child has seen it too, a child cannot lie".

Alongside the Virgin and Jesus Christ, the saints have a large part in religious life. The facades of the region are decorated with Saint Florian, Saint Christopher and Saint Martin. This is not only an artistic decoration, an edifying ornament, it is more: an effective protection. Images of the saints can be found inside the houses and even in the barns to protect the cattle. Even today, on the first Wednesday of every month (Thursday is considered an especially dangerous day), the parish priest goes around the village to bless certain plants and the salt in the cowsheds. Today, the protection of the Catholic religion is requested, through the priest, against diseases, epidemics, disasters, catastrophes which afflict the valley. Against these misfortunes, they have recourse to insurance as well as to Saint Florian, Saint Martin and the veterinary surgeon. But, also, the peasant asks to be protected against specific occult powers, covered by different names, which were considered to be the cause of these misfortunes. But, above all, they asked to be protected against witches. Thwarting the ruses of the witches was one of the priest's main tasks. It was said of a parish priest: "He makes the witches obey him, he is strong against the storm", or, to the contrary, "El ne ve nia dalla tem-

pesta".⁶ As, for 150 years the priests had almost all been natives of the valley, who would be surprised to see them share the beliefs of the Ladin peasants? Before the war, every village in the valley was home to two or three witches. Here and there, a few women still survive who, in their youth, were suspected of witchcraft. They no longer practice their trade. "The parish priest has made us powerless": This is their own observation, as well as that of the whole village.

The domain of the witches of Enneberg was that of the storm and cattle. It is not believed that they were concerned with love spells. The concept of the seductive witch seems to be totally lacking. On the other hand, the cows they bewitched no longer gave milk, the oxen languished and roared painfully. The technique of their witchcraft is the classic one of charm by analogy: The witch stirs the water in a bowl with a spatula, whispering magic spells (my stay was too short to learn them, but I have no doubt that it is possible). To work the spell of the cattle, they hung shoelaces from the door of the stable and they pretended to milk them, whispering invocations. By these rites they firmly believed that they would succeed in passing to their own cows the milk of their neighbour's, who would despair of their empty buckets. It seems that the power of the witches was much greater on the days when they had taken Communion without confessing.

The tradition also contains the "Hexe sabbat". In the Ladin valley, it takes place on Thursdays, in cursed places, at night, after the "Betläuten" [church bells calling people to prayer, see editors' note below]. Two of these cursed places, the "Plan de Stris" and the "Col Maledett", are still on show in the village. These are small plains in steeply descending valleys, well enclosed, surrounded by rocks of sinister aspect, but where grass grows as if by magic, while the surroundings are stony and deserted. They are enlivened, one by a spring, the other (a sort of volcanic cirque) by a small lake and a waterfall. The witches used to go there traditionally, riding on their broomsticks and reciting the following formulas: "sciara delle mura" (bowl with the remains

6 Alton, *op cit.* p. 15.

of fat); “quegora de chura” (goat’s horns); “cacca de manin” (cat...); “fum su per camin” (smoke going up the chimney).⁷

When they met, they ate and drank copiously and danced lasciviously. Among them was a headless priest. He had murdered a woman while he was alive, cut off her head and buried her in that place. It was he who taught them to protect themselves from the priests who had once been his colleagues. The uninitiated were strictly forbidden access to these places. If anyone ventured there, they would recognize the peasant women in these witches, but the next day they would have forgotten them and have wandered the rest of their life, melancholy, vainly trying to remember.

How were the witches recognised? It was quite hard. But witchcraft came to be diametrically opposed to Catholicism, and the witches feared the priests, the Mass and the sacraments (conversely, the priests feared the witches). They did not dare not to attend the Holy Office, and they were recognized by the fact that, while they were at Mass, they were as evasive as possible. They closed their eyes, slept or pretended to sleep, they bowed their heads low and did not look up at the Host... “Les elies que cigno insci col ché tan i officie scialdi da sospetté”⁸ (those who lower the head during Mass must be highly suspect).

They were not wrongly suspected. Based on what could be learnt from the stories – both gossipy and suspicious – of the older women, and from information gathered from their younger relatives, the witches themselves believed strongly in their power. They “made” hail and storms; that is, they knew formulas and used them for that purpose. They hoped to see the milk of the cows in the nearby barn fly by incantation. Perhaps they also tried to ride a broom and go to the meeting at the Plan se Stris. But none of those that I have been able to investigate a little were able to, not even in their dreams. They believed, however, that their sisters had been there and that they were missing a “secret”, or that the priest had exorcised them. They too dreamed of the good old days, a golden age when the priests had not yet fought their charms and weakened their power. The village vaguely believed in a federation of witches, while the witches were unaware of the good fellowship and

7 Far from being meaningless rhymes, they seem to be more associated with rites for the preparations for the witches’ flight.

8 Alton, p. 79.

intimacy that can exist between conspirators. They distrusted and watched each other, even in public. They remained attached only to their mistress, the one who had initiated them.

Which women became witches and why? Perhaps, first of all, one should look for a certain revolt against the order of the village, a revolt against hard, slow, patient, regular work which demands asceticism and self-sacrifice. For the daughters of poor peasants, the road is long and hard until they have earned their dowry. For a peasant woman who owns two or three cows, it is a hard struggle to assert herself, to be valued in the community. There is an impatience with work, and a unease with Catholicism, for God, his mother and his saints seem to be only with the powerful of the village; a blasphemy that weighs on the conscience. Add to this the fact that at that time the opportunities to escape were very limited. On the one hand, there was turmoil and dissatisfaction, on the other, in a village that fiercely believed in the opposing powers of good and evil, sooner or later the temptation would present itself to become a "witch" who offered to transmit her knowledge.

The psychological attitude and the conversion of the initiate present all the classic characteristics of every conversion. There is anxiety, indecision and a tormented conscience. Suddenly there is a decisive event, which is perhaps petty but which does not lead to a renewal of an alliance with the divine and a sublime reconciliation with the world. On the contrary, it brings about a distance from heaven and its authorities, and triggers latent aggression and passionate vengeance against the social environment. Admittedly, this takes courage and a certain inclination to non-conformism.

Moreover, witches do not dispense with authority, but put themselves under another authority. They do not reject rites, they accept others which are part of a very ancient tradition. And so it is that people soon believe in the witch, she has social influence and, let us say, a social position in the village. Recently there have been no more lawsuits against them, but, as we have said, the villagers resort to the priests.

What were the services that the witch rendered to the village in normal times, i.e. when she was in balance with her environment, with her time,

when she was an integral part of the village? Higher, diffuse, vague powers are difficult to sustain. In the face of misfortune, Catholicism has a position: "Our misfortune is a punishment from God, our sins require penitence". But in the valley, a profound notion of divinity is missing which would have deepened the the idea of religion. For many centuries the village, taken as a collective unit, has been stable. Old traditions and certainties have have slowly crumbled away, and some urban elements elements welcomed – German newspapers, magazines, roads, post offices etc. – but without shock. There was no sudden abandonment of old traditions, creating uncertainty and unease and requiring a new religious orientation. The entrenched belief in witches spared the inhabitants the effort of developing a faith which had, in a way, remained quite primitive.

Belief in the witch has its place in the functioning of village society. What a relief to believe in the materiality of evil powers. In having the ability to accuse someone when you are unsuccessful, in being able to conjure up evil powers, the causes of these misfortunes, hope is reborn. I knew a peasant, once very rich, who claims that his stable had been "bewitched" in 1904. He had had to give up a large part of his property. "I couldn't do anything about it", and after thirty years this is still his justification: The witches clung to that stable and house, it was cursed. "I sold it, and I started over again, little by little, across the street. See my house is good again". "And the buyer, how did he free himself from the witches?" "He knocked down the barn and built a new one, had it blessed and changed cows. I couldn't go on, I was riddled with debt."

Witches are not the only ones who represent evil powers in the life of the valley. There are others with pagan attachments, remnants of an ancient demonic mythology. In first place, we find the *Orco*. He is not the devil. He is much less important, but is rather a kind of evil spirit, a naughty "Waldschrat". He does not ruin the peasants, but he chases them, vexes them, attacks them. He disturbs daily work. He contents himself, it is true, with scattering the ducks and chickens here and there. He attacks ovens in which the fire does not burn, butter that does not form, and laundry that does not whiten well: "El é pa

propiro na miseria", that is to say, "He is the cause of little daily miseries". Indeed, it is in these that he is most to be feared. He leads poor people astray. If the peasants, after the Angelus, return home, which is often only a few miles away, without having recommended themselves to the Lord, they lose their way and wander all night in the mountains. Exhausted, they find their way only in the morning, after the Betalinte [presumably church bells calling people to prayer, editors' note, see also above], while the cattle they were driving have fallen into a ravine.

The Orco looks like a black, hairy man. He sometimes manifests himself in the form of a spirited horse. Someone who tries to mount him should take care, as the horse will gallop away at top speed, knocking over the rider, who, tired, stiff, dizzy, blooded and lame, will try to return home in the morning. The appearance of the Orco, according to the inhabitants, is becoming increasingly rare. The villagers explain this in the same way they explain the disappearance of the witches: the priests have exorcised him. "They put crucifixes in the places where he used to appear, it's much better now."⁹

Alongside the Orco, but even more retiring, is the Pavaro. Of the same species as the Orco, it once inhabited pea and bean fields. It had the head of a dog, burning eyes, a enormous mouth, teeth of fire, vulture's talons, a snake's tail, and the arms of a giant. Why did it have all these frightening characteristics? Just to scare children stealing some pods, to catch them and cut off their legs. Here are the verses he sang while sharpening his sickle: "Aguzzo, aguzzo ben" (well sharpened), "Taia les jamme ai mittons qui vegne" (I cut off the legs of the boys who come). As he knew how to imitate a crow, a vulture or a magpie, many young Ladins were often seized by an appalling terror.

On the other hand, there are a few surviving servant spirits, friends of people, ready to render them minor assistance. There is still, here and there, the legend of the "ganas" and the "salvangs", handed down from time immemorial. Scientific theory even links it to the first inhabitants of the valley who fled from the Rhaetians to the wild heights of the mountains; they were giant but gentle men and women, living in caves and dressed in animal skins.

9 Better, but not finished. Just the other day, the son of the owner of the "negoziò" saw the Orco. The young man was coming home late at night on his motorbike from a ride in the city (it is said that the young man's conscience was not very clear that evening and that he had reason to fear violent reproaches from his father). The Orco frightened him terribly and he entered the shop in panic and terror.

In winter, sensitive to the cold, they would go down to the villages to warm themselves. They spoke little and only, when they were very hungry, would ask for “puca latte, puca pan”, which showed that they were foreigners, for a good Ladin would have said “n pu de latt, n pu de pan”.¹⁰

They did not harm anyone and, as a token of thanks, helped the peasants in their work. We find them already in the fourteenth century, where a chronicle of the region informs us: “Among the mountains of this country lived the people of the *gnana*, in the caves of the mountains; they ate with people, and played and danced with them”.¹¹

There are three or four men in the valley who flatter themselves that they have a “gana” among their ancestors, and poetic legends form around them.

Anyway, the ganas and silvangs have also disappeared. The inhabitants have a different explanation for this disappearance: “These wild and shy people were afraid of tourists...”

After having questioned villagers, priests, witches, let us ask ourselves, in turn, as historians, how and when the notions of witches and those related to them, evil and servant spirits, disappear. But first another question arises, why, in the Ladin valley, have these beliefs been preserved for so long? This second is easier to answer and it has a double aspect.

On the one hand, our valley was settled three thousand years ago. On recently cleared land, transplanted ancient beliefs take root less easily.¹² On the other, its encounter with urban civilization, the culture between countryside and city, came much later. Tourists have been coming in increasing numbers in summer only for the last fifteen years, and in winter only for the last five. Under the Austrian regime, the decay of peasant civilization progressed much more slowly. Urbanization and “progress” merged less intimately than under Fascism, which in the valleys developed a cult of technology and modernity.

10 Alton, p. 67 no. 1.

11 In montanis suae regionis gens gnana in cavernis montium habitavit: cum hominibus vescebantur, ludebant, choreas ducebant... *Fontes Rer. Germ.*, 1, 415.

12 This phenomenon can also be observed when we compare Montafon in Vorarlberg with an old Vorarlberg valley.

As for the other question, the answer is more delicate and lacks peremptory force. Let us confine ourselves to a few suggestions. It is true that the assault of the city is carried out, first of all, by tourism: mass tourism. When only one or two tourists ventured into the valley, mocking the beliefs of the inhabitants and trying, during their short stay, to sow their ideas of progress, the inhabitants would say of them, "Quel mat de todesc" ("that mad person from Germany"): Today they still tell tales of how the Orco punished some of them. It is not reasoning that causes changes, nor contact with other ways of life, nor even intimate contact.

In Vorarlberg, for example, in large families, when the yield from cattle and land was not enough to sustain life, the father or one of his sons would take up a position in the summer as a road builder or in town. They returned as they had left, believing in witches, the Orco and *Pavaro*, bringing back the money that was so lacking. But the change in beliefs was not the consequence of this money either; it had made its entrance without having changed anything. For this money had not destroyed the morality of peasant work; it had been hard earned, even harder than in the valley by working the land. It was not money per se, it was money earned with ease that changed the very basis of existence in Badia. Today, many fewer Ladins are forced to leave to earn a living: tourism has changed everything. Instead of one hostel, there are three; instead of one job for three, there are thirty, because you not only have to provide accommodation for the tourists, you have to wash, iron, knit, and sew. They buy shoes, stockings, boots and provisions. And, slowly, the inhabitants adopt a dual idea of value for work. The work sold to foreigners is much more expensive and they are still surprised to see the tourists pay without batting an eyelid.

That is not all. For some years now, there have been other job opportunities for the inhabitants of the valley: one a driver, another a ski instructor, a maître d'or porter. And it is no longer the effort that is paid for, it is no longer the perseverance and asceticism of work that is rewarded and leads to prosperity, it is physical dexterity, flexibility of mind, the ability to adapt or to move forward. And so it is that those in their twenties are different from those in their forties in their physical appearance: their steps are quicker, their gestures more relaxed. The notion of values has changed completely. It is no longer the well-established peasant who is envied and placed high up in

the village hierarchy, but the ski instructor, the owner of a big hotel. It is no longer the house with full cupboards that is the symbol of a man's worth, but the sports record achieved by a young person.

The phenomenon of effortless gain does not go without remark among the Ladins. A ski instructor who still looks after his land in the summer, once said to me, "I cannot understand this. Look at this meadow: When I am wrestling with it in summer I have little or no profit, when I am enjoying myself in winter, my purse is full". And the father replied, "Basically, that's right. In summer, the meadow is part of you, you can be proud of it, while in winter you play the fool". "But not at all, father, I am admired and greatly envied in winter". "By whom?", "My comrades!", "Then they're as crazy as you are."

It is no wonder that old people watch this transformation with a suspicious eye. For money earned easily, and by means they do not approve of, is also spent in a way they do not approve of either. It is not spent on buying land, on buying a house, not even on improving a house, but to buy a modern musical instrument, an accordion, a phonograph, a radio, a bicycle, a motorcycle, a new pair of skis, clothes, elegant shoes, things that finally wear out and disappear; they are happy when it is not wasted at a hotel, with friends, or on trips... And, instead of laying in supplies, the cupboards are emptying. "What good are so many things in the cupboard?" young people ask. New proverbs have been invented: "Winter money melts with the snow", "Skiing brings money, but you lose out", and others.

Under this new order of things, this new spirit, the disappearance of the witches and the good or bad spirits seems to us a natural thing. What remains of the farm work is more secure, there is the vet and insurance. The domain of the witches is shrinking, that of the Pavaro even more so; beans and peas are planted less and less often. Fears and uncertainties are now on a higher plane where evil powers have other names. The witch was blamed for hail. Other enemies are blamed for the fall in the price of livestock on the markets. These are "real" enemies, political or economic in appearance, but which soon reveal themselves as masked and pseudo-rational ideas. Among these are "the Austrian yoke" for some, "Fascism" for others, "the crisis", and, for all, taxes. Fascist education finishes the destruction of the old framework.

More and more Ladin teachers are being replaced by young Italians.¹³

13 The "irridenta" Ladin is mainly limited to the very thin layer of German, i.e. Austrian-trained, intellectuals; it is composed of teachers who studied in Innsbruck or Bolzano,

And what they give to their peasant pupils is an education in a strange dualism, made up of disparate and contradictory elements: adaptation to urban life, to the life of the state, hygiene propaganda, the cult of sport. The old people sharply criticize it: "It's not a school", they say, "It's just singing, drawing and doing gymnastics. In my day, children learnt something at school. We knew our catechism differently, by heart." Certainly, there are still long hours devoted to religion, but the first sentence that the little Ladins learn in school is no longer, "I am Catholic", but, "Io sono Italiano, io sono Italiana". The first song is no longer a religious hymn, but the hymn of the Ballila, which ends like this: "Son bimbi, ma bimbi gia fieri, gia forti – gia pronti a lanciare – Il sasso e il cuore".

During all the years of school, God is housed alongside another god: the State.

Therefore, in this new state of affairs in the valley, the belief in witches is a matter of age. Between sixty and eighty years of age it is believed that, although weakened by the priests, witches have existed and always will exist. They are still present in the inhabitants' minds. Between the ages of thirty-five and sixty, they say to themselves: They once existed, but no longer, times have changed. They are happy to listen to the old stories, believe in the apparition of the *Orco* and presence of the witches, but other notions are now at the forefront of their concerns. Between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, people do not oppose these beliefs, but they think about them only exceptionally. It is the eight-year-old who will tell you clearly, "Witches, it is all lies. The head of the Ballila said so".

Lucie Varga
(Paris.)

Ladin priests, grocers, traders, and those who used to read German newspapers. Then there are the old people, those for whom the good old days, the Austrian regime, Franz Josef, light taxes and pleasant memories of youth merge into the image of a golden age, all the more desirable as it remains imprecise.