

LE MONASTIER (April 4th)

1- SUMMARY OF VISITS



When we arrived, we visited the "Musée des Croyances populaires". It is an ethnographic museum which presents some legends of our department in the form of figurines. We were guided by Patrice Rey who has created and painted about 200 characters. He explained to us the difference between a tale which is written and a legend which is oral. Patrice Rey has interviewed some old people who have told him legends. Some of those legends are very old and have passed down through generations. They were told in little villages during the evenings and this tradition disappeared when people had TV in their home. People were also very isolated due to the altitude and the snow. So they spent some of their free time to tell stories. I was told that one third of the legends were typical of our region whereas the two other thirds could be found somewhere else. I'm going to speak about some of these legends he described us.

At first, Patrice Rey explained to us all the things that people did when a wizard had dried the milk of the cows. One solution was to make cows drink the urine's wizard !



Then we learnt about the "Draye de Saugues": it is a malefic horse which threw the children into the river so that they got drowned. We can compare it to the "Kelpie" which is a metamorphic

creature mentioned in several myths and legends from Scottish folklore. It has usually been described as appearing as a horse, but is able to adopt a human shape.



The "Draye de Saugues"

Then Patrice Rey showed us the "Drac" which is a mischievous elf which can turn into evil, werewolf, vampire or dragon. It is a malefic creature who likes bad jokes and can kill people. It can be compared to the Scottish "brownie" which is a household spirit. But the "brownie" is a nice creature, coming out at night while the owners of the house are asleep and perform various chores and farming tasks. Robert Louis Stevenson even thought that one night a "brownie" helped him to write one of his books !



The bad jokes of the "Drac"

Patrice Rey presented the witches and especially Jeannette Revergade who lived in the village of Chadron in the 14th century. I learnt that the last trial for witchcraft dated from the beginning of the 19th century. Witches were often condemned because they cured people with plants and asked some money for their potions, any potions ! For example, they could give a husband a potion to support his wife!! In our region as in Scotland during the reign of James VI, there were witch hunts.

After, we spoke about medicine in ancient times. Witches used medicine "by signature" to indicate the cure. People practiced medicine "by analogy". For instance, headache could be cured by eating nuts because a brain looks like a nut ! They used plants or animals such as snails to treat themselves. They had stones to protect themselves against venom or lightning. In Scotland people thought that Celtic glass was a prehistoric stone which could protect against lightning.

We spoke about some beliefs about the magic powers of water sources. For example, the source of Queyrières would make kids intelligent and the one of Bellenos would have the power to heal !

To finish, Patrice Rey told us about a haunted house : the "Moulin de Perbet" in which the Joubert family lived. In this house, there were paranormal events like stones which came out of the wall, flew and became very hot. Philomène and Marie were possessed by the devil. It is said that the priest of the village would have been attacked by silverware. Philomène knew the past of the priest. It is also reported that the dead mother of the girls appeared to her daughters at night and taught them prayers backwards. Their mother-in-law drew metal objects on her. Those paranormal events have been attested by more than 400 witnesses. So a lot of journalists went to the "Moulin de Perbet" in 1901 and some of them were from Edinburgh.



Philomène Joubert

At the end, Patrice Rey explained to us he collected all these tales for an association of Occitan studies. AS in Scotland where Gaelic was prohibited at school, people Patrice Rey met didn't want to speak in "patois". Then, Patrice Rey carved and painted wooden figurines to tell the history of the music in the Massif Central region. Finally, he decided to do the same about the legends and after this exhibition became a museum.

We also spoke about wisps ; people thought they were the spirits of dead people.



Wisps

After Janet Darne, an English native speaker gave us information about the abbey of Le Monastier. The Abbey Church of the Monastier dates from the 11th century. Its patron saint is a martyr called Saint Chaffre. We learnt some vocabulary of the church such as flying buttress,

ambulatory, organ, chevet, nave... The abbey has different colours due to different stones : there are volcanic stones which are red and arkose from the village of Blavozy which is white. We also spoke a little about Robert Louis Stevenson, the Scottish writer who travelled during twelve days from Le Monastier to Saint Jean du Gard with a donkey called Modestine. We saw the hotel where Stevenson slept when he was in Le Monastier.



The chevet of the church



The organ of the Abbey Church

2- WHAT I LIKED

I really enjoyed the visit of the museum even if it was too cold. I liked to listen to the legends and especially the stories of the "Drac" because it can turn into evil, werewolf, vampire or dragon. Patrice Rey gave also a lot of details which were funny like the spring which can make kids intelligent

3- WHAT I DID NOT LIKE

I did not like very much the presentation of the Abbey Church because I am not fond of churches. I thought too Mrs Darne could have spoken more about the travel of Stevenson.

4- WHAT SURPRISED ME

I was surprised by the "Drac" because it is a funny elf and it was used to excuse various facts. I was also amazed by a potion which can be given to a wife to calm her ! To finish, I was astonished by the events of the haunted house which reminded me the scary movie "The Exorcist" !

5- WAS IT MY FIRST VISIT ?

Yes, it was my first visit in this museum and in the abbey church.