

COB-PEELING

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THE train with the tall elegant engine left Graz at 6 a.m. on Sunday and got to the hamlet of Krottendorf at about 8. The road to Ligist wound for a mile between chilly hills where the sun came late and the mist lingered, but Ligist was round the corner and in open country: a remote, minute little watering-place of the old monarchy. We were in very good time for Mass at 8.30. It turned out to be Harvest Festival and the church was decorated with splendid ubiquitous fruit, and with maize straw plaits and crowns of ancient design, with maize cobs hanging like inverted orange candles from lamp stands and rails. For such a small church the singing was remarkably good: ambitious, as it is apt to be in the villages, but, thank God, not operatic. The peasants and many of the coal-mining families of this scattered parish put up a brave showing. Before and after Mass the men gathered on the market-place to exchange news and views and settle any business that had cropped up since last Sunday. The hairdresser was open for the occasion, and there was excellent soup as well as beer to be had all day at the local pub—and no doubt Wiener Schnitzel too, for those with money on them. We sampled the soup before starting on our climb.

I had done this walk before, in late winter, when the paths were all ice, and in early winter, when we walked up in dense fog and came out in sunshine at the top, and when darkness overtook us on the way down; and now it was mid-autumn, with the trees still in their glory, the grapes on the south walls ripening, the chestnuts bursting their pods, and fallen pears ready for gathering and turning into perry. But farmhands were all busy elsewhere, Sunday or no Sunday. Our hosts lived at the very top, a place surely exceedingly like heaven. The view may run for miles downhill and over rolling country, or it may look down on a sea of mist; but here the sun and air are pure beyond a doubt, and the town dweller can only think: If anything on earth is good, this is good.

But our hosts were busy. 'It is not the ideal day for you', they said. 'We must get the corn cobs in for the peeling this evening.'

After dinner they offered us seats in the sun, but it suited us better to join them, going across to the great field where the forest of maize stood rustling, but the cobs had been plucked and flung into heaps along the alleys. We tossed them into the cart, brought it down to the farm, carried the cobs in basket-loads into the outhouse where they were piled in a great mountain in the middle of the floor, and then went back to the field, and so it went on till it was late afternoon and time to go. But already a question had been asked and answered. 'It is a pity you shouldn't see the peeling, it is quite an event: couldn't you stay the night?' —Well, if it was not too much trouble . . . I could, and go down the hill in the morning for the early train back. Someone else was going down then, so I would not get lost. So I stayed. We worked till nightfall, then the mountain of cobs in the outhouse had to be given some sort of shape, and trestle benches were placed along the walls all round it. We had a supper of boiled chestnuts and dried-pear lardy-bread, with coffee and milk, and then hung about till the evening proceedings began. Gradually people drifted in, members of farmers' families living one, two, five miles off, up hill and down dale. The girls set to work, the young men stood about and guffawed. We sat on the benches round the cobs, the older men had their own corner with specialized work to do; ours was merely to strip the cobs of their sheaths, peeling off leaf by leaf till only three leaves were left, which were bent back for a handle. It needed doing quickly and neatly. We tossed the stripped cobs into baskets which filled rapidly and were carried over to the men. They bound them together in bunches by their leafy handles, ready for tying along the beams and rafters of the loft and balcony. There were snatches of part-songs from one corner, and in the other the peasant village-mayor would start up a jodel, so the hours went by cheerfully, and when the mountain of cobs was reduced to half its size, there must have been about sixty people there. The huge cider jug was passed from hand to hand for the thirsty to drink from, and sometimes a small glass of home-distilled brandy went round too. The girls all behaved decorously and worked without stopping, neatly and efficiently. The boys lounged about, helped a bit, teased a bit, rather loutish.

At eleven it was finished. The young men cleared the room and in no time the accordion-player started a tune and the fun of

the evening began. They all dance as though born to it, these Austrian peasants, waltzes, polkas and one-steps, with lots of going round and round and round, all very rhythmical. It was more subdued than it might have been, for the weather had been set fair for weeks and the peeling had gone on almost nightly at neighbours' houses, uninterrupted by rainy days for a rest. So all were a bit tired and went off home before one o'clock.

Waking early next morning was not easy, but delightful as soon as done. There was a warm sun already, so benign and kind, with none of the bone-chilling early mists of town Octobers. These we met at the bottom, in Ligist. But we had had our golden hour walking down the slopes of that hill-side, and still glowed with it.

CATECHISM FOR ADULTS: VIII. 'He shall come to judge'

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CHRIST, who suffered, died and rose again, was exalted to reign with God. In the Apocalypse, St John sees him 'in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like to the son of man'. (I, 13.) He sees Christ in his glory and hears his voice: 'I am the First and the Last, And alive and was dead. And behold I am living for ever and ever and have the keys of death and of hell (I, 17-18). In his resurrection and ascension Christ is shown to be the one in whom we were chosen 'before the foundation of the world' (Ephesians I, 4), the Word who was with God. The pre-existent word is identified with Jesus 'in whom we have redemption through his blood' and in whom the mystery of God's will is made known (Ephesians I, 7-9). Being glorified, having won the victory, he is now ruling with power—now 'all things are under his feet'. (Ephesians I, 22.) Now the eternal rule of Christ is revealed, in that his presence constituted, through grace and sacrament, a kingdom. He rules in the Church, which is the germ of the new creation, for the Church is the form that the rule of Christ takes in faithful souls. This rule of Christ is