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Autor:	R.B.
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Autumn Journey

When autumn arrives, the urge to wander comes over us again. A new spell draws us — the maturity of the earth, the solemn stillness of the distances, and the arch of the sky rising higher than at any other moment of the year. Nature, in this yearly Sabbath, takes on fresh clarity and colour, as if it wished to linger in its ripeness before it fades and freezes, while the realisation that the end is at hand makes men enjoy every day with deeper gratitude. They no longer descend in swarms, as in holiday-time, and the hotel-keeper looks kindly on the few guests the year brings him even into the late autumn. Now the earth belongs to the traveller as never before: he can walk freely over the stubble-fields and mown meadows, gleaning the joys of summer which are slowly turning into the delights of autumn.

Whoever has the good fortune to be able to linger in the mountains sees this resting world slowly withdraw into itself, away from the strangers who had come into it. Shooting has begun: the farmer will vanish for whole days and seldom returns without some booty — a mighty stag on a sledge, or a chamois slung over the shoulders. The huntsmen's faces are blackened with wind and weather, their clothes are dirty and torn. Even the cautious marmot falls victim, and his precious fat must take the road to the chemist's.

But even the stranger can lose himself in the solitude of some primeval forest, where mushrooms in endless variety cover the ground and the tree-trunks. The farmers are already talking of the first fall of snow, of all the work to be done in the wood, and at last the great procession of cowherds returns home from the pastures with all its bells ringing. In places on high mountain ledges where a plantation has flourished round the village, the berries of the mountain ash gleam orange-red against the forest background, and the woods and rocks look the darker for their autumnal profusion. But even the forest has its colour. An autumn beech seldom glows so red as when it stands solitary above the valley framed in green pine-tops, with the setting sun behind it turning it to flame.

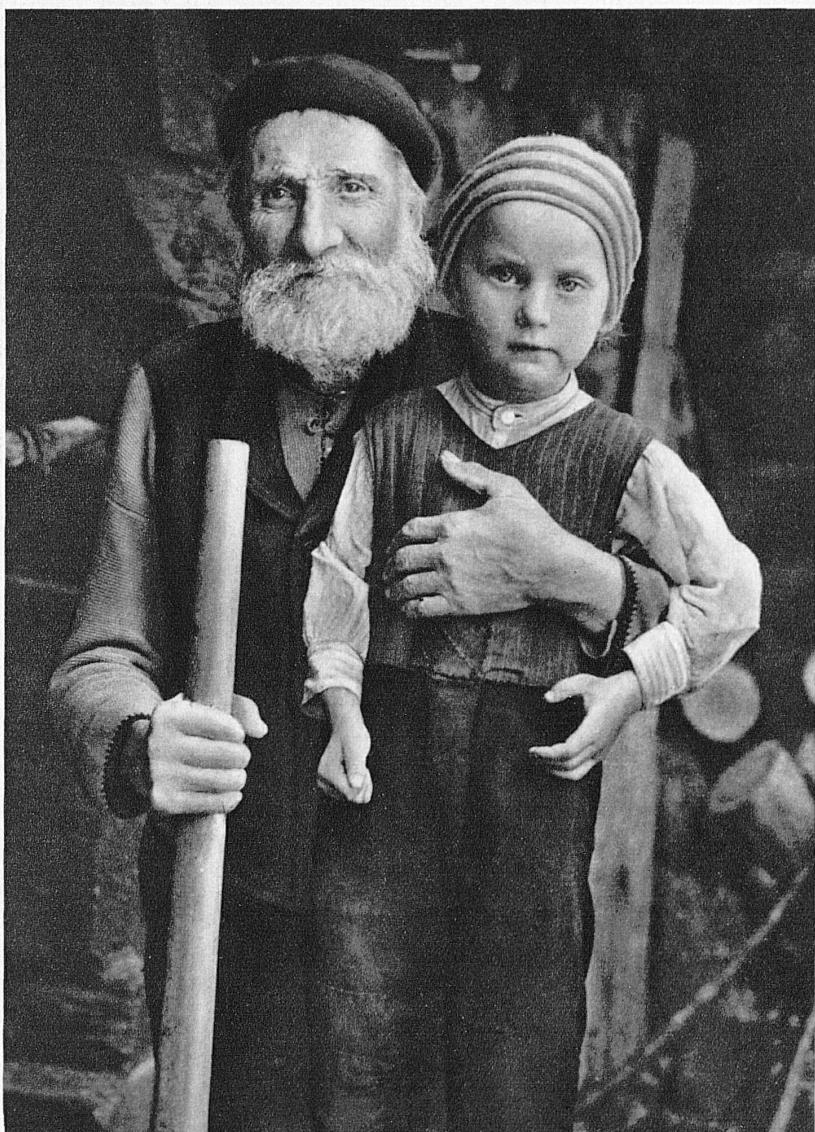
Still deeper is the joy men find in the work of their own hands standing in contrast to the wildness of nature. The red-fruited apple-tree in the garden in the valley, the sunflower hanging its heavy, flaming head, and the magnificent colours of the dahlias are the living tokens of the blessing unfolding in fruit and flower. On the narrow, upland fields, the women are hacking the root-crops out of the dark earth, the rotting leaves, smouldering in heaps, spread their autumnal scent over all the roads. It lies like incense on the fields mingling its autumn melancholy with the damp evening air. A mixed wood borders the road to the valley. The delicate needles of the larch hang like tassels, and by the wayside the berberis and traveller's joy were the first to colour their leaves and flaunt their ripe fruit. Now the lake below gleams deeper blue. The vine-leaves were veined with gold before they turned purple. In the parks the planes and chestnuts strew the lawns with yellow and the falling leaves spread their bitter-sweet smell on the air. The harvesters fill their sacks with fruit or their casks with grapes: it is as though the table of the earth were spread with good things. The mountains shed their veils of mist and stand clear like lasting



Bigorio — Tessin

thoughts above all this change of ripeness and decay, while their upper ridges are already covered with fresh snow. In the towns, autumn is on every market stall: it never looked so gay, and the streets seem wider, as though more light had found its way into them. Here there is a whiff of fermenting wine, there the scent of apples. To wander through this fruitfulness is to know the beauty of the earth, to take it into the heart like a ripe fruit to feed on when winter comes.

R. B.



Grandfather and grandchild from the mountains — Grossvater und Enkel — Grand-père et petit-fils montagnards — Nonno e nipote dalle montagne

Phot.: Meylan