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ON AN ITALIAN FARM

(continued from previous page)

cow (the Germans took two good ones last year), one heifer, two working bullocks, five goats, 32 sheep, a sow, a boar, two porkers and five piglets, five fowls and a number of chickens, a donkey and two dogs. None of the animals were in good condition, probably due to the effects of the mid-summer weather. The cows, goats and sheep are taken into the hills each day for grazing, to be returned each night and housed on the ground floor of the farmhouse. In winter they are housed and fed hard feed with occasional foraging spells outside. The animals provide food in the form of milk (not used fresh), cheese, bacon

later, but follows a similar tedious manual process. The cob stumps are used for fuel.

The tobacco is planted from seedlings early in May, and for a few months has to be carefully hoed and weeded. In August the leaves are ready for picking. The larger ones are plucked by hand, leaving the smaller ones at the top of the plants to be gathered in second pickings. The leaves are placed loosely on trays carried by the girls on their heads to a storeroom where, the same day, they are threaded with long steel needles on to a string. This is a long, tedious job. Tobacco which takes about four hours to pick requires about eight hours



When Allied soldiers arrived in Italy peasants came begging for scraps of food. A typical scene is shown in this photograph.

and eggs. Meat of any kind is very rarely eaten. The sheep are shorn and a rough yarn is spun by hand.

Harvesting the Crops

The grain crops are sown in November, and harvested in June-July. They are cut by a sickle and tied into small "stooks" which are threshed on a circular concrete or stone slab about 20 feet in diameter. Sometimes the usual flail is used, but I saw a straight stick also being employed. Then the rough straw is pitched outwards, and, finally, is piled outside, where it is made up into huge bundles in sacking and carried on the girls' heads to a barn or stack for the winter. There is still a heap of grain and husks on the threshing ring, and, to clear this, it is pitched for hours high into the air whenever a breeze springs up. The husks and light straw blow into a large heap outside the ring, and the grain remains. This is finally sieved, carted inside, and stored in heaps, as sacks are very scarce. All the straw is used for stock food, and the husks for floor covering for the stock in winter. Even then, its usefulness is not lost, as it is dug back into the ground when it is dirty. The same thing is done with the straw stumps left standing in the fields, which are all gathered and stacked when harvesting is over. The threshing of maize cobs is done much

to thread. The strings are tied on to wooden frames and the leaves dry in the sun for eight days, hung inside for a few weeks and then baled in sacks. As a crop there is terrific labour involved, but it does bring in a lump sum of money. The leaves, even by New Zealand standards, were small, but the quality of the little we tried was fair for smoking.

Crop Rotation

A rough form of crop rotation is employed. It is not scientific or planned, but the small patches are used for different crops as far as possible. The variety includes only grain, tomatoes, bean crops, and tobacco, and very occasionally a field may be left fallow for a season. The cultivation is so intensive that there is practically no weed problem. Blackberry is common, but never out of control. The ground is regularly built up by the hoeing of any available green stuff, the messy straw from the stables in winter and, when available, a little lime. The only crop which showed signs of sickness while we were there was a small area of grapevines which had produced a few bunches of very small grapes.

Family Life

The family life is of interest, as it has many features common to a large

(continued on next page)

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