INTRODUCTION

FOR those who know Austria Kruckenhausner's pictorial anthology should have a pleasant evocative power. Even though they may never have seen the majority of the individual sights he records with such loving care, his choice is so skilful that they will recall similar country churches, cloisters, roofs, courtyards or organ lofts teeming with music-making putti. His very method of grouping his motifs strengthens this impression of the typical. Following closely upon each other these images of porches or towers, of carvings or stucco are sufficiently varied not to look monotonous, and sufficiently alike to fuse and telescope in our minds merging, perhaps, with the memories of similar things we have seen on our own travels. For more often than not, what we recall from these travels is also distilled by our memory into typical configurations that may have lost their individual identity but retained a distinctive flavour. It takes an artist to catch this elusive feeling on the wing. The incomparable Osbert Lancaster with his flair for the authentic accents of a style, a type or a landscape has exploited this skill in his satires and travel books; so, in a different way, has Saul Steinberg. Unlike these draughtsmen the photographer is not free to vary the motif and retain only the characteristic, the frequent or the striking. His tools are selection, angles, lighting and juxtaposition. And yet the art historian may sometimes envy the power of these tools to bring out the character of a collective style. How much easier it is thus to present the essential physiognomy of late Gothic vaults or of Baroque cupolas than by a verbal analysis of their structural properties! How much more convincing are demonstrations of certain elusive continuities across the chronological limits of period styles than are our attempts to find a formula for regional traditions.

It is with such questions in mind, I submit, that we should approach Kruckenhausner's collection of photographs. For it goes without saying that the search for the typical must occasionally obscure the individual and the unique. Fragments of Michael Pacher's great St.-Wolfgang-Altar turn up like snatches of a melody in various places, but neither the whole altar nor its enchanting site is included. For this book is emphatically not intended as a tourist's guide to the principal beauties of Austria's landscape and art. For views of that country's most famous sights and monuments we must turn to the many excellent books of topographical illustrations that provide this information. What we find here is a subjective selection of more or less "hidden" treasures that struck the artist's eye. His programme excluded the styles of the nineteenth and twentieth century, it even cut out the whole art of painting as unsuitable for his medium. On the other hand it did not confine the roving artist strictly within the frontiers of present-day Austria, since at least three of his illustrations come from the South Tyrol that has belonged to Italy since 1919. But neither this lack of precision nor this extreme selectiveness disturbs the cumulative effect of this sequence as a composite picture of a country's artistic physiognomy.
True, Kruckenhausers opening section transcends this question of local traditions, however closely it may be bound up with it. He illustrates the building in its landscape setting in a way that convinces us of the effortless harmony that seems to prevail between architecture and natural scenery in many an Alpine village. Not that this harmony is peculiar to the Alps. We all remember similar happy configurations from other old cities and villages of the Old and even the New World. No doubt our habits and subjective reactions have their share in this feeling of “rightness.” Our nostalgia for the allegedly good old days and for the simple life envelops those sights in a deceptive haze that hides from us the tensions and the misfits of the past. The age and rarity of old buildings moreover renders them venerable even to the most hardened sceptic and will induce him to forget or forgive whatever may look arbitrary or badly solved in the joining of walls or placing of stairs. Few of us will ever arrive in front of an old castle or monastery in a frame of mind that favours criticism. We would no more wish the keep to be higher, the cupola to be steeper or the window to be lower than we would consciously wish the lines of the mountain to run differently. After a distance of time the past simply becomes part of nature, it merges with the scene. We feel so strongly that this type of building “belongs” in this kind of landscape that those could be forgiven who put down this reaction to simple conditioning. But is this all? The answer to this question is of much more than academic importance. It impinges on the urgent problem of the preservation of our heritage which is not only of relevance to the tourist trade. Have we no right to feel that this natural balance between landscape and architecture was once a reality and that it is really menaced by the modes of building that came in the wake of the industrial revolution, those standardized and mechanical “developments” that everywhere violate the beauty of the countryside? Will our garages and blocks of flats, our factories and our motels ultimately mellow and merge into the background as do the farm buildings and shrines on these pages? Will pylons look at least as innocuous as telegraph poles, cars as homely as oxcarts and television masts no more disturbing than the large clocks on the towers of village churches? One would like to hope so, but the chances are small. For there is at least one objective sense in which the old building can be said to merge into the landscape which can well be studied in these pages. Their variety in shape and in texture, the absence of regularity and uniformity softens the contrast between natural and man-made forms and facilitates that easy transition from trees to roofs, from peaks to towers that is so well brought out in some of the photographs. They confirm, I believe, the theories which were first worked out in eighteenth-century England by those critics who meditated on the nature of “Picturesque Beauty.” It was a category invented to account for the requirements of the English garden — in contrast to the English country house built according to the severe laws of Palladian proportion. The villa is beautiful, the thatched cottage surrounded by creepers is picturesque, precisely because of the variety and irregularity of its appearance. Repetition and commercial exploitation have rendered the picturesque suspect. The thatched cottage within briers recalls the tea-cosy and “ye olde coffee shoppe.” The functional architecture of the twentieth century glories in the hard-edged beauty of honest efficiency. It is only recently that the question has obtruded itself with increasing urgency on our architects and town planners whether the older methods and conditions of architecture that gave us the “picturesque” town, village or castle did not embody some other secret that eludes us? How can we recapture that feeling of “organic” unity with nature which a great modern architect such as Frank Lloyd Wright never ceased to demand, how can we escape the wasteland of “built-up areas” and give shape and meaning to our mushrooming towns? What makes for the superiority of traditional styles which was dimly felt and yet so badly traduced by the “historical” styles of the nineteenth century? Perhaps
the answer may lie in the fact that these styles are indeed traditional and thus the result of a relatively slow process of evolution and adaptation. In such a process one might expect features which are felt to be obtruding or disturbing to be gradually eliminated from the builder’s repertory. If one farmhouse was less successful and looked odd and alien in its surroundings, the next builder might unconsciously feel his way towards a better solution that avoids the mistakes of the first. This would be the conservative, the “Burkeian” case for the slow evolution of tools and styles in the settled life of relatively static societies, conditions that guarantee the successful adaptation to function and surroundings. Our aesthetic satisfaction with the results would thus be an intuitive acknowledgement of the “rightness” of these solutions within the requirements of a country’s life and landscape. Nor would this “rightness” be restricted to utilitarian aspects. The steeple of the village church marking and accentuating the centre of the community’s life and worship, the castle on the hill that slowly developed from a fortress into a commodious residence of the local Lord, the wealthy monastery set apart in its large estate, they all gradually find the form that suits both their function and their significance within the fabric of a country’s life. This continuous significance, moreover, this sense of growth may transcend the changes of style and fashion that were bound to occur in the long history of a building. Few works of architecture were ever built precisely as they were envisaged on the drawing board. Few of the churches and castles illustrated in these pages did not undergo severe radical changes, additions and subtractions in the course of centuries; yet the Romanesque steeple seems to blend in with the Gothic nave, the Gothic vault with the Baroque organ almost as effortlessly as the whole seemed to blend with the landscape. Is our tolerance towards such incongruities of style yet another symptom of our sentimental indulgence or are stylistic hybrids more offensive to the doctrinaire than they are to the art lover? No doubt such clashes can jar. No doubt it happened quite often that a new generation despised and rejected the handiwork of their forebears and ignored or destroyed as much of it as was economically feasible. But there are other cases where we can prove that earlier phases of a building were respected and preserved and the new additions were made to fit in with the old. The most convincing examples of such tact and piety are the façade of St. Stephen’s cathedral in Vienna (only partly visible on page 64) in which the Gothic extension was clearly designed to develop and echo the Romanesque core, and the Gothic vaults built by the Baroque architect Munggenast in Zwettl (page 162). But why should not others also have been responsive to this task of fitting the new to the old? Would a designer of a Baroque organ for a Gothic loft not quite instinctively have taken the shape of the church into account, however much his vocabulary of swags and scrolls may have differed from the tracery of the gallery (page 181)? Is not the story told that Meinrad Guggenbichler of Mondsee who carved the Baroque altars of St. Wolfgang (pages 202, 203) pleaded for the retention of Pacher’s Gothic masterpiece on the high altar (pages 195, 223, 248, 251)? It was only the doctrinaire nineteenth century that invariably advocated a clean sweep and a restoration in the “pure Gothic style.” The results, of course, were the worst unintentional hybrids of devotional art that crowded out so much that was genuine. If Austria’s churches are still rich in the picturesque medleys of styles this is due to the fact that Austria was spared a Viollet le Duc and other learned gothicizers.

The typical Austrian village church combines a late Gothic structure with a late Baroque stucco decoration. This is not, perhaps, a mixture which will immediately appeal to English taste. For neither the late Gothic style of the fifteenth century that produced the complex vaults and the richly
carved altars frequently displayed in the following pages nor the exuberant decorations of the Baroque with which our author is in love obey the canons of taste and restraint on which English critics have insisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A glance through this book will show that for the Austrian craftsman richness and profusion, splendour and variety were never values to be shunned as was the case both in Italy and in the North during the predominance of the classical doctrine. The local builders and carvers were never inhibited by fear of being "vulgar" or "ornate." It is true that their idiom on the whole remained heavier and less capricious than the extreme styles of flamboyant Gothic in Spain or the wildest fancies of the Bavarian Rococo. But like the English Grinling Gibbons they loved the display of intricacy and ingenuity. Faced with the traditional sneer that their design resembled a wedding cake they might well have retorted — but what's wrong with a wedding cake?

But though the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* of 1934 still gives as the first definition of the term *baroque* "grotesque, whimsical," the writings of Sacheverell Sitwell and the influx of art historians from Germany and Austria have softened the traditional English resistance against this Popish style of extravagance and over-statement. Maybe the time has come when an English tourist or reader can respond with a feeling of "rightness" to these rocking *putti* and billowing clouds. Austrians at any rate take these impressions as much for granted when they enter a church as they expect the scent of incense and the sound of eighteenth-century church music. Was it not Haydn who replied to the reproach that his Masses sounded too gay and worldly that he could not help this — the thought of heaven filled him with so much joy?

Coming down the Danube on his musical journey in 1772 Dr. Burney noticed that "all the way to Vienna the common people, in the public houses, and the labourers, at their work, divert themselves with singing in two or sometimes more parts ... almost all the young people that were walking by the waterside, were frequently singing, and never in less than two parts."

"It is not easy" (continues the doctor) "to account for this facility of singing in different parts, in the people of one country, more than in those of another: whether it arises in Roman Catholic countries, from the frequency of hearing music sung in parts, in their churches, I cannot say."

Dr. Burney’s observation is relevant to this book only because it raises the question how a tradition is created and spreads, how certain habits of form and certain standards of skill penetrate far beyond the narrow sphere of the professional master active in a nation’s capital, and how it imbues the whole life of a country. Polyphony was once a learned style that was indeed spread by the Church before it became the property of folk music. But this enjoyment of music in its turn provided the fertile soil from which sprang the flower of the Viennese classics.

To be sure, the situation in the visual arts is not quite the same, since fewer people can learn to carve than to sing. But if Krueckenhauser’s book is intended to demonstrate anything it is the spread of certain forms and standards far beyond the main centres deep into the remotest valleys. Here, too, the impulses mainly came from the Church. The historian can often trace their origin into distant times and lands; in Austria he may be struck by two outstanding features he does not usually expect to find together — the timelag that often separates the country’s artistic production from the prevailing styles of Western Europe and a profusion of local talent that guarantees high standards.

The strangely barbaric thirteenth-century sculpture of Schöngraben (pages 216–19) is indeed a remote flowering of the Romanesque which had long been superseded in France by the beauty of
Gothic statuary. It is only in the fourteenth century that Austrian Gothic responds immediately to European developments originating from Italy, from Paris and from Prague. The fifteenth century finds Austria again hitched off from those dramatic changes that overcame the arts of Flanders and of Florence, though the South Tyrolean Michael Pacher was in contact with the art of Mantegna, and the master of Kefermarkt (pages 244–5) is a match to the craftsmen of Nuremberg. The Renaissance movement as such nearly passed Austria by, the great exception almost proving the rule — for the cenotaph that the Emperor Maximilian erected in Innsbruck (pages 198–9) harks back in its themes to the vanished glories of medieval chivalry. Even the wave of the Baroque that originated in Rome reached Austria relatively late, having passed through the modifying filter of Piedmontese variants and Lombard pattern books. For this new style was largely carried to Austria by migrant builders and decorators from Northern Italy who wandered north in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries offering their services to princes and parishes who wanted their buildings modernized.

The role of these humble virtuosi is not perhaps sufficiently appreciated even now. Understandably official Austrian art history prefers to talk of Prandtauer the local man who built the glorious monastery of Melk rather than of Beduzzi the travelling "theatrical engineer" who supplied designs for its decorative details. Whatever their mutual share, it is clear that the indigenous craftsmen knew how to profit from the Italian invasion and how to absorb and revitalize the message that had thus reached them from distant Rome. The wealth of commissions that came to them in the wake of the Counter-reformation is reflected in these pages. Of course masters such as Fischer von Erlach and Hildebrand in Salzburg and Vienna were in touch with international developments, but the broad stream of the Austrian Baroque kept its impetus after the neo-classical reaction was well on the way in France and even in Rome. To be sure, artistic quality need never suffer because it is practised in a backwater. Even Bach's music was old-fashioned in its own time, and Tiepolo was something of an anachronism even in Italy. Yet in both these famous examples the special conditions under which these masters created gave them enough zest and confidence not to be overawed by changes in fashions elsewhere. The same, in a way, may be true of Austria's leading masters. For though they found themselves in a country near the fringe of Christendom they were yet near the centre of power — the family domain of Europe's dominant dynasty.

In no country of Europe is the feudal medieval past closer than it is in Austria. The writer of these lines still remembers the funeral of Francis Joseph in 1916, that sombre wartime pageantry marking the end of a reign that had started in 1848 with the suppression of the liberal revolution. One used to look with wonder and incredulity at the full title of the Emperor as it was printed on the title-page of the Krippenkalender, the Austrian equivalent of Whitaker's Almanack. For this title reflected a conception of sovereignty utterly different from that of a head of a state. The monarchy was no "state," it was an accumulation of domains and of partly fictitious claims that had been gathered up by the ruling family in the course of many centuries. The Emperor of Austria was also apostolic King of Hungary, of Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Lodomeria and Illyria — not to speak of the title of King of Jerusalem he still claimed. He was Archduke of Austria, Grand Duke of Tuscany (in name only), and of Cracow, Duke of Lorraine (by title), of Salzburg, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and Bukowina, Grand Prince of Transylvania, Margrave of Moravia, Duke of Upper and Lower Silesia, of Modena, Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla (again without effective rights), of Auschwitz and Zator, Teschen, Friaul, Ragusa and Zara, Count (of princely rank) of Habsburg and Tyrol, of Kyburg, Gorizia and Gradisca, Prince of Trient and Brixen, Margrave of the high and the low Lausitz and in Istria,
Count of Hohenems, Feldkirch, Bregenz, Sonnenberg, etc., Lord of Trieste, Cattaro and the Windisch Mark, Grand Voivode of Serbia, and so almost ad infinitum.

Only a full commentary of this motley list would provide a framework for the history of that region that was to become Austria. One point would rapidly emerge from such a history. If the Nazi crowds of 1938 greeted Hitler with the chant of Heim ins Reich (return home to the Reich) they were falsifying history through equivocation. The Reich or Empire of which the Austrian domains once formed a part was not of course the German Reich but the Holy Roman Empire, that strange fiction created by or for Charlemagne according to which the Roman Emperors had at last found a successor in the King of the Franks. This Empire, it will be remembered, was elective and subject to ratification by the Pope, and the history of central Europe in the subsequent centuries is largely the history of the intrigues and suffering this unrealistic institution involved. In the early Middle Ages the region around Vienna had become known as the Ostmark, the Eastern Marches, which developed into a prosperous duchy under the Babenberg dynasty, one of whose representatives is known to English history as the captor of Richard Lionheart who had to be ransomed from his prison in Dürnstein (1193). But Austria's destiny was really decided towards the end of the thirteenth century when the usual quarrels among the Electors resulted in the choice of a comparatively weak and landless Swiss Count, Rudolf of Habsburg. To assert his authority the newly elected King (he never had himself crowned Emperor) turned on the King of Bohemia who had been invested by Richard of Cornwall (a previous choice of the Electors) with the fiefs of the Babenbergs. Having defeated the Bohemian Rudolf bestowed the fief on his two sons (1282) and thus his dynasty became a power to be reckoned with.

Austria's subsequent history is the history of the Habsburg dynasty trying to enlarge and fortify these family domains and thus securing a base from which to enforce their election as Emperors. The accession of each of the Austrian lands is connected with another shake of the kaleidoscope of power. Marriages remaining without issue, heirs dying before coming of age, dynastic alliances, arbitrations and legal pretences all play their part in this immensely complex power game. The "will of the people" of course did not count any more in the Austrian lands than it did elsewhere in those feudal ages. If the nobility and the "Estates" proved recalcitrant they were crushed — and only the Swiss peasants who inhabited the Habsburgs' country of origin succeeded in eluding their grip. For like all medieval sovereigns the Habsburgs really looked at their lands as on their family estate; strangely enough they were very slow even in accepting the political advantage of primogeniture, the inheritance of the whole domains by the eldest son. Countless times the patchwork of properties was divided up between a ruler's heirs and without the high rate of infant mortality prevailing in those centuries the Habsburg power would soon have been dissipated by fragmentation and family feuds. As it was, the lands usually reverted again to the surviving line and though there were plenty of setbacks in the Habsburgs' bid for European power their estates kept extending.

Paradoxically perhaps it was during the first of these setbacks in the fourteenth century when the Imperial crown had gone to the Luxemburgs residing in Prague that one of the Habsburg dukes, Rudolf IV, made the most determined effort to raise the power, prosperity and prestige of his lands. By means of brazenly concocted "privileges" he demanded the unprecedented title of "archduke" for himself and his successors and thus staked a claim for the Habsburgs to stand higher in the pecking order than any other family. It was from these foundations that the house began its spectacular rise that is often summed up in the Latin tag: bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube (let others wage war, you, happy Austria, marry). For Albert, Duke of Austria, married the daughter of the Emperor
Sigismund and thus come to unite in his person the crowns of Bohemia and of Hungary. He died in 1439 soon after his election but Frederick the Habsburg Duke of Styria now took over the inheritance and soon also the Imperial dignity. Though both the Bohemian and the Hungarian crowns eluded him, though he even temporarily lost Vienna first to his brother and then to the Hungarians, this notoriously inept monarch transformed the situation of his house by marrying his son Maximilian to the daughter of the Duke of Burgundy in 1477. Their son Philip married Joan of Castile, the heiress to the Spanish dominions, in 1496 and so Maximilian's grandson Charles V (who also inherited the Austrian possessions in 1519) stood at the pinnacle of power at the very time when the Spanish conquistadores seized parts of the New World; whence his often quoted boast that the sun never set in his domains. Geographically that was not far from the truth, but the reign of Charles V also witnessed the emergence of three distinctive threats to the tranquillity of Habsburg land-collecting — the success of the Reformation which undermined the religious foundations of the Holy Roman Empire, the menace from the Turks who crushed Hungary and advanced as far as Vienna (1529), and the shift of sea power towards the Atlantic seaboard that followed on the age of discovery. This is not the place, of course, to recite the crises and sufferings that ensued for the Austrian lands during the religious wars of the seventeenth century. Protestantism had made many converts among the population and even among the nobility and the means by which these recalcitrant subjects were coerced back into the fold of the Church or expelled the country do not make pleasant reading. An Austrian bully will still use the menacing expression: "I'll make you a Catholic yet."

Moreover the ascendancy of the Spanish line over the Austrian cousins gradually led to the dominance of Spanish etiquette in the Vienna court with its international Catholic culture. The political turning point came when the Turks failed in their second siege of Vienna in 1683 and the Austrian armies under Prince Eugene of Savoy embarked on a war of liberation that extended the frontiers of the Habsburg domain as far as Transylvania. It was in these years of buoyancy during the first decades of the eighteenth century with the victory of the Catholic camp assured at home and abroad, that the Baroque style established itself in the Austrian landscape. The extinction of the male line after the death of Charles VI in 1740 led to a fresh crisis when Frederick of Prussia challenged the succession of Maria Theresa. Yet the pretense of the Holy Roman Empire continued till Napoleon's assumption of the Imperial title in 1804 led Francis of Habsburg to assume the title of Emperor of Austria. The humiliations which the Habsburgs suffered under Napoleon still led to one happy result — in the general rearrangement of the map the independent Archbishopric of Salzburg, that jewel of a city, was joined to Austria.

Who, except professional historians still remembers these dates and deals? What is remembered is the emergence of Vienna as one of Europe's cultural centres, however much a Metternich might try to seal it off against the dangerous influences of foreign ideas. He could not prevent the contagion of nationalism that erupted in 1848 and first led to the loss of most of the Monarchy's North Italian possessions. Yet, by a succession of compromises and balancing acts the Habsburgs maintained themselves on the top of that unstable pyramid while the industrial revolution and universal education brought the explosive issue of languages in the polyglot monarchy increasingly to the fore. Defeat in the first world war and the idea of "self-determination" completed the disintegration of the ancient feudal edifice and brought the German-speaking subjects of the Empire face to face with the question of their own identity. Their conflicting answers to this question are writ large across the tragic history of the last thirty years. It looks as if their forcible incorporation in Hitler's Reich had convinced many Austrians of the continued relevance of their different past.
This need not imply that they must take refuge in nostalgia for splendours that were often dearly bought. Indeed, it is understandable that many Austrians prefer to remind the world of the achievement of Vienna's socialists in their welfare work or of the world fame of such men as Freud, Mahler, Schönberg or Kokoschka. The Vienna Circle in philosophy, the Vienna schools of economics, of medicine and even of the history of art have played a part in this century that justifies the Austrians' distaste of the advertiser's clichés. No citizen of any country will take kindly to the commercialized simplifications for simpletons that the tourist industry seems to need. England is not a country of fox hunters and beef eaters, nor is Italy an art gallery with an osteria attached to it. Austria is neither a country of yodelling yokels nor of waltzing aristocrats. But in Kruckenhauser's pictures something is caught of the real old Austria which an Austrian can accept as authentic.

E. H. GOMBRICH