

The problem of marketing Swiss wines

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THE PROBLEM OF MARKETING SWISS WINES.

By DR. HERMANN BÖSCHENSTEIN.

The yearly consumption of wine in Switzerland attains approximately one and a half million hectolitres. Of this amount, only about half a million can be produced at home. In spite of this there exists a serious marketing problem with regard to Swiss wines. Even in the good years it required extraordinary efforts and State intervention in order to find a market for our wine. Why is this? Is the quality of the Swiss wines such that the Swiss citizen neglects the product of his own vineyards in order to drink imported wines from France, North Africa, Spain, Italy and, formerly, German wines, not to speak of the more modest purchases of wine from Austria and from Hungary? Most certainly not, for there are excellent Swiss wines which are greatly appreciated not only in Switzerland itself but also abroad. The crux of the matter is that most of the wine produced here, is white wine, whilst the greater part of the wine consumed, is red wine. Of course, it would be possible to make the necessary changes in the vineyards, but only to a certain extent, in view of the conditions governing natural production. And, anyway, it has proved possible for the wine producers to alter the relation between red and white wine, so that now 30 per cent. of the red wine is produced in comparison to 70 per cent. of white wine, whereas before the war the figures were 20 as against 80 per cent. In German-speaking Switzerland, in particular, vineyards producing red wine have shown excellent results. Thus the problem of finding markets for Swiss wine, is above all a white wine problem. Efforts are also being made by those at the head of the wine industry to support the ideas of modern hygienists and to put on the market beverages made of grape juice which is free from any alcohol content, and also, during the vintage season to furnish the market with the best quality of table grapes. It goes without saying that the major portion of the yield from the vineyards goes to the making of wine. What is needed, however is: first — to make this wine known; second — to have it properly handled by the hotels and restaurants and brought to the notice of the customer, and thirdly, to get the producers to give their vines the care and handling which they require and deserve. A great campaign has been started for this purpose, in which the State agricultural and wine-growing schools, the Cantonal vineyard Inspectors, the associations and propaganda centres for agricultural produce have all pooled their resources. A very pleasing film has been prepared, which is shown in addition to the usual programme, and which shows the spectator the patient and arduous work of the wine-grower, the beauty of the vineyards, the ancient culture of wine-growing and its importance for the entire economy of the country. A small primer for wine-growing tells the Swiss all about the picturesque abundance of the many products of his country's vineyards, whilst a handy guide for inn-keepers and restaurateurs gives them useful hints with regard to the handling of wine, its storage in cellars and the best way to introduce it to customers. In Switzerland there exist between 40,000 and 50,000 farmers, who go in for wine-growing "on the side", and 4,000 owners of vineyards who devote all their time to wine-growing. The whole of the wine-growing industry occupies approximately 100,000 persons; in

this total are included glass-blowers in bottle-making factories and those who are employed in the wine trade. Together with the levelling process of civilisation, a great deal of the intimate, personal relation to wine — that of the real connoisseur — has been lost. Young people go in for drinking modern cocktails, when — and this fact must also be recognised — they don't remain on the "water-wagon" for reasons connected with training and sport. And then, there are thousands who know no more about wine than the fact that there exist both red and white wines! They know nothing of the profound difference between the wines of the Valais and those of Vaud, nor that which exists among the wines of Vaud, when they come from the region of La Côte or of Lavaux. And still less are they capable of differentiating between wines which come from neighbouring villages or regions, and yet are so different in their bouquet. Many a Swiss ignores the fact that a Canton of Inner Switzerland, a mountain Canton such as Schwyz, produces a delicious wine. And, therefore, it is very necessary that a discreet, but vigorous publicity campaign be undertaken in order that our domestic production of wine be better known and appreciated. There are many other problems which still have to be solved in this connection, one of them being that of price, which was brought up recently by the press and which should be gone into very judiciously by all those concerned — the producers, the trade and the hotel and restaurant keepers.



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