

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1962)
Heft: 1406

Artikel: Noble chasselas
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689391>

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NOBLE CHASSELAS

Darwin or no Darwin, the Chasselas grape plant shows in Switzerland how the descendants of one and the same species of origin can change to different local forms under the influence of their surroundings.

Long, long ago, a love story brought the Chasselas as an immigrant to Switzerland. A young man loved a girl, but her father wanted some exceptional present before consenting to the marriage. The boy went abroad to look for one. When he came back, he said to the father: "I bring you better than gold and jewels. I bring you the greetings from the great Bacchus who sends you here his crown, a set of noble Chasselas vines." The enchanted father pushed his happy daughter into the arms of the lucky boy and gave them all the vineyards they would be able to plant with the new vine. And so the Chasselas spread to the Lakes, to the Jura, to the Alps.

The Alps! the Valais! The Wallis! Let me sing their valiant son, the favourite of the alpinists, the Fendant. From Sierre and Sion down to Martigny, he grows on pre-historic glaciers ground, on the glacier-worn cliffs and slopes along young River Rhone, himself a glacier's son. Fed by the "glaciers milk" melting down from the ice-covered 14,000-foot peaks that encircle the Valais, the Fendant ripens under the darting rays of the mountain sun and is boiled and baked in the torrid hot-house of the deep Rhone valley.

It is this astonishing combination of high altitude arctic and deep valley tropic on mineral-rich glaciers ground that has seduced Father Chasselas to develop in the Valais an alpine wine of great class and noble character, with a warm heart and a rich body, encouraging the soul and animating the spirit: The Fendant.

Attend on an Alpage a gay Raclette party and you will always associate Fendant and Joy. Return with a group of alpinists to their Alpine Club hut after a difficult climb. What do they do to celebrate their victory? They open a bottle of Fendant. And the Hut Warden will advise the novice who comes down in weak shape: "Don't drink water. It's deadly. Take a glass of Fendant". He must know; he is a mountaineer of experience.

Straight across Switzerland, right on the opposite side, on the wide blue lake along the Jura mountain chain, there grows a Chasselas descendant of a quite different type, the Neuchâtel. He lives on chalky ground where he is in turns animated by the stormy Jura winds and the warm lake breezes, while the sun overhead gives him the hot treatment all day long. This makes him crisp and lively. This is the wine that forms a star in the glass. That is why the Neuchâtel bottles have a glass ring around the neck and a hollow bottom. This is the wine reputed all over the world for making hot cheese fondues and cold icebowls.

Between the Alpine Fendant and the Jura Neuchâtel, in the Canton de Vaud, we meet still one more different descendant of Mister Chasselas, the Lavaux. He grows on the steep terraces of the Dezaley promontory that rises out of the waters of upper Lake Geneva or Lac Léman. Between Lausanne and Vevey, we salute the great Lavaux names of Dezaley and St. Saphorin, of Riex and Epesses, of Rivaz and Cully. A real Hall of Fame. These brilliant Chasselas children are the Wines of Elegance, of distinguished taste and nutty flavour.

The love story around the Chasselas immigrant must have happened in the country of La Côte, which is also in the Pays de Vaud or Waadtland. For this is his only descendant to bear a female name. All the others are males: Le Lavaux, Le Fendant, Le Neuchâtel.

Let us leave the Chasselas Boys and turn to their lovely sister of La Côte. She has spread her vineyards between the medieval lake fortresses of Rolle and Morges on central Lake Geneva, which actually is the River Rhone reaching here his greatest extension like a blue ocean. You look in vain for steep and rocky slopes. All is green and undulating loveliness, with cosy vintner villages embedded in the vines, some of great repute like Fechy, Luins, Mont, Vinzel. And lovely are the wines they produce, of delicate bouquet and exquisite aroma, friendly and neighbourly. Wines everybody likes.

Sister La Côte has more Chasselas Brothers, little ones who do not produce enough to meet the demand; like the premium wines of Aigle and Yverne growing amidst the huge boulders fallen from the peaks near the spot where River Rhone enters Lake Geneva; like the delightful Twanners and Schaffisers on the Jura lake of Biel or Bienna; like the fine wines of Frybourg's Mount Vully on Lake Morat or Murten, not far from the Aventicum of Imperial Rome; like the light delicious wines of the Mandement around Satigny on the peaceful hills stretching downward from the City of Geneva, saying "Good-Bye" to the emigrant River Rhone who leaves here the lake on his way into the world.

One thing all the Chasselas children have in common: They are all white and dry, light and natural, cool and fresh. And they have a cork, for respiration; those are no dead wines. All are delicious as appetizer, as table and as dessert wines. All go well with fish, gratin, with cheese and fruit, with cake and nuts and snacks. They will always honour a hostess who serves them at a party, or a restaurant that carries them on its wine list. Salute, Noble Chasselas: "Vinum bonum laetificat cor hominis."

WALTER J. SIGWALD.

SWISS EXPERTS ABROAD

On behalf of the International Labour Office in Geneva, a number of Swiss citizens will be carrying out special missions in countries in the process of development. These Swiss experts include a teacher who has been sent to Colombia for a period of four months to organize the teaching of commercial subjects, and an engineer who is to work in the same country for a year on the setting up of a productivity centre; an expert on compensation funds will go to Libya for a year to organize the administration of social insurance, and in Greece a university professor will work for six weeks as a micropaleontological expert. Finally, under the terms of a bilateral agreement between the Confederation and Uganda, a Swiss expert will work in the latter country for a year training laboratory assistants. (OSEC).