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Autor: [s.n.]
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WINE NEWS AND A WEEK-END IN "LA COTE"

From news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse and the Swiss National Tourist Office I have learnt a great deal about Swiss wines. The Swiss Winegrowers' Association with its nearly four hundred members stated in August that the Swiss wine-growing area had again become smaller by 33 hectares (81,543 acres) within a year. This decline took place above all in the German-speaking parts whilst the Suisse Romande, specially the Valais, showed an increase in production. The agricultural section of the Federal Department of Public Economy reported that, compared with the average of 1950/1960, the production of wine had increased by 45% in 1962/3.

Imports have increased, too, and the total consumption (1.96 million hectolitres) has gone up by nearly 17% as compared with the average of 1950/60. On 30th June, stocks at Swiss wine merchants amounted to over 154 million litres which is two million litres higher than last year and just a little above the stocks at the same time in 1961.

The consumption of non-alcoholic grape juices has also increased considerably, and stocks have risen by 1.2 million litres in twelve months to 5.48 million litres.

Today let us single out the major producer of Swiss wines, the Canton of Vaud. The Vaudois wines are produced in a region sharing the characteristics of the Jura, the sunlit shores of the Lake of Geneva, the uplands forming the foothills of the Alps and even the Alps themselves — a countryside of such varied natural beauty that it has been called "Switzerland in miniature". And the wines are as varied as the land that nurtures them. Those of Le Chablais, for example, are strong and heady, those of La Côte delicately smooth, whilst the Jura and Le Vully feature wines that are "tingling" and far less innocent than one would first imagine.

To the north, the vineyards of the Jura extend from the Gorges de l'Orbe to Lake Neuchâtel. The vineyards of Le Vully dominate the lakes of Neuchâtel and Morat. To the south, La Côte stretches from the northern boundary of Geneva to the approaches of Lausanne. Féchy, Bougy, Mont and its abbey, Tartegnin, Gilly, Bursins and Luins are all rightly renowned for their good vintages. To the east of Lausanne and extending as far as the castle of Chillon — immortalized by Byron — is the district of Lavaux, with Lutry, Villette, Grandvaux, Vevey (where the vintners' festival is celebrated every twenty-five years) and La Tour-de-Peilz. Beyond Montreux and Chillon is the home of the Chablais, wines such as Villeneuve, Aigle, Yverne, Ollon and Bex.

Reading about the Vaudois wines and the vintners' festival at Morges at the end of September reminded me of an unforgettable week-end last August which I spent on the sunny shores of the beautiful Lac Léman. We had passed a very hot day sightseeing in Geneva and were glad to relax in the comfortable, airy train speeding along the lake to Morges, centre of the La Côte wine-growing district. Casting my mind back to that visit, a series of events pass through my mind — a birthday celebration on the cool terrace of a friend's lovely house, a festive dinner at the distinguished *Esplanade* at Aubonne, renowned for superb food; then a drive the next morning through Vaudois countryside over the Molandruz Pass to the Valley and the Lac de Joux, cool, dark and serene (nearly 4,000 feet up and not far from the French frontier); morning coffee under the shady awning at the Hôtel de France at

Le Brassus; the drive back over the Marchairuz Pass, through the attractive Jura limestone landscape; a glorious view of the Léman and the Savoyan Alps, and from the Diablerets to the Bernese giant peaks of Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau; then the lazy afternoon in the rose garden and an invigorating swim in the pool (what a refreshing change from the sultry heating heralding a storm); and then the highlight of the week-end, the trip to the famed cellars of Bougy-Villars in the late afternoon.

This was a special privilege for me, as women are hardly ever admitted to the *caves*. It was thanks to the tax collector of Aubonne, Monsieur Charles Jaquinet, and his brother, a Swiss living abroad (Chairman of the Board of Foreign Languages in Istanbul) that this venture was made possible. Monsieur Ami Blanchard, former Mayor of Bougy-Villars for twenty-six years, showed us around a number of cellars. The first was a small modern *cave* where the wine was stored in glass tiled containers, a more economic if less romantic method. The wine tasting began. A little glass was filled at the tap and handed round clockwise in strict order amongst the visitors (in the Valais the ceremony proceeds anti-clockwise).

The tour took us to several cellars. The one belonging to the Commune was separated from the Commune Hall by a door and baize curtain. Then there was the large cellar of the de Fischer property with its oleander plants and plane trees on the terrace in front of the stately façade. Everywhere I was very impressed by the enormous casks the largest holding as much as 11,000 litres. I was fascinated watching the expert tapping of the bung-hole. I inspected the interesting presses and other implements and the age-old Y-shaped beams supporting the vaulted roofs.

All the wines tasted were of 1962 vintage. I felt very ignorant listening to the experts discussing the merits and state of maturity of each individual wine — all the same it was a long time before I felt I wanted to decline when the little glass came round again. I was interested to learn that there still exists a kind of *socage*. Every household (hearth) has to provide one man to work twice eight hours in the vineyards, and there is a fine if he fails to attend.

Finally, the one-time Mayor invited us to his private hide-out, part of his cellar furnished as a little den. Gravel covered the floor and shelves full of special vintage bottles lined one wall. The Blanchard crest dating back to 1460 hung side by side with the owner's laurel crown as crack marksman.

Sitting at the scrubbed deal table and sipping a special *Pinot Gris* I realised how much of the important local business is transacted in these parts over a glass of wine. Many a friendship is sealed and many a feud settled in the same way. I more and more appreciated the privilege of having been invited to share this ritual, and it was with a very grateful thank you that I took leave of my new friends.

The drive along the lake back to Morges was yet another experience, for gone was the serenity of the morning, the lazy warmth of the afternoon. The sky was dark and the lake menacing. The thunder storm was breaking. Over Geneva we could watch the lightning creating bizarre shapes in the black sky. We heard the rockets which the winegrowers sent up. This is an expensive, but profitable new method of preventing hail. The damage to vines can be reduced to a minimum, whereas without rockets as much as a whole 100% can be destroyed in a specially vicious hail storm.

The storm broke with all its force as we arrived back at Morges, and we were able to witness it from a covered verandah, enjoying a good meal — very welcome after the most prolonged *apéritif* I had ever partaken! It was an experience I shall always remember with pleasure and any wine from La Côte will be shown special respect and appreciation by me in the future!

Mariann.

SWISS ARTISTS TAKE THE BOW

The many one-man shows held in various parts of the country will be supplemented by several collective exhibitions to be seen shortly. The joint exhibitions of Swiss women painters, sculptresses and craftworkers is being organized by Geneva's "Musée Rath" from 2nd to 24th November. The artists of the Grisons will exhibit in the Fine Arts Museum in Chur from 17th November to mid-December, while the Villa Ciani in Lugano will be the setting for the show of the members of the Ticino chapter of the Association of Swiss Artists, Sculptors and Architects. A further one-man exhibit is held at Winterthur's Fine Arts Museum, where works by sculptor Emilio Stanzani are on show until 17th November.

[S.N.T.O.]

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