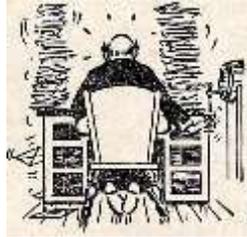


The Amateur Winemaker

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From the Editors Chair



CHANCE TO EXHIBIT

There are this year several wine and mead classes in the National Honey Show, which is being held at Caxton Hall, Westminster, S.W.1., on October 1st-3rd, and it is hoped that they will attract a large entry. Home-made wine has four classes, red dry (including brown), red sweet (including brown), white dry and white sweet, and there are first prizes of 25/-, seconds of 15/- and thirds of 10/-. There is also a silver medal for the champion wine from the four classes. Similarly, there are open mead classes, one for sweet mead and one for dry, also with good prizes. At the Show, it will be remembered, the organisers have agreed to put a room at the disposal of winemakers on 1st October, and it is hoped that all winemakers who can will attend.

CLASSIFYING

In these classes, you will notice, brown wines have been included with the red, which is yet another solution to the problem of how best to classify country wines. What is the best way, by ingredients, by colour, by the degree of sweetness, or by combinations of all three? Some decision is needed on this, to simplify the matter for the organisers of shows. The obvious classification is by ingredients, but this means at least five classes (fruit, flower, cereal, root and miscellaneous) and from the judge's point of view is by no means satisfactory, for sweet wines are shown side by side with dry and good judging becomes physically impossible, since once one has tasted a really sweet wine the palate is destroyed.

SIMPLE WAY

To satisfy the judge we can best divide the wine into sweet, medium and dry, and the wicked thought occurs to me that it is not really essential even to have the division into white and red, for this is a distinction stemming solely from the employment of the grape, a division which does not enter into the making of our country wines, unless we are deliberately endeavouring to produce port, burgundy or claret "types." Probably the simplest classification for home-made wines is just: Sweet, medium and dry-three classes only. The name of the wine ("parsnip," "elderberry," etc.) could still be given to enable the judge to assess wines of the same ingredients in a group, but all within the sweet, medium or dry class.

SUGGESTED READINGS

But how to define categorically sweet, medium and dry? The only logical way would appear to be by use of the hydrometer, a method to which a judge could have recourse in cases of doubt. But what readings should be specified for the three classes? Continental countries have their standards, of course, but the English idea of what is a dry wine may differ. At the Andover Congress it was tentatively suggested that a dry wine might be one with a specific gravity of up to 1005, a medium up to 1010, and a sweet all above 1010. In practice, however, this might not work out to everyone's satisfaction, for on doing a series of hydrometer tests on finished wines, some friends and I came to the conclusion that to be dry - in our opinion - a wine could not have an S.G. above 1000, which at first seemed quite astonishing, but is not so when one reflects that the alcohol produced will have had the effect of dropping the S.G. considerably "below par," so that even with the residual sugar, it is still possible for the S.G. to finish well below 1000. A wine only one or two degrees above the 1000 to us definitely tasted medium sweet, a range which, after great argument, we extended up to 1014, calling all above that figure sweet. So our final classifications were: Dry, below 1000; medium 1001-1014 inclusive; sweet, 1015 and above.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Here is an opportunity for individuals and Circles to make some interesting tests for themselves. Test your own wines with the hydrometer, and let us have your opinion upon what is dry, what is medium, and what is sweet. Then perhaps we can arrive at a generally acceptable standard. Y 011 may find it additionally interesting to do as we did and test at the same time some commercial wines in each category.

PROBLEM

This year, as last, several readers have written with a most puzzling problem in the making of rhubarb wine. The liquor, it seems, at first ferments well, but then suddenly goes glutinous and erupts violently from the jar or cask, frothing so violently that as much as two-thirds of the liquor is lost. Most of those who have written have assumed that the trouble is due to their having used precipitated chalk to remove excess acid, but this is not the case, for several readers have had the trouble who have not adopted this method. One is also tempted to think that over-boiling, with a consequent upsetting of the pectins, may be the cause, but some readers have struck this snag even when using the cold water method. Nor does the answer lie with the yeast, for users of wine yeasts, dried yeasts, and baker's yeast have all run across this phenomenon. I am driven to the conclusion that the answer could well lie with the rhubarb itself; perhaps one of the widely-different types of rhubarb causes this trouble because of its high pectin content, and others do not. It would be most interesting to hear from all readers who have struck this problem, and to hear what rhubarb they used, and what method, in the hope of arriving at a common denominator, and a solution.