

The Amateur Winemaker

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From the Editor's Cellar

"Analysis defines a wine's skeleton; wine tasting enables us to touch the muscles and flesh-to caress the face and the figure."-Source not known

WINE- TASTINGS

The above quotation is apt for me this month, having had the chance of three wine-tastings in a row, the first a lighthearted one at a cheese and wine party organised by our local Rotary club, the second at our wine Circle monthly meeting, and the third at home during a visit by the traveller of a Rhine firm specialising in Hocks and Moselles. Each of the three was thoroughly enjoyable. in its individual way, and I'm led once more to reflect on what an infinite variety there is in wine. and how, using it intelligently, one can cater for almost an" type of function, from the grave to the gay, from the formal to the frivolous. The first wine tasting was not so much a serious tasting as a wine and cheese party. sherry rubbing shoulders with Burgundy, Bordeaux. Hocks, Portuguese rose, Sauternes-the lot! What was noticeable was how 150 people, many of them with very little knowledge of wine, thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Many remarked how, at a wine and cheese party, one "circulated" much more freely and naturally than at that abomination of desolation, a cocktail party, and several remarked to me that they now realised "just what you see in this wine Circle idea." Wine and cheese parties are now commonplace. in this part of the country at least, and I often wonder just how much our movement has done to popularise them. After all, we were having them in our Circles long before other organisations cottoned On to them as an excellent social idea (with the honourable exception of, say, three firms in the commercial wine world).

"COMMERCIAL" AS WELL

Our Circle wine tasting was a serious one, Comd. Mudie steering us through some of the intricacies of the Claret world, with illustrative examples. This is an idea the Andover Circle, like many others, is pursuing systematically, and the intention is to go on to acquire a knowledge of the main groups of commercial wines. At one time there was a certain resistance in our winemaking clubs to the idea of studying commercial wines but these last two years we have detected a change of attitude; more and more winemakers are coming to the realisation that to make really good country wine demands some knowledge at least of the basic types of commercial

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wine. Our "Dining-In Club" articles are an excellent illustration of this approach, and we cannot commend this more broad minded approach to the hobby enough. The more we know about wine generally, the better wines we shall make.

RULES

The National Conference and Show at Bournemouth (April 17 and 18) is now virtually upon us, and promises to be as successful as ever (if you haven't already obtained your tickets, delay no longer!). Curiously enough, this month we have received several several letters upon two points: why do the rules not lay down specified gravities for certain classes, and why is fortification not forbidden? On the first point, the answer is that, after much discussion and argument, it has proved quite impracticable to give any hard and fast rulings upon gravities (as a means of indicating dryness or sweetness) since the sugar content of a wine is by no means the only factor to be taken into account when considering its apparent dryness or sweetness; the issue is complicated by the wine's other attributes. such as its acidity and astringency. Hydrometer tests of your own wines, and of dry and sweet commercial wines, will soon prove the impossibility of determining gradations of dryness and sweetness by means of the hydrometer alone; the palate of an experienced judge is a better guide. Whilst beginners in winemaking often disagree as to what is dry and what is sweet it will be found that experienced judges rarely do. As regards the second query, concerning fortification. at one time the National had a rule to the effect that all wines must be made by natural fermentation, and not fortified. but this has been dropped since no judge can assert with certainty that any particular wine **has** been fortified (unless is has been grossly overstrengthened). And if a law cannot be enforced, it is bad law, and soon falls into disrepute. In any case, whether a wine is fortified or not is not all that important, for a wine which is too strong is likely to Jose points rather than gain them. Those who worry about someone else gaining an advantage by dabbling with fortification are those who, usually, have not yet realised that alcoholic strength is by no means the criterion of a good wine. One needs sufficient strength for the wine's particular purpose that is all: that said. flavour, bouquet and texture are far more important.