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LIGHT WINES.

The time, we hope, is fast approaching, when summer-heat and dog-days' dust, and galley-slave toil of Exhibition-seeing, will create thirst which will require to be slaked with something less potent than Portuguese and Spanish liquors. True, we might make them into wine-and-water; but, as wet is the greatest enemy of the vine, so all aristocratic wines repudiate an alliance with water, as a cause of weakness and diminished repute. Secondly, from humbler wines refreshing wine- and-water can be made, less expensive, containing a larger proportion of the healing virtues of the grape, and more thirst-quenching and agreeable to those whose taste has been duly educated.

Nor need the vinous draught be wine *and* water, unless for form's sake, appearances, and modesty, just to avoid the direct stares or sidelong glances of inveterate port and sherry drinkers, or persevering quaffers of stout and bitter ale. If, at the Exhibition, a herculean amount of galleries and foreign courts, including trophies, with explanations of machinery and mathematical instruments by learned and communicative experts have been done—why, then, on returning to your lonely lodging, or sitting down to your choice dinner at your hotel, you may boldly pour out a tumbler of wine—pure from the bottle, unadulterated by the pump—to dispel your weariness, and may drink the same with beneficial effect, provided you select a wine suitable for the season and the purpose.

All fermented liquors are employed to restore (temporarily or permanently) expended strength, to support weakness, to stimulate lassitude. There is a degree up to which they are beneficial, and a degree beyond which they are injurious, and that both temporarily and permanently. It happens, that some of the liquids which give the strongest immediate stimulus are the most injurious if abused or indulged in habitually; while others, whose effect is gentle and moderate at the time, may be daily taken in reasonable quantities, with a favourable influence on the health and constitution. Such is the difference between wine, the ancient cheerer of the heart of man, and the modern discovery — alcohol, represented generally by

three of her daughters, brandy, rum, and gin. The average life of a wine-bearing vine, fairly treated and in favourable circumstances, is from a hundred to a hundred and fifty years. Some few at two hundred years are still healthy and productive. The life of Man, according to M. Flourens, *ought to be* about the same, the end of the second century being its extreme limit. To attain this, the only elixir to be employed is a sober allowance of good wine.

The different effects of different fermented and spirituous liquors are dependent on other qualities besides their strength. A glass of gin-and-water diluted down to exactly the same strength as a glass of ordinary Macon (red Burgundy), has not the same effect on the human system as that glass of ordinary Macon has. Brandy (French and British), rum, gin, scheidam, whisky (Scotch and Irish), have each their amateurs, admirers, and advocates, who extol the virtues of their own favourite spirit. A pot of beer has not the same effect as a pot of cider of the same strength. Certainly, the former contains an element, the hop, which is wanting in the latter; but while Sir John Barleycorn has the reputation of calming the nerves, Sir Devonshire Pippin will tingle them up and keep them in a state of undue excitement. The truth is, in respect to either of those worthies, if you give them an inch (too much) they will take an ell. In cider countries, cider-drinking is not an unfrequent cause of delirium tremens. Cider is very treacherous in regard to its strength; and so is ale, and so is sometimes porter. However strong either may be, neither mixes well with pure spring water, although combined with effervescent draughts (soda-water, seltzer-water, ginger beer, or lemonade) they form a more trustworthy mixture, grateful to thirsty throats and jaded minds.

In Normandy, the great home of cider, a marked distinction is drawn and maintained; only the pure unmixed juice of the apple is dignified with the name of "cidre," which is therefore, as a matter of course, known by the consumer to be potent. He is duly forewarned to be prudent in his potations. The finer qualities (partly, perhaps, or entirely perry), are bottled, gaudily ticketed with "Sillerie de Normandie," and other fine names, and sold on the spot, as dear as a franc a bottle, retail. Ordinary cider, in the manufacture of which a considerable proportion of water is used—the cider which you see contained in casks large enough to hold a small dinner-party—is universally known as "boisson," "drink," and *is* the drink of the population at all seasons, in all places, at all times of the day and night, at the morning meal and the evening repast. It is often more difficult to get a glass of water than a glass of "boisson." Tables d'hôte overflow with the latter; the former you

may sometimes call for in vain. In great droughts, for want of water (only to be had by fetching it two or three miles), "boisson" has been given to servants to wash up plates and dishes with.

Of course, boisson in Normandy is swallowed in indefinite and unmeasured quantities; nor do the Normans look the worse for the regimen. They are a tall strong hearty race, utterly unlike the meagre Frenchmen of our old farces and caricatures. We have, in England, a school of drinkers whose practice is directly opposed to the Norman. Instead of imbibing, at discretion or indiscretion, what is offered when they are dry, our abstinents, under medical advice or personal whim, take as little liquid as possible : drinking at dinner nothing but undiluted wine, with no water, still less with beer. They are not numerous as a sect.

All Europe, south of the latitudes where grapes ripen in the open field, produces light wines which would supply a healthy and not expensive beverage here, if once a taste for them were spread. When the consumption is sufficiently rapid, they are excellent drawn fresh from the cask. The French call them "small wines;" the "grand wines" and the "fine wines" being such as are carefully bottled with the honours of long corks and waxed necks. Switzerland has several good wines, both small and strong, which may be tasted around the lakes of Neuchatel, Geneva, and others. Light wines are consumed both when new and sweet, and also just a little older (for they are not expected to attain great age), dry, "sec," or "sack," when they are somewhat stronger, which might be the reason for Falstaff's preference. In Roman wine-shops you are mostly asked whether you will have your "bicchiere de vino," your beaker of wine, "asciutto" —dry, or "dolce" —sweet. Of Italian light wines, both red and white, the variety is considerable. For convenience, many of these are kept in narrow-necked flasks, stopped with a no more solid cork than a teaspoonful of olive oil. When the wine is wanted, the stopper is removed by a jerk of the wrist, which scatters it and a few drops of wine on the floor. Several Italian wines will shortly merit the attention of English importers. Noteworthy are the vino d'Astè of Piedmont, white and sparkling; the Montepulciano of Tuscany, red and clarety; and the two sorts of lagrime cristi and other wines resembling them, from Naples. When the Roman question is settled, the Roman wines will be settled too, and that for the better. Hungary furnishes capital wines, both little and great; Swiss tourists make their acquaintance with general satisfaction. Unfortunately, their place of growth renders the expense of their import to us, a little heavy. The Rhine wines are old familiar friends; they need no bush— only, like the Hungarians, a diminished duty.

Both for geographical and commercial reasons, the majority of our light wines, therefore, come from France. But in France itself there are many prejudices, or settled notions (to use a more parliamentary term), with regard to wine. One of them is, that the frequent use of white wines is far from salutary, and is bad for the nerves; respecting which a word may be said.

The expression "white wines" sounds comprehensive and general; but there is an important difference in their mode of preparation, separating them into two classes, which differ from each other much more widely than any one unadulterated red wine differs from another. In all pure red wines the colouring matter is the skin of the grape. When the fruit is thrown into the vat, the grapes are partially crushed, and there left together (pulp, stalks, and skins) until fermentation has reached a certain point. They are then finally pressed, still all together; the liquor drawn off, further fermented and duly fined, becomes red wine.

The higher the class of wine, the fewer are the varieties of grape employed. The highest are extracted from as few as two sorts of grape only. The best clarets are made almost exclusively from the Carmenet or Petite-Vidure, and the Carmenère or Grosse-Vidure grapes. A vine-owner who wishes to maintain the repute of his wines will make two or three gatherings. In general the first batch will prove the best. The bunches hanging on the vines will be carefully selected, cutting only those that have been well exposed to the sun, and whose berries are equal in size and colour. Bunches ripened at the base of the vine will have the preference, while all green or decayed berries will be thrown away. For some wines, a certain proportion of the grape-stalks are rejected. These rules are followed with such minuteness that in certain communes the vintage lasts full two months.

Second-class red wines admit into their composition a larger number of varieties of grape; and the more ordinary the wine, the greater is the number so admitted. It is singular that several kinds of grape, which are excellent to eat, produce defective and imperfect wine; it is apt to turn sour, or has a want of delicacy, or its colour is pale, or it has not exactly the right tint; it may be plentiful, but of inferior quality; it may have a particular taste of the soil in which it is grown, disagreeable or not, as the case may be. From these varieties, judiciously mingled, good and wholesome, though not first-rate nor first-priced wines, are prepared.

It will be evident that, in consequence of this simultaneous fermentation of the stalk, the skin, and the pulp of the grape together, all genuine red

wines contain divers medicinal elements supplied by the vine-plant, which must have then- effect on the human system, according to the place of growth, and the varieties of grape used in making the wine, and also according to the constitution of the individual drinker.*

(* The maximum of alcohol contained in the first- rate vines of Medoc is from 8.60 to 9.25 per cent. They contain, besides free acids and vegetable and mineral salts, tartaric, malic, acetic, and oenanthic acids. The salts are, bitartrate of potash, tartrate of lime, tartrate of aluminium, and *tartrate of iron*. They carry *from seventeen to eighteen hundredths of tannin*, and from thirty-four to thirty-five hundredths of colouring matter.)

The same cannot be said of all white wines: some of them are less tonic, less medicinal than others. Sanitarially, white wines may be classed as those made from red grapes (or a mixture of all and any grapes), and those made from white grapes only. White wine from red grapes may seem a paradox, but it is a fact annually accomplished. The skin of the grape, when not overripe, does not readily part with its colour, without maceration in its own juice or in water. Consequently, grapes carried, as soon as they are gathered, to the mechanical wine-press (not to the slow mingling, mashing, and treading out by human feet), give out a colourless juice very nearly as limpid as water. This juice clearly contains only the elements to be found in the pulp of the grape, to the exclusion of those which are peculiar to the pips, the skin, and the stalk of the grapes. It is not, indeed, truly and completely wine. There would be no tannin or astringent principle in it. Anything, too, is good enough to put into these white wines; sour and decayed berries, as well as ripe and sound berries, serve to bring in grist to the mill. The value of the best white wines never attains anything like the figure of the red wines of the choicest vineyards. Amongst the white wines so manufactured from coloured and miscellaneous grapes, is the world-wide favourite, Champagne.

There are other white wines, made entirely from white grapes, and treated in the same way as red wines are, only, perhaps, with somewhat less care. Many of these might fairly be called "yellow wines" by way of distinction; they contain more aroma and medicinal virtue than the white wines of the previous category, nor does their temperate use appear to be followed by any inconvenience. On the contrary, the wines of the Rhine and the Moselle are found by many persons to be particularly agreeable and restorative on recovering from a fit of sickness. Some of the French yellow vins de liqueur or sweet wines, such as Muscat, Frontignac, and Lunel, are delicious and gently stimulating elixirs. One glass at a time is a dose; it is like drinking

plum-pudding or richly perfumed cake. They should be tasted *after* any other beverage or aliment; for whatever comes *after them* is comparatively insipid in its savour. They attain these highly concentrated flavours by being left to hang until they are far on the way to the condition of raisins, before being applied to wine-making.

The well-known white wines from the environs of Bordeaux are made from white grapes, and possess the corresponding merits. No less than seven varieties of white grape are grown to furnish the best qualities of Sauternes, while four others help to supply an abundant quantity of ordinaries. The vins de Grave, so called because the choicest are grown on "graviers" or gravelly soils, exhibit still more frequently the yellow tint which is an indication of their wholesomeness. They bear a close resemblance to the Rhenish family. Their head-quarters is the Château Carbonnieux, remarkable also for its collection of vines, which, at the date of a recent report, comprised more than a thousand varieties of grape, contributed by Madeira, Hungary, Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Corsica, not to mention France. The dominant variety employed for the Graves, as well as for the Sauternes, is the Sauvignon, which gives bunches well furnished with oblong amber-coloured berries, and is, moreover, one of the best table grapes. Wine made of the Sauvignon only is highly aromatic, but has a tendency to get into the head. And yet some people say that it is a waste of time to try to get tipsy with French Wines.

On this delicate question the opinion of the Turks would be valuable. It is rumoured that Champagne is innocently tippled by Mahometan bons vivants, who take it for a sort of improved soda-water. The estate and vineyards of Carbonnieux formerly belonged to the Benedictine Abbey of Sainte Croix, at Bordeaux. The jolly monks, after enjoying the fruits of the earth themselves, drove a thriving trade with Turkey in bottles filled with limpid liquid, and ticketed MINERAL WATERS OF CARBONNIEUX. It was a terrible infraction of the Mussulman law; which law, however, the Benedictines were in no way bound to obey. The monks and the imams may be left to discuss which is really the greater offence: the selling of wine under the semblance of water, or the selling of water disguised as wine. As a punishment to the backsliding followers of the prophet, a few bottles of vermouth (wine made with wormwood combined with the grapes, and taken as bitters) might have been rightly substituted for an equal quantity of "mineral water."

Another settled belief in France is that the Bordeaux are the wholesomest

of all their red wines. Of course, in wine-growing neighbourhoods, nearly everybody drinks the wine grown there as the habitual beverage. But in departments and districts where people have to buy their wine from a distance, the growths of Bordeaux and its environs, though dearer than most others, are preferred, on account of their supposed superior qualities. In the north, too, whither they arrive direct by sea, they are believed to stand the Voyage better than other wines. There is a curious but deep-rooted idea that *sea air*, the mere vicinity of the sea, injures Burgundian wines, even when they are safe in bottle. How sea air should influence a liquid defended from it by a coating of glass and an inch depth of cork, is not attempted to be explained; but so it is that wine-merchants in the north keep (professedly and confessedly) very short stocks indeed of wine from the central interior.

The consequence of the prejudice is that, in the markets, and in table-talk, the existence of a great number of growths of Wine is quite ignored. People speak of Burgundies and Bordeaux, and that is all, forgetting that the term Bordeaux wines ought in strictness to mean only those of Medoc. True, there are the Beaujolais wines; but they would rank as Burgundies: those of the Côtes du Rhône, such as Hermitage, Côte- Rôtie, and St. Peray (sparkling), hang on close to the skirts of the former. But then there is an immense quantity of Vins du Midi, wines of the south, such as Roussillon, which are imbibed by the natives only, which are the object of an enormous commerce at Certe and elsewhere, and which disappear from vulgar ken. They go in very large quantities to Bordeaux, and never come out of it, to anybody's cognisance. As to what becomes of them, we had better imitate the prudent discretion of the minister without portfolio respecting Spanish wines imported into France. Our guesses would only lead to the rejection what a fine thing fancy is for numerous discriminating and fastidious persons who can drink none but the purest clarets, the unquestioned produce of Medoc. Alas! for those who have not faith. In France alone, at least one hundred times as much Château Lafitte claret is drunk as the whole estate yields annually. Where do the false ninety-nine bottles come from ? And who are the lucky individuals who manage to secure the genuine hundredth?

A fresh attempt might now be advantageously made to introduce several of these vins du midi to English favour. They are full-bodied, fruity, cheap, and strong; wholesome, also, if used with caution. But they are not light wines. Let no one make the inconvenient mistake of drinking ad libitum at his first experiment. He will discover more double stars than the Observatories acknowledge, and will feel the earth's revolution on her axis to be wonderfully accelerated.

The Touraine, again, and many a square league thereto adjacent, draws from the earth hogsheads upon hogsheads of excellent wines, which no one has ever seen or tasted out of the Touraine; which appear on nobody's table, which figure in no French innkeeper's bill of fare. Nevertheless, the writer knows by experience that they are very drinkable: nay, exhilarating. There are ruby-coloured, clarety growths, more or less light; there are the white wines of Blois and Beaugency; and at Vouvray, near Tours, is concocted an effervescent draught which, with your eyes shut or open, might pass for champagne. What becomes of the Touraine wines? Total ignorance; Egyptian darkness. Inquire for them of your wine-merchant. He keeps nothing of the kind, and never has kept anything of the kind. What do you mean by asking him such a question? All his clarets, Without exception, come to him direct from Bordeaux. Plenty of Touraine wine, however, reaches Paris, perhaps even Bordeaux, where it is lost, like the Rhône, in holes in the ground.

Instead of buying questionable Chateaux Margaux and St. Juliens, the lover of light wines might venture to patronise some of those of the Touraine, boldly calling them by their real names, and giving them out, at table, for what they are. The Touraine barrique or hogshead gauges two hundred and fifty litres. Now, although wines are dear just now, I am offered (on the spot) a good table wine, of 1859, for one hundred and ninety francs the hogshead, and an extra sample of 1857 for two hundred and fifty francs, or ten pounds, *i.e.* at tenpence a litre (a trifle more than a pint and three-quarters) for the best. Their carriage is easy; there is a railway direct from Tours to Paris. Touraine wines might be reckoned on being supplied genuine, because there is no temptation to substitute changelings for them. The growers truly say, "Our red wines are similar in character to those of Bordeaux, and are often given as such; we may even state that they are better (at equal prices) as ordinary table wines." But names have such great weight in this world! If there is no disputing about tastes, there is also no discussion about names. A bottle of wine ticketed Chateau Margaux *must* be better, say inexperienced epicures, than another humbly labelled Vernou or Vouvray, or perhaps not labelled at all. The length of one's purse, and one's French connexions, are the turning-points which must decide the question practically. Those who are rich enough, do well to buy the grand wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy, if they can get them for their money; those who are not, are wise in searching for a palatable succcdaneum from other quarters; particularly as, for one bottle of grand wine, they can have four, or six, or more bottles of good ordinaire—a serious consideration. The working and middle class population of Paris have no other vinous beverage (setting aside beer, which is

increasing in fashion) than the ordinary wines of Central France, condescending even to make merry with "little blues" and "littlewhites;" and they thrive not badly under the circumstances.

If the taste for light wines here be not yet come, it will come by-and-by. The appetite will gradually grow with its indulgence. With regard to the wines of France, one thing is clear; either they improve considerably with a certain degree of age in bottle; or the consumer's taste insensibly adapts itself to their little peculiarities.

You get in a cask of "bon ordinaire," already drawn off (*soutiré*) and fined (*collé*), and only requiring three weeks' or a month's repose in your cellar or warehouse to put in bottle. At times of the year when it does not freeze, an aboveground warehouse is the most convenient to perform the operation in; there is at least a certain amount of daylight, and your man is not exposed for hours to the temperature and atmosphere of an underground cellar. You bottle your wine, selecting a bright sunshiny day, with the wind not far from the north or the east. At the Channel ports of France, you can get good *ordinary* Bordeaux for from nine to twelve pounds the cask, which will yield three hundred and a few odd bottles. I find what contents *me*, for eight. Very good ordinary Burgundy may be had for less, but put it down at eight, and it is not dear. A cask of Burgundy yields only from two hundred and seventy to two hundred and eighty bottles; but the contents of wine-casks, now differing greatly, according to locality, are shortly to be equalised throughout France. If you deal with Bordeaux or Burgundy direct, a "chemise" or second outer cask, to prevent tricks being played with your wine on the road, costs five francs, and is not money thrown away. Adding to these prices the freight to London, the wharfage, the English duty, and the cost of bottling and of corks [the best are the cheapest; many a bottle of good wine is spoilt by a bad cork], the reader may calculate at what a cheap rate he can furnish his table with good light wine, by following the plan of buying it in the wood. English wine-merchants should persuade their customers to buy their ordinary French wine in the cask, and bottle it themselves; they might sell it so at a reasonable price, and yet get a fair profit.

Your wine is bottled and stacked: a goodly store. For the first three or four months it is "sick," and out of order. If you can leave it untouched a twelvemonth, so much the better; but in six or eight months you may begin to make use of it. "It is pretty well," you think. "Very fair." If Burgundy, the bottle already begins to show a crust, delightful to most English eyes; if pure

Bordeaux, it should not betray the slightest crust or deposit after being ten years in bottle. Your wine costs so little that you make free with it, giving country cousins tastes of what they never tasted before, and trying its healing qualities on your poor sick neighbours. When it is half finished, you begin to say: "I like this wine; we must be more sparing with it." When it is drawing near to its close, you shut up the last two dozen in some secure hiding-place, only to be produced on state occasions. This is the history of many and many a cask of "bon ordinaire." We do not fully value our friends until we are on the point of losing them.

At the moderate outlay which now is possible, a collection of wines of different vintages may be formed, by laying in every year a little more than is consumed; and then the collector has the pleasure of talking about "My cellar," if he only knows where to purchase. In Medoc there are a number of peasants who work at their vines with their own hands, and who take great pains and pride in treading closely on the heels of aristocratic wines. Of these persons excellent wine is to be had, at not extravagant prices. And besides professional vigneronns (people who cultivate the vine either for a livelihood or to make a fortune), there are in France many amateur wine-growers who possess small vineyards, which occupy the leisure left by other more serious employments. A lawyer, a medical man, a draper, inherits or acquires a patch of stony ground sloping to the south, which is, or is soon, promoted to the dignity of "Ma Vigne." The happy proprietor forgets the flowers of forensic oratory, while sniffing the perfume of his vines in blossom ; prunes redundant shoots when tired of amputating limbs; decides the most suitable length of his vine stakes, after handling linen and the metre measure. All sell the wine they do not consume at home, with even greater delight than they sell the extra produce of their gun or their garden. They prefer a set of private customers to letting their wares go to wine-merchants, for one good reason —they get a better price. But the amusement of the whole affair, from the beginning to the end, is a great inducement to its pursuit. The watching and the "feeding" of the wine in casks, affords continual interest. The tasting is an effort of critical acumen. "My 'fifty-sevens are perfect! My 'fifty-eights, as comet wines, will be worth something ten years hence. Do you think we shall have another comet soon? What bouquet in my 'fifty-nines! Colour like a ruby; no earthy aftertaste. How were your 'sixties? Sourish, eh? Mine were not bad, and plenty of them. All gone to Paris, to make old Medoc."

