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Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles

The Third Article in a Series / Fourteenth Section

by Barbara Marinacci

This long-running series (since April 2003) is based primarily on California winegrower Martin Ray's correspondence, much of it now archived in Special Collections at the UC Davis Library. Following the Introduction, the second article, in four parts, covered MR's primarily epistolary relationship with East Coast wine authority Julian Street during the early to mid-1940s. (The Princeton Library holds these extraordinary letters.) Subsequently, this lengthy article portrays the close friendship between MR and UC Davis enology professor Maynard Amerine, begun in the late 1930s. In this installment the growing conflict between them—over MR's strident push within toward forcing the creation of quality control standards in premium winemaking—reaches its climax. Barbara Marinacci, who was Martin Ray's stepdaughter, co-authored with her mother, Eleanor Ray, Vineyards in the Sky: The Life of Legendary Winemaker Martin Ray (1993; new edition, Mountain Vines Publishing, 2006).

PART III. MARTIN RAY AND MAYNARD AMERINE (1937-1976)

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As spring moved into the summer of 1955, in his letters to Maynard Amerine, Martin Ray initially seemed almost oblivious to the evidence that his enologist friend's interest in maintaining their former intimacy was on a steep decline. During most of June and into July, as he'd often done before, MR kept writing to him about various topics—occasionally berating Maynard whenever he felt he deserved, and might even benefit from, this scolding. But he was saying less than before about the Wine Quality Control Fight that he and Eleanor had been waging since April with members of the higher-quality section of the commercial wine industry enlisted by Louis Gomberg in the new group called the Premium Wine Producers of California.

MR could work up, anyway, other matters to involve Maynard, such as asking him to invite to his home for dinner—and wine, of course—the lead performers in *The Teahouse of the August Moon.* Burgess Meredith and Scott McKay, whom the Rays had recently befriended along with their wives (see #8), would soon be in Sacramento with the troupe during its West Coast circuit. But even this transaction had caused friction between the two friends. When MR thanked "Pelly"—University of Washington English Prof. Angelo Pellegrini—for having entertained the actors in Seattle, he said, "Eleanor and I do so much appreciate your having

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them at your home and, as you well know, they enjoyed themselves and you, completely." But he couldn't resist adding further commentary, starting with Meredith's report on Maynard and ending with his own harsh assessment of physical and mental health factors that he felt now ailed the UC Davis wine-science professor.

> Amerine seems to have tried hard to give them a fine day but he did not impress them sufficiently to stir up the same warmth, which after all is a rare thing. We do not think Amerine is really well, since his long illness just before taking off on his sabbatical [yearlong, starting at the end of 1953]. He has since had a recurrence of the fever and he is very impatient with everything around him and talks of his summer lecture of one hour each day as if it is a herculean endeavor, whereas once he thought nothing of any challenge. [Amerine's health-threatening condition appears to have been chronic prostatitis.]

MR's observations and commentary then became even more personal—and critical.

> His references to women grow continually more caustic and uncalled for and he gathers around him more single men of the same tendencies only those older and more so developed in all the unfortunate mannerisms of bachelors who have not managed to adjust themselves to the unnatural lives they lead. We are really quite worried over him sometimes. He is bitter about so many things it becomes almost impossible to be free with him as always we have been these past 20 years.

(Readers might be reminded that in contexts like this one, when MR used the plural pronoun "we" he often meant *both* Elsie, his deceased first wife, and Eleanor, his wife since 1951.)

MR went on to describe Amerine's prior impatience and irritation over the road-show actors' inability to pin down, several weeks in advance, the dates when they'd be able to dine at his home in Davis while in Sacramento. But finally Meredith had come up with the 4th of July, which had suited Amerine fine. However ...

> Maynard never thanked me for the introduction, never even mentioned to me the day they had with him, merely said, "We had a very nice time" when I asked him about it. [MR would often call MA on the telephone.] Burgess on the other hand was so satisfyingly expressive and thanked us for arranging the day for him. So it goes with people. I always think of the suicide's note: "People are just no damned good!" Of course, I do not feel that way. But there are times when we see the trend of developments in old friends and when we are obliged to take it and in silence, when it does seem that life could be made so much better with just a little effort. [7/14/55]

(It should be noted that in this same time period, and earlier, MR had written backbiting remarks about Pellegrini to Maynard, too. Such was the customary nature of his gossiping, and sometimes ER's as well, in letters and in talk. Everyone's appearance, conversation, behavior, and background were scrutinized, probably to detect character flaws that might cause future problems—and therefore were predictable. Even when imbibing great quantities of wine and dominating the conversation, MR's eyes and ears worked overtime. But while storing away various perceptions his brain frequently distorted whatever had been picked up, as later accusations and outbursts would reveal, perhaps resulting in a ruptured relationship.)

Still, MR had sent appreciative thanks to Amerine, adding mention of a proposed new winegrowing partnership.

> Talked to Burgess and Scott on the phone day before yesterday. They told me about their party with you and your conversations. They thanked me again. In a way, I should thank you for this very good friendship because you told me you had heard him [BM] on the radio or over TV and that you thought he was a good guy. Through him we have now reestablished our old friendship with John Steinbeck and we have had three letters from John since. [This correspondence was covered in #13.] Burgess may well get into the wine business, yet. He told me he would like to get in with me. He might have been just the person I was looking for. [See #7.] But as things are going, I don't think I want anyone. We are doing well enough so I can manage pretty well myself. Orders are continuing to come in by themselves. Last month I had no time to sell and we had a damned good month—all from write in [customers' wine purchase orders]. And in the south [L.A.] this last week I opened up some more damned good accounts. [7/10/55]

MR would continue to consider the financial and social attractions, and the national publicity possibilities as well, of partnering with Burgess Meredith. (Actually, the origin of the Rays' inspiration to create what became the Mount Eden Vineyards corporation five years later is traceable to this time, with Meredith becoming an early member/shareholder.) New attention to Martin Ray and his extraordinary wines was being stirred up by John Melville's *Guide to California Wines*, by MR's rigorous new marketing forays away from Mt. Eden when he sold both aged and newly released vintages, and by his fierce personal verbal and written combat with the wine industry over quality control, which he and Eleanor widely publicized through multi-duplicated communications with wine retailers and connoisseurs, who then shared them with others. "Rusty" Ray was becoming an iconic figure among urbane wine drinkers disappointed, disillusioned, and

cont. p.18 —

MARINACCI, *cont. from p.2* —

even disgusted with California's mongrelized, lackluster (so-called) varietals.

When MR wrote to Pellegrini again in August, he complained that he was finding it "hard to do any work at all." Much as they craved ardent attention, the Rays were increasingly beset by people calling up and wanting to visit the winery and vineyards, and of course to buy wines directly from them, since it was often difficult to obtain them elsewhere. Eager visitors who had read Melville's guidebook might daringly drive up the two and a half miles on the narrow, winding, unpaved, rutted, rock-strewn mountain road—dry and dusty in the summertime, muddy and dangerously slippery in the rainy season—to arrive unannounced. Most turned out to be "professors and professionals—a whole new group of wine buyers among this class of people." [8/8/55]

Often the Rays then felt that these brave souls couldn't be turned away. Sometimes they got so carried away with an unexpected rapport with the friends of friends or even strangers that the drop-in guests were invited to stay for lunch or dinner, or even—when an impromptu party might last far into the night—to bed down in the redwood cabin below the main house. The original dwelling on Mt. Eden, it served as a guesthouse now, with its one big room's large picture windows providing gorgeous views of the northern reaches of Santa Clara Valley and the Diablo Range beyond it, foothills below and beyond the mountain, and south San Francisco Bay.

Usually, though, the Rays managed to deflect importunate phone callers by telling them that, regretfully, this was an inopportune time to come up the mountain—and persuading them instead to drop by the Argonaut wine and liquor shop on Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road. They were assured that its friendly proprietor, Ace Perry, would delight in escorting them outside and then pointing up westward, far off into the distance, at Martin Ray's mountaintop winery and home visible from that spot. And then at the highest altitude they'd see the long, dark green shape of the redwood-forested crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains as it now headed northwestwardly, to end near San Francisco. (This segment Eleanor Ray contrived to call the *Chaîne d'Or*, attributing the picturesque "chain of gold" term to MR's French-born mentor, Paul Masson.) And when Ace ceremoniously poured a sample libation for them to taste, they'd all raise their glasses to toast the Rays, who'd said they would—figuratively at least—return the greeting from on high. Then, of course, Ace had a plentiful selection of Martin Ray wines on hand to offer them for purchase, to take away and store as someday-potable keepsakes of this very special occasion.

A Visitor from France

In mid-summer a social commitment began to dominate both MR's and ER's attentions, distracting them from focusing entirely on the Wine Quality Fight. It centered on the impending arrival of Burgundian wine man Jean Latour's daughter, Christiane—nicknamed "Chris." Her uncle, Louis Latour III, had earlier visited MR in the mid-1940s, with his young son, Louis IV, while MR's first vineyard on Mt. Eden was still under development. And it was Louis who, through Amerine's help, had arranged for MR's noteworthy purchase of new Burgundian oak barrels in 1954 (see #7).

The Rays naturally spotted a fine opportunity for indirectly promoting Martin Ray wines, and they began to go all-out in sponsoring Mlle. Latour's trip to the West Coast, to include, of course, a stay on Mt. Eden. After arriving in the U.S. Chris first visited with Latour-connected people on the East Coast. She even stayed in the Boston area with Eleanor's Harvard-based son Peter and his wife, Terry (who had already met her the year before when visiting France). They reported to the Rays on their houseguest's helpfully intended but annoyingly slapdash ways, thus forewarning them about what they too would likely experience.

MR and ER devised a busy wine-centered itinerary for Chris in California. "Little did she know that she's serving such noble ends as propaganda for quality," ER wrote her son Barclay in mid-July. Designated as Chris's escort and chauffeur in both the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas, he accepted the assignment manfully. She'd arrive in L.A. first, in mid-July, and from there drive north with Barclay, to stay in Saratoga with the Rays for some days at their Mt. Eden home, from which she'd make forays with Barclay into other nearby wine regions.

Initially MR doubtless hoped for a romance to blossom between the two young people, leading inevitably to a marriage linking him through his adopted son to the Latours' nobly ancestral Burgundian winemaking lineage. And the field was apparently clear for this now, since Barclay's engagement to Maria, a young German law student whom he'd met in Pasadena, had recently been broken. He had courted her in Germany the previous summer, in a whirlwind manner counseled by his stepfather, who had even supplied the diamond engagement ring—which had once been his first wife Elsie's. (#6) Barclay, who had witnessed the debacle that had ensued when Peter brought his bride to Mt. Eden during the past holiday period (#8), had begun to realize that it might be impossible for him ever to marry a woman whom Rusty would judge as acceptable—or who herself could countenance his cunning interrogations or dominating and demanding

behavior, which worsened when he was inebriated. Therefore, this 23-year-old young man, though obligingly undertaking his assignment as Christiane's California escort, was wary about getting too close to her, or maybe to any girl—knowing how anxious Rusty was for him to marry and start producing progeny, in accordance with his master plan for establishing a wine dynasty on Mt. Eden.

The Rays, having appointed themselves Mlle. Latour's social directors, worked feverishly on arranging special events for her in both the Southland and the Bay Area. Wine writer Robert Balzer and gourmet delicatessen proprietor Harold Jurgensen offered to put on grand dinners in her honor. Barclay could introduce Chris to celebrity scientists at Caltech in Pasadena, such as Nobel Prize laureate Dr. Linus Pauling. Although notably a chemist, he was also (among his multiple scientific identities) a crystallographer; therefore he'd become the adviser on geologist Barclay's doctoral dissertation on "The Crystal Structure of Zunyite." (Several years later, LP would become his father-in-law; the very prospect had precipitated a new family crisis caused by Rusty's patriarchal ban on the marriage.)

But the most dazzling event by far was the gala dinner party hosted by the Rays' new actor friend Burgess Meredith. It would feature both Louis Latour and Martin Ray wines. Since he'd been immersed in both science and trekking around the Great Outdoors throughout his youth, Barclay, as Chris's dinner date, hadn't a clue about the identity of the other guests—all movie stars, directors, and producers, plus a few spouses.

Here's how MR summarized the occasion in a letter to Amerine.

> Eleanor wrote all the publicity for the papers that covered all the Hollywood entertainment we arranged and yesterday Burgess sent us a whole big envelope of newspaper stories and photographs which delighted her. The dinner Burgess gave [Christiane] turned out to be a dinner from midnight to dawn and there were 20 celebrities there including The Merediths, McKays, Tyrone Power, Merle Oberon, the David Selznicks [actress Jennifer Jones], Marlon Brando, John English, Charlton Heston, and God knows who else. The columnists picked up the story and it ran all over the country and ended up on the national broadcast of international news, so wrote Mrs. Freddy Wildman of New York who heard it on her radio there. So it looks like we gave the house of Latour some very good publicity. Wines drunk were named and those made by the Latours were named. Eleanor was afraid they would cut them out as commercial but they did not. It has been a lot of fun. But now we must get back to work on our other work. Sales were last month the largest we have ever had. [8/4/55]

Later in the month, when writing to the editor of *California Wineletter*, Charles van Kriedt, MR declared that it had been "perhaps the greatest wine dinner in all California history." [8/30/55] Like his wife, he tended toward hyperbole.

Scheduled to arrive at the Rays' home on Mt. Eden in late July, Chris would take a number of excursions with Barclay, as arranged by the Rays. A crucial destination, of course, had to be UC Davis, where Mlle. Latour could meet important professors and tour the winemaking research facilities and the experimental and archival vineyard collections. Inevitably, the Rays tried to involve Maynard in the plan, naturally expecting him to host her visit. But a significant sour note came into the Rays' strenuous preparations when Amerine acted irritated, apparently objecting to MR's take-charge attitude. During Amerine's sabbatical a year earlier, he had spent time with the Latour family. Wishing therefore to arrange for himself this get-together directly with Christiane, he complained to the Rays about not having heard from her; instead, he was receiving many instructions and requests from Martin. After all, he had already established his own personal connections with the Latour family!

MR tried to explain the situation and thus mollify him. But he started first with a sly comment, based on a recent phone talk with Mlle. Latour: "Maynard, she must have her eye on you, the way she spoke of you!"

> She hesitated to write to you, although she now very well may. You are a young bachelor [MA by then, though, was 44] and she is not only an eligible gal but she has said that she and her family think you a terrific personality and guy. It is one thing to write you or plan to write to you at some distant time but when it comes right down to doing it, it can well seem to a French gal a bit forward. She <u>does</u> very much want to see you. [7/10/55]

Apparently the Rays still held hopes that Maynard would someday feel motivated and self-confident enough to marry, forsaking the "confirmed bachelor" status he was settling into. Surely there was a chance for him yet ... if only he'd meet just the right sort of attractive woman! (MR's early depiction of his friend's insecurities vis-à-vis females is given in #2, in the January 2005 *WTQ* issue.)

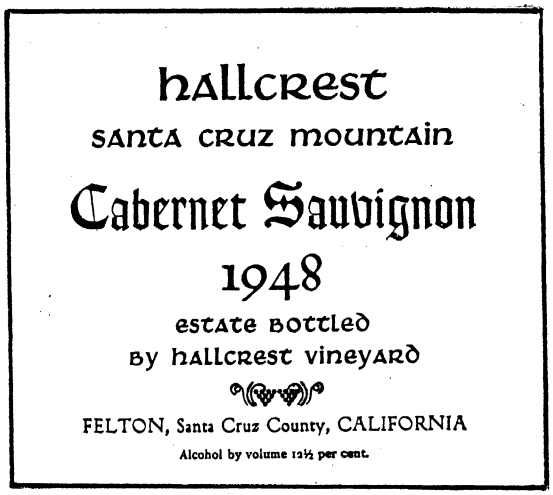
In the end, it had turned out that Maynard couldn't entertain Mlle. Latour at UC Davis after all, since he—a privileged member of the celebrated Bohemian Club—had signed up for a retreat session at the secluded Bohemian Grove that would take place during Chris's remaining available time in the San Francisco Bay area. So MR brought Mlle. Latour to Davis himself—having persuaded Dr. Albert Winkler to show her around the campus and provide

a luncheon at his home. This inconvenience furnished another occasion for a resentful MR outburst:

> Look at the way you treated the Christiane matter! Telling me, her sponsor, that she must contact you, that she must contact Guyman [a UCD professor] on whom you tried to put her off! And all this after I had written you at length explaining our family relationships and why she naturally turned to us! You made it necessary for me to Drive all the way to Davis to see that she was properly entertained there. I said nothing then but I tell you now, I could hardly believe it. [7/26/55]

(As it turned out, Amerine later managed to make up for this absence of expected gallantry by dining with Chris Latour before her return to France.)

There were dinner parties galore on Mt. Eden. And to fill out some of the days, Barclay took Christiane to a few choice wineries. One was Hallcrest, near the town of Felton in the Santa Monica Mountains, where small amounts of pure Riesling were produced.



(Proprietor Chaffee Hall, an attorney, was one of the few California vintners MR approved of, though recognizing that this "gentleman" winegrower, quite unlike himself, rarely if ever did hands-on work in field or cellar.)

To set up visits to Napa and Livermore valleys MR had written friendly letters to three of the four wineries whose wines, winemaking, and wine marketing practices MR had specifically attacked in his two April letters to Gomberg, leading to discordant repercussions. (See # 9, 10, 11.) MR had made it clear that he himself wouldn't come—which doubtless made invitations likelier. Christiane and Barclay were graciously received at both Wente and Beaulieu. Apparently, though, John Daniel of Inglenook declined to respond to MR's overture, since in his otherwise friendly letter he had reiterated previous charges about wrongly labeled, and therefore misleading, Inglenook wines.

MR wrote Amerine about these receptions, probably wanting to reassure his friend that once Quality Control came about, peace would surely descend on the California wine industry that he had recently roiled up.

> Herman Wente could hardly have been nicer to Barclay when he took Chris there. And the Marquise [de Pins, at Beaulieu] was most hospitable. Time will heal all things. Chris has told us of the hatred among the Burgundian growers generated by the fight there for their Appellation Controlee—which she says they fought to the bitter end. [7/26/55]

A few letters indicate that MR, though impressed with Mlle. Latour's surname and family connection, was now disillusioned about her potential as a future business ally. (He scarcely anticipated, anyway, the strong future entry of females into the wine business, nor would he have ever believed they could succeed as fine winemakers.) Writing to Peter on Chris's last day with them, while she and Barclay were off again to Napa Valley, he remarked on Chris's lack of genuine interest in wine or winegrowing; according to her, such apathy also characterized several young Latour boys, in line to take over the Latour enterprise someday. "They should be trained, and the interest should be developed even by now," MR remarked, disapprovingly. (He likened children to grapevines that required explicitly designed pruning and shaping so as to achieve satisfactory production at maturity. Already he was impatient for the time— in what he hoped was not the distant future—when he could start instructing and educating as yet unborn grandsons about winegrowing.) Then waxing philosophical, he commented, "Nothing is really what you think it is once you get inside of [a family]." [8/3/55] This had been true enough in his own birth family, and clearly Eleanor's as well; and in the coming year he'd again have to deal with an alarming rebellion starting up in his acquired family's ranks.

The farewell party put on for Christiane Latour at Mt. Eden included Burgess Meredith and visiting New York publisher Alfred Knopf. Hostess Eleanor kept steering the female guest of honor away from the kitchen. Although the young French woman always tried to help out, she had proved herself to be, as intra-familial correspondence shows, a domestic klutz—not to be trusted with fragile wine goblets and other prized dishware, and always apt to spill food and drink. As MR wrote to Peter right after her departure:

> Chris has gone and we have left only the scorched earth! There was a final dinner last Sunday for her.... It was really a great success but we had to virtually tie Chris to her chair. Every time she started to get up I said, "No, don't touch the salad plates—Eleanor has no place

to put them as yet," etc. I could just see her sweeping them off the table with all the oil and vinegar going onto the rug! [8/4/55]

The Rays must have sighed with relief when their hosting responsibilities ended. But the last dinner party did provide a memorable scene that ER could recount much later:

Like Paul Masson, Martin usually dominated most talk at his table, possibly out of a sense of responsibility for keeping guests entertained. And he definitely resented it if someone cut in and tried to take over to any extent. (The only one ever to challenge him on this was Burgess Meredith.... As an actor he expected to occupy center stage and perpetually hold forth. After Martin had been talking for just too long, Burgess leaped to his feet and shouted, "Shut up! *I* want to talk!" Martin was stunned silly. But he thought it very funny, and let Burgess carry on. When this happened I glanced at Alfred Knopf, seated opposite Meredith, and he was so astonished that his eyeballs actually quivered!) [*Vineyards in the Sky*, 1st edition, 1993, p. 268]

Quality Control Gets Turned Over to UC Davis

During late June and July, while setting up and then supervising the social whirl he and Eleanor had arranged for Christiane Latour, Martin Ray was still negotiating with Louis Gomberg and, through him—he thought—with the Premium Wine Producers of California. He had also sent ample materials about his quality control agitations and proposals to Dr. Albert Winkler at UC Davis (see #12). The next step seems to have been agreed upon during a phone talk with Gomberg. Perhaps by then MR was weary of spending so much time and effort on the matter, particularly because of the waning possibility of getting prominent attention from the national press favorable to his grand QC cause (#13). It might not be so easy for him now to act upon his oft-expressed threat: to widely expose the member-wineries' deceptive practices should they reject quality control.

In mid-July Louis Gomberg had sent a note to Martin Ray that picked up on MR's prior suggestion that Dr. Winkler be summoned to present his ideas to the PWP about establishing new QC rules, since Amerine had balked at getting involved. (This too was presented in #13.)

Sorry for the delay in these advices. Contact has now been made with three of the four wineries concerned and they have all concurred in the suggestion that the matter be taken up with Dr. Winkler, as we discussed. (The fourth is away on a trip and won't be back for another 10 days or so but I am quite sure he would be inclined to go along with the other three.) Dr. Winkler, as you probably know, is regarded as the industry's chief advisor on such matters and I believe he would be the logical starting point for initial consideration and evaluation of your plan. [7/15/55]

The news elicited soon afterwards this letter from MR to "My dear Lou":

I am tremendously gratified that you have brought about the successful conclusion of this long and bitter fight. Great credit is due you. You have now given the growers a face-saving solution and you have placed the plan exactly where it should be, in the hands of the University.... It had been my original suggestion that Dr. Amerine should be the man, but, as you say, Dr. Winkler is regarded as the industry's chief advisor on these matters, and there is no one to whom I would rather trust the future of the plan.

As I have told you, I will withdraw from any direct participation in whatever negotiations your group may have with the University. It is now all in your hands. But the interest of a great number of consumers and retailers has been aroused, and I shall not permit this interest to die. When you have finally worked out your plan they will be ready and anxious to support it as a commendable achievement. It is these consumers and retailers who must support the higher prices that must inevitably come as a triumphant result of a Quality Control plan. When your group can give them straight unblended authentic varietals they will be willing to pay well for them, and you will have gone a long way toward meeting any threat of imports. The great European growths will always hold their own, but the lesser ones will gradually be forced out of our market, which is as it should be.

Again, Lou, my heartfelt congratulations. [7/17/55]

So as things stood now, Maynard Amerine had been dropped as a major player in the future quality control negotiations with Gomberg's PWP group.

In a two-part letter that MR sent to Amerine toward the end of July there was this long paragraph. Obviously he assumed that Maynard had already received this Quality Control news from his colleague Albert Winkler.

As you no doubt know, the long and bitter fight to gain recognition of Quality Control has been won! Gomberg was able to get his [PWP] growers to agree to take up the plan for study and consideration at once if I would turn the entire matter over to the University at Davis. The growers thus have a means of saving face and the plan will be in the hands of the University where I had all along intended it should be when it came time to actually write the plan and adopt means of enforcement. I have had a long talk with Dr. Winkler and turned over to him the portfolio of material assembled on Quality Control, and he has agreed to meet with the Premium Wine Growers and work out with them whatever is to be agreed upon for improvements required. I think that the way it has worked out is best. Perhaps it could never have been done in any other way. You and I have

> turned up too many ill feelings among growers in our efforts to expose mal practices [*sic*] and bring on reform, and they would never have accepted either of us as direct sponsors of Quality Control, I realize now. But I, for one, am happy to have contributed my part. And it will be apparent to all who have known your work that you have from the first fought for the same principals [*sic*], even though you and I did not work together. Now let us both lend Dr. Winkler and the Growers all our support wherever we can say a good word for what they are undertaking. [7/26/55]

A week earlier, MR had reported on the current conflict between him and Amerine in a letter to Boston wine retailer Russell S. Codman, showing he still hoped that ultimately his estranged friend would be brought back into preparing and instituting a viable QC plan.

An Iced-Over Friendship

Martin Ray's objections to Amerine's surly behavior over plans being made for Christiane Latour's impending visit had made just one more source of anger and disaffection between the two friends. But something even more drastic was going on with Amerine's connection with Martin Ray. In that summertime of 1955, both the epistolary chatter and squabbles in the letters from MR to Maynard Amerine, whether or not they were connected with 1955 Wine Quality Control Fight, went mostly unanswered.

Already in early May Amerine was realizing that he needed to separate himself both personally and professionally from the unseemly fracas that MR was intentionally stirring up. His position at UC Davis required maintaining good communications with wine industry people—especially a rapport with winemakers who worked with him on research projects. He began noticing that the respectful and usually friendly enough standing that he had enjoyed among such people was disappearing. His own oft-stated goal of getting quality standards finally accepted and enacted among the premium wineries was inevitably linked up now with Martin Ray's current agitations.

Here was the crux of the dispute between the two men: Did the goal, or end—finally introducing quality-control rules and enforcement procedures into the making and marketing of the wine industry's better wines—justify the rough tactics, or means, that Martin Ray was now forcefully employing, even threatening to blackmail reputations, to bring it all about? Amerine thought not. And he kept saying so to MR, who refused to consider, let alone countenance, that circumspect point of view.

So at some point during the barrage of letters from MR, Amerine told him over the telephone, that their long friendship now had to be suspended. He said he felt distraught that the winery people were now ostracizing him. Here is how Eleanor Ray in her memoir/biography of Martin Ray later told of the shocking body blow to the two men's long-enduring friendship

> Always in the past Maynard had backed Martin's efforts to perfect California's wines, providing vital moral support and technical advice. Now, in the fracas Martin had created over trying to induce the "premium" wineries to accept quality-control measures, Maynard evidently felt that the vintners' group considered him to be in collusion with Martin Ray. So one day Maynard telephoned Martin to say that all of them had stopped speaking to him. Consequently, he must put their relationship "on ice." Martin was thunderstruck, for he had not intended to involve Maynard personally in the conflict. [*Vineyards in the Sky,* 1st edition, 1993, p. 372]

After that, things could never again be the same between them.

For some reason, MR felt motivated to compose an addendum to the letter to Maynard that he sent on July 26th (partially quoted in the previous subhead section). Typed on a separate page so that it could be private and more reproving. At the top MR had handwritten "NO COPIES TO ANYONE."

> My conversation with Lou Gomberg and with Dr. Winkler today, as covered by my letter to you on that subject today, clearly establishes that *you have no grounds for ideas expressed to me today.* [Emphasis added to indicate that this surely was the date when Amerine declared his intention to put their friendship "on ice"; the earlier part of the letter had been written beforehand.] Everyone involved knows that you refused to support me and if this bothers you[,] you have no one to blame but yourself. I told you repeatedly that <u>you</u> should be the one making the fight and I literally begged you to alter your stand. Your attitude should have been that taken by Dr. Winkler. And I ask you again to forget your hurts and support the cause you have so long championed. Actually the industry would no more have accepted you than me, and for precisely the same reasons, and you are naive if you think so. I should have realized this just as you should have. But you should be proud of all you have done that has nettled some of the growers for you were right. I am proud of the part I have played, and the feelings of those who have opposed me bother me not at all. Actually they are turning, slowly perhaps, to a new and healthy feeling of respect for me.... However else some may feel about you, all respect you. Isn't that better than sticky sugar drops? I say that we have both accomplished a great deal and I believe it mad for you to say you are ruined or that I have in any way altered anyone's feelings about you. You are not well, you made a mistake and now you are acting like a child,

exagerating [*sic*] the ills of your position, denying the friendships which are your most valuable possessions and blaming it all upon somebody else....

And now I tell you, Maynard, I shall continue to regard you as our dear friend. If you wish to be hostile you have turned against the basic philosophy you have supported for 20 years and I think you should have rest and reconsider. [7/26/55]

There's a curious document in the collection of the Amerine–MR/ER correspondence in the Ray Papers at UC Davis: the *original* letter quoted above. There are fold marks, showing it had gone through the mail in an envelope. And upon the left margin of this letter someone with a pen had set down a succession of question and exclamation marks, increasingly in multiples (e.g., !?! and ???)—and identical to ones MA had previously made in handwritten postcards and letters he'd sent to the Rays. So these were *his* comments on the contents of MR's tell-off letter. He'd responded to it only in this way, sending it back to its source—for what good would ever come from any arguing back against these professional and personal attacks?

And several weeks later, when MR wrote again to Dr. Winkler at Gomberg's behest, delegating to him the resolution of the controversial situation he had engendered, he made no explicit suggestion of enlisting Amerine as well in the work ahead.

Lou Gomberg has asked me to confirm to you the understanding between us relative to the proposed Quality Control which his Premium Winegrowers group has agreed to consider under your sponsorship. I asked Lou to write you a letter inviting you to appear before his group for a discussion of your ideas on Quality Control. He agreed to do so. It was my idea and understanding that this might be the beginning of a series of meetings between you as a study of the subject proceeded supported by University research and a practical consideration of the position of the growers.

Lou tells me he would like for his group your <u>opinion and evaluation</u> of Quality Control as you visualize it.

My interest in the matter has been turned over to you. All of you concerned know the suggestions I have made. I purposely confined and limited them because of the circumstances involved and to facilitate the agreement which we have reached. I wish to make it clear that beyond this I intend to support fully whatever you may propose, having the fullest confidence that a maximum good will be achieved for all. I believe that the University is the only logical and qualified authority. I think it best that you proceed in the undertaking without consultation with me further. And I propose the same to the growers. They have my assurance herewith that I will accept and support all that agreed between you.

I presume that any written reports will be available not only to the members of Lou's group but to prospective members as well. In such case I would like to receive copies of any such reports as I have said that on the day Quality Control becomes a reality I will request membership in the group accepting it.

It is my hope that within a year the agreed upon controls may be written and accepted, in which case it would not be too much to hope for a wide line of varietals being available in the market, all under the label of QUALITY CONTROL within five years. With this in mind I will shortly advise those who have supported and followed my efforts to bring this about that it is now all in the hands of the University and the growers ... and that I have these hopes. I refer to a large group both within and without the actual trade.

Thanking you for your sincere consideration of all involved— [8/11/55]

Finally feeling relieved now of constantly and ardently manning his chosen battle post, Martin Ray could begin devoting far more attention again to his beloved vineyards, where the grapes were fast ripening. The sugar and acid in the Pinot Noir grapes were ready for initiating the Madame Pinot champagne cuvée.

In a letter to Angelo Pellegrini written three days earlier, MR reported how the PWP members had in effect denied a place for the eminent UC Davis enologist in any discussion or planning for quality control.

Because of Amerine's stand over the years against the very things I have been trying to eliminate, the growers specified it must be Dr. Winkler, Amerine's boss, with whom they would work. I fear Maynard has been hurt, but I guess he will get over it. [8/8/55]

MR was also guessing—hoping—that the ice treatment that Amerine had applied to their once warm friendship could get melted away over time, helped by some assiduous letter writing in which he'd try to avoid any mention of the QC battle.

An Inconvenient and Suspect Intrusion

The Rays wanted to believe, of course, that Maynard's putting their friendship "on ice" meant only a temporary hiatus in their intimate relations with him; that when all the brouhaha over quality control quieted down, they'd be back together as the old, comfortably familiar threesome. So for the remainder of 1955 from time to time they sent Amerine regular reports on their activities, asked questions, and issued invitations, hoping to eventually lure him back into their lair. Following a one-pager in August, MR still reined himself in; his letters to MA were limited to two pages each in September, October, and November. They may, though, have sometimes been accompanied by copies made of other people's letters that praised the Martin Ray wines.

In September MR's letter contained two paragraphs reporting on the ambitious young local winemaker, Dan Wheeler, who was farming a vineyard property in the Santa Cruz Mountains, owned by Dr. Schermerhorn, Chaffee Hall's physician brother-in-law, and who was now bonding his winery. MR said he had previously provided Wheeler with instructions on proper vine pruning, but it hadn't been properly carried out. Also, as a vintner who loathed encountering any traces of sulfur in wine and refused to use it as a sterilizer and stabilizer, MR reported this of Wheeler to Maynard:

> He is a nut on sulphur. And despite his very casual and quiet manner he is a very determined character, with a wife backing him up who is more determined.... The last time he was here he told me our Madame Pinot Champagne has too much sulphur in it! Since it could not possibly have any detectable amount in it in springtime, I challenged him but with no apparent success. So I asked him to ask you how small an amount you can detect in a wine. [Minuscule amounts of sulfur in MR's wines could have come from his having sulfur-dusted immature grapes in springtime to prevent mildew, or from his having burned sulfur sticks within barrels to sterilize them for reuse, though they'd be well rinsed out.]

Over the years, MR frequently disparaged the wines, practices, and integrity of other vintners, whether well established ones or young aspirants. So it's nice to see more generosity of spirit here in his encouraging Maynard to meet with Dan Wheeler: "I rather believe he will listen to you if you are so inclined.... I would like very much to see the Wheelers make a go of that thing and I hope that you can steer them where they need help." [9/9/55]

In the following month MR's letter to Amerine started out with this:

> We had a very good vintage, getting the Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon off with full sugar and high acidity. And the Chardonnay, too, seems very good. Sales continue splendid and it is all we can do to get the orders out, now with Will [MR's nephew] gone. You know, he went back into the Army! His brother Jim finally got his PhD, I probably told you. [Earlier, before he married Eleanor, MR had hoped that these two sons of his oldest brother Al (Alpheus), who as boys and young men had periodically worked for him, at both Paul Masson and Mt. Eden, would eventually take active roles in his winemaking enterprise.] Anyway, Barclay is coming home this week end with a friend so that we can have a Champagne bottling.

What he then told Maynard in detail was weirdly disquieting.

> But what I am writing you about is a long inspection that we have been having. The Inspector just left and I thought I should write you about it. As a result of my Quality Control activities a special inspector was sent down with instructions to tear everything apart and find everything possible. They proceeded on the assumption that since all the wines made before the Kew period were owned by Ray & Company and they were sold to a newly formed corporation, Martin Ray, Inc., the latter and present Company has no right to Vintage any of them. [These business arrangements, initiated by MR in 1949 with the Kew family because of Elsie's illness, were discussed in the July and October 2005 issues of *WTQ*.] But I was able to establish that they were sold in original containers and were not in any way treated and so it was I who saved the right to vintage them. They found that I am overfilling our bottles, as I have always known, and I rather disarmed them by writing them a letter on the spot admitting the practice as far back as 1936 and giving reasons and calling attention that several inspectors have in the past discussed this with me. I asked that they let me pay a tax on the sales during the life of this Corporation, on the few cc's overage shown by measuring the actual fill. It comes to perhaps $9. They set up a little Chem Lab in the kitchen and ran alcohols on all our wines. It cost us a fortune on so many small lots.

No doubt when MR conveyed the next piece of news to Maynard he appreciated the irony involved.

> But they could find over 14% in only one wine—the Amerine Cuvee of the Pinot Noir 1951 vintage. [This wine resulted from Maynard's having undertaken to vintage, with novice Peter's assistance, MR's very ripe, high-Brix Pinot noir grapes during the Rays' wedding trip that September, as told toward the end of #4.] They made a great deal of talk about this, despite the fact there was only three barrels of this particular wine. And samples were taken to their Chemist in San Francisco and today the inspector was at the same subject again. He took the card and I had not mentioned your name to him in any way. Only I saw him make note of your name. Nothing has been said about you or why your name is on the card. After all, there is no reason to attach any importance to it. But it may arise and I wanted you to know that they have the card and have made note of your name. I am to have a hearing. They say I should have cut the sugar with water! I told them I would not discuss it before the hearing.

He had still more to say that he thought would interest Maynard.

> After a long investigation they have been able to find nothing to pin on us other than the insignificant tax that may be levied on me for overfilling and the three barrels of 1951 Pinot Noir which showed 14% alcohol. And on the last, I have a previous inspector's word that their chemist had never yet found a wine analysed as 14%—he always reports excessive alcohols on table wines merely as 13.9 plus. And the inspector changed

the card to so read in his own handwriting. I still have that card! But they trumped up something that may cost me about $2,000. They are arbitrarily determining that, since Ray & Company made certain of our present (pre Kew wines) inventory and it was transferred to the new company, Martin Ray, Inc., this constitutes being in the business of buying and selling wines not made by us. For this I had no license. And the special stamp tax amounts to $250 per year for conducting such a business. This, with penalties, amounts to about $2,000!

MR felt confident now in identifying for Amerine the person behind this time-consuming and costly intrusion into his cellar and the wines it contained in barrels and bottles.

The inspector told me on the side that his investigation came as a result of a letter written by Frank Schoonmaker to his friend John Huntington, the Deputy Chief of the A&T Unit [Alcohol Tax and Tobacco Dept] in Washington! Perhaps knowing this is not worth $2,000 exactly. But it is always good to know what brings on evil acts. Now, in case I am asked to explain what your name on the card means, I will say that it was an honorary thing—I was not well enough at the time to have the vintage, you were visiting us and directed our son briefly in the making of that small token vintage. If you wish me to say otherwise, I will. [10/23/55]

(Schoonmaker's officious and venomous letter to MR sent earlier, in July, and the latter's forceful reply to it, were covered in #13.)

It's intriguing to find the apparent derivation of this investigation in a letter that Eleanor wrote to her son Peter almost a year later. Dan Wheeler with his wife and four children had just visited the Rays for dinner on Mt. Eden—finally departing at 3:30 a.m. ER first mentioned that Rusty would again be buying Chardonnay grapes from Wheeler.

Next year our own Chardonnay will be coming in sufficient quantity. But we're not telling them [the Wheelers] they are for our own use, but for a friend. We can't have Wheeler telling people in the industry we get any grapes from him.

ER's comment shows how MR didn't ever want other people—whether vintners, wine writers, or customers—to know that some of his wines actually were made from grapes that he had not grown, despite his claims that they'd originated in his own vineyards. Moreover, she then gave an instance of why. "Incidentally," she wrote, "it was Wheeler who started all that trouble we had over excess alcohol, etc."

The Rays heard from Dan Wheeler that in the previous year, when he invited various winery owners to his place and given out samplings of wines made from his vineyard grapes, Robert Mondavi, who had been there, asked to take some Martin Ray wine away with him to "analyze." Having then judged it high in alcohol, and doubtless still angry over MR's attacks on Krug's and other wineries' blended varietals, he turned the wine over to Frank Schoonmaker, probably knowing he'd do something drastic with it.

... and Wheeler says Frankie-the-Schoon [the Rays' epithet for Schoonmaker] simply went wild!! This is just what he wanted, wrote the gov't. a letter on this, stirred up all our trouble. So you see this is how a person can cause one hell of a lot of trouble. Wheeler may or may not have intended this, but he buddies around with Mondavi, Goulet of Almaden ... and it's my own personal opinion that he is no friend of ours, is the kind of fellow who is trying to get in good with these more established men and wineries by feeding them with material they can use about us. [9/5/56]

No wonder MR often declared that he was singled out for persecution from organizations or individuals in the wine industry. After all, sometimes paranoidal inclinations and ideation can be based on adverse real-life experiences.

Disillusionment Sets In

Now that the responsibility for discussing the desirability and logistics of setting up a quality control plan was going to be handled by the University of California at Davis, in the person of Dr. Albert Winkler, MR thought he could relax more in the back seat. Still, there was something disquieting about what Louis Gomberg had written to him when wishing to clarify the circumstances of the willingness of members of the Premium Wine Producers of California to summon Winkler.

In mid-August Gomberg sent a rather cautionary, and even foreboding, note to MR, letting him know that only four winery proprietors or their representatives, *not* the entire PWP membership, had invited Dr. Winkler of UC Davis to present ideas for a QC program.

Dr. Winkler is most welcome to attend and address any of the meetings of the Premium Wine Producers of California, on the subject of quality control or any other subject of his choosing. The group of four wineries (BV, Inglenook, Krug and Wente) to which your original remarks [*i.e.*, the April and May letters] were addressed is the group that confirmed my suggestion that the matter be referred to Dr. Winkler for study. I have no official connection with these four wineries. Our relations have been and are entirely informal, which brings me to the second point: The Premium Wine Producers of California, as such, has not as yet considered your plan, nor has it had any part in any of the negotiations up to this time. This is the organization of which I am the Secretary-Treasurer. [8/15/55]

Though no longer in the QC forefront, inevitably MR kept wondering about what was currently

happening to advance his great cause. When he called Dr. Winkler in early autumn and learned that he hadn't been asked yet to come to a PWP meeting at which he could present his ideas about creating and enforcing quality control within the membership ranks, thereby to move toward growing, making, and marketing better and honestly labeled varietal wines. At this, MR concluded that he had been cleverly outmaneuvered and hoodwinked by the Premium Wine Producers—or, even more likely, the California Wine Institute. Not only did it provide the meeting place, but it also had become the new organization's sponsor. It was apparent to MR that for all Gomberg's clear personal interest in and probable approval of his ideas for quality control (per his earlier letters to MR and MR's reports on their phone conversations), LG himself was basically a hireling; he was not empowered to force anything upon the membership that they didn't want.

So by late October, MR was sharing his downright suspicions with Angelo Pellegrini. And after giving him news about dismal decisions recently made among wine producers, he railed against the actions of persons in the wine industry who'd brought about the government inspectors' recent intrusion and fines—which repeated similar adverse experiences of his at Masson years before, and also set down what he'd report to Amerine on the following day.

> The growers double crossed me. After I turned the Quality Control portfolio over to Dr. Winkler, they stalled and stalled and have done exactly nothing. But they have, through the Technical Advisory Committee of the Wine Institute voted unanimously to permit wines to be vintaged even though they not be 100% of a given year, just as varietals can be called whatever variety they may use to make up 51% of the wine! They think they have me licked, but they haven't. Shortly I shall make a further move. In the mean time, just in case you think they are not both malicious and determined to fight my efforts for reform, they have caused the Government to fall upon me in determined search for some cause they can use to bring me to grief....The inspector admitted to me he had instructions to "Find anything he could that I am doing that they can bring against me." What they do not know is that they cannot find anything beyond trivia and I am able and prepared to hold my own. When I fought the growers before they did exactly the same thing and it went on for two years. Until we can remove the criminal element from our industry, this thing will be turned on anyone that opposes them.

Then MR voiced the same bilious opinions about the other wine men he'd begun expressing much earlier to both Julian Street and Maynard Amerine—and added a tantalizing condemnatory tidbit.

> It is interesting to realize that the public in general when viewing our growers think of them as such fine men. Little do they know them. These chaps with which I am concerned are hard babies and they stop at nothing. In my recent research into the history of one of them I learned that he had been caught red handed putting into one of the best known and most respected California brandies he makes a substance forbidden by law but which gives it the taste and nose of an older spirit. [ER later scribbled something illegible in the margin that identified the man.] He was forbidden ever again to set foot on a bonded premise. But he got out of it and no one ever heard of it. He was the same man who had used a deadly poison to preserve his wines and was caught at that some years ago. My information came from the Government Inspector who had all the facts.
>
> Well, it's a great life, if you don't weaken! [10/22/55]

One is always apt to wonder to what degree MR's persistent paranoia distorted his perception and reporting. However, there surely is some factual truth in what he had written now to both Amerine and Pellegrini, and also told other people at this and other times about various industry abuses and persecutions.

André L. Simon

On the same day that MR composed the above letter to Pellegrini, indicating that he might be launching another one of his vehement volleys, MR wrote to the influential international wine authority André Simon, letting him know of the stalemate, or rather reversal, in QC progress.

> Our very successful vintage now being over, I can answer your welcome letter of September 12, and give you a recent report on the status of my Quality Control fight. When last I wrote you I felt gratified at having turned over all material to Dr. Winkler of the University of California, as proposed by leaders of the Premium Wine group through Louis Gomberg.... However, after all seemed promisingly settled, and I wrote Gomberg congratulating him on the part he had played in bringing this about, he wrote me on August 15th a letter clearly exposing the insincerity of the group's leaders, for as you know from copies of my previous letters sent you, I at no time addressed my industry proposals to them individually but to them as a group.
>
> So you see their move was merely a tactical maneuver pulled so as to get me removed from the picture, and thus, with pressure off, they could rest assured that the matter was sidestepped. They have made no contact with Dr. Winkler whatsoever, and thus he has not been asked officially to work out any Quality Control plan or do anything.
>
> But you can be sure that I don't intend to let the matter

rest here. Shortly I shall give them another blast, if the inactivity continues, and send copies to the trade and to all individuals on my list interested in fine wine.

I know you would be interested to hear of the industry's latest effort, through the Wine Institute, to degrade our standards. It was proposed that it no longer be necessary to have a vintage wine 100% from a given year, but allow a small percentage of blend. This proposal met with no objections whatsoever, and it was given to a sub-committee [the TAC] to work out. Now, I suppose, it will become law before long. At this same meeting they turned down a suggestion that the minimum percentage of varietals in a vintage table wine be increased from 51 to 75 percent; the subcommittee after discussion reported that the wine industry was not ready at this time for such a move. Through all the years of California viticultural history they are never ready to move forward, but are always ready to go backwards— and instantly! [The meeting referred to was that of the Wine Institute's Technical Advisory Committee, on 5 August 1955, and MR mentioned the same two decisions in his letter to Pellegrini.]

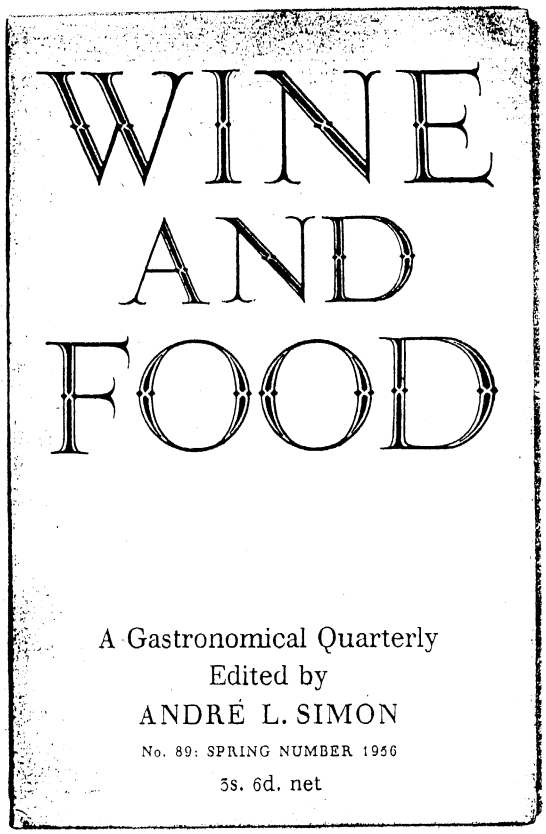
MR now set down what he hoped André Simon would do, and said why. As progenitor of the Wine and Food Society, with multiple active branches in various cities, Simon's support of quality control measures in an article to be published in a future issue of the *Wine and Food* newsletter might work wonders in rousing wine connoisseurs to join MR's embattled stance.

I tell you what goes on here in the hopes that you as leader of the largest group of wine enthusiasts in the world can make your magazine readers conscious of the tremendous pressures being exerted over the years to devaluate all label names, standards and practices in the California industry. For it is only through public education and public demand that our evils will be eliminated. Most of our wineries still are run by Prohibition's bootleggers or their descendants, and they reflect still the thinking of that era, when the whole idea was to get by with all they could. They all drink spirits, not wine, and not having any idea of what a fine wine should taste like they assume in their ignorance that nobody else can judge, either. [Since MR didn't socialize with other winery owners and winemakers, this wholesale assertion, of course, seems absurdly unjustifiable.] Their entire efforts are expended in making quality claims, spending vast sums to this end. And unfortunately they have gotten by with their false claims for the most part, for many years. But I am greatly encouraged by the great number of people interested in learning about wines, today, and really believe that we are going to make progress in eliminating these evils, as more and more people become aware of the situation, and demand better wines.

Some concerted stand must be taken against malpractices in the industry, by recognizable groups of people. So far, for twenty years, I've never found one individual to stand with me in a fight for quality, believe it or not. [MR had clearly given up on Amerine by now. But also Amerine, as he'd pointed out to him, was not "of the industry."] In the late '30s I hired a group of lawyers to fight personally against the proposal to allow champagne to be made by the bulk process, but lost the fight. Now the law allows them to say "Naturally fermented in bulk"! Of course our sparkling wine over here should not even be called champagne, I always avoided it by merely labeling mine "Extra Dry", but soon a law was enacted making it compulsory to label any sparkling wine champagne. Gradually, like termites, these fellows eat away the meaning of all terms, all designations of quality, unless we put on a really effective war against them. [10/22/55]

With or without any help from André Simon, Martin Ray was going back into the battle for wine quality control as its fitting standard bearer.

[*To be continued*]



[*Wine and Food was published quarterly by The Wine and Food Society over a 37-year period. Simon was editor for the first 116 numbers, from 1934–1962. The journal is a masterly archive of prominent wine and food writers of the day.* — Ed.]