Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles

The Third Article in a Series (continued)

by *Barbara Marinacci*

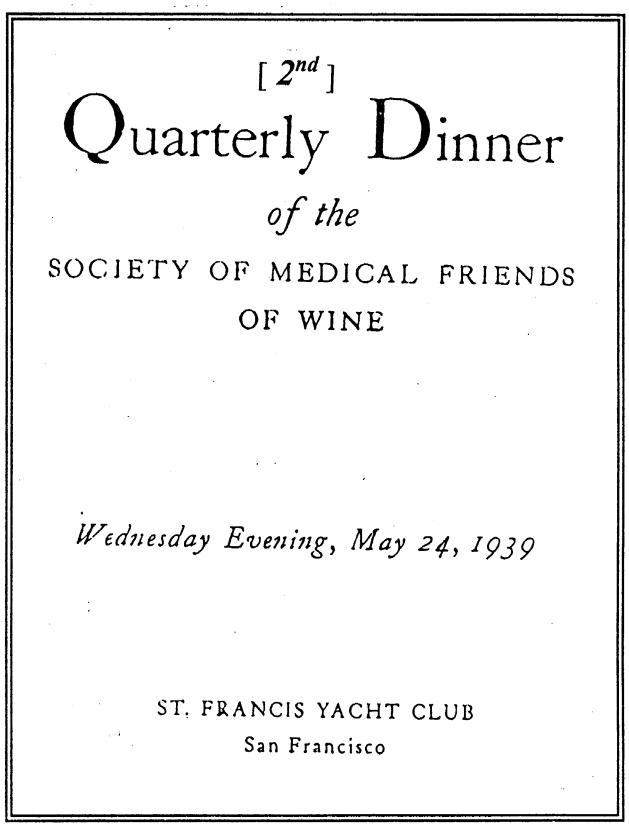
[This is the third segment of an article within the continuing series based primarily on the writings of California's "legendary" vintner Martin Ray (1904-1976). For 40 years he zealously promoted the cause of wine quality, particularly in the forms of planting more fine winegrape varieties, producing unblended varietal wines, and assuring their honest labeling. Author Barbara Marinacci, the stepdaughter of Martin Ray, prepared the Martin and Eleanor Ray Papers for permanent storage in Special Collections, UC Davis Shields Library. Comments about Amerine in Martin Ray's letters to Julian Street quoted herein, as well as about other principal figures in California's wine industry in the early 1940s, are reprinted with the kind permission of the Manuscript Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.]

PART III. MARTIN RAY AND MAYNARD AMERINE: 1937–1976

-3-

By 1938, U. C. Davis's primary enologist was becoming acknowledged as an expert wine connoisseur and wine judge. Maynard Amerine's growing reputation resulted from his diligent determination, since the time of his 1935 appointment to the teaching faculty and research staff of the Division of Viticulture, to learn as much as he possibly could about wine in its many manifestations: past and present winegrowing practices in different regions of the world, research findings that might improve winemaking technology, and rational methods of sensory evaluation of many types of wines. He was ambitious in both his career objectives and a larger aim to push California into demonstrating its potential for producing excellent wines.

Amerine also understood the newly revived California (and American) wine industry's need to start and support educational efforts that would enhance wine marketing. André Simon's launching in the mid-1930s of the international network of Wine and Food Societies inspired a receptive small community of wine lovers in the San Francisco Bay area. One of Amerine's early moves in gaining knowledge of wines was to join up. He also managed to become a member of the highbrow Bohemian Club, and hobnobbed with oenophilic physicians in the Society of Medical Friends of Wine, San Francisco. In fact, Amerine himself was responsible for getting the latter organization started. He brought the idea back from his 1937 trip to France, where he had learned about just such a group. He passed the concept on to Leon Adams, the Wine Institute's public relations man, who soon put it into action with a core of doctors already belonging to the Wine & Food Society. (The Society of Medical Friends of Wine recently celebrated its 65th anniversary.) These associations' sophisticates—older, wealthier, and far better acquainted than he at first with fine wines (which most had managed to acquire, store, share, and drink during the 13 years of Prohibition)—were happy enough to take the budding young professor under their wings. Within several years Amerine knew more, and tasted more skillfully, than most of his mentors. Still, he was usually diplomatic and circumspect about it all; a full aplomb could come later on, in good time.


[2nd]

Quarterly Dinner

of the

SOCIETY OF MEDICAL FRIENDS OF WINE

Wednesday Evening, May 24, 1939

ST. FRANCIS YACHT CLUB
San Francisco

— The evening began with Paul Masson California Dry Champagne 1936. The speaker of the evening was Maynard A. Amerine: "Wine Growing in California, Its Present Day Status and Future Objectives." —

Deftly, Amerine had insinuated himself into positions of choosing wines for special events, partly because he was willing to spend time and effort doing investigative tastings. His admiration for wines now being made by his friend Martin Ray, proprietor of the Paul Masson Champagne Co., at times influenced his wine choices, since he totally endorsed MR's determination to produce pure varietals vintaged from the finest French grapes.

For instance, members of the Wine and Food Society of San Francisco received a letter in late summer of 1938 from its Honorary Secretary, Harold H. Price, announcing a banquet to be given on Thursday, October 27th, at the "beautiful and commodious quarters of the Stock Exchange Club, 155 Sansome Street, well known for the quality of its cooking." The letter ended with an assurance that "The menu has been the product of much thought and discussion and will fulfill our high standard of perfection." (Note that a benevolent invitation was extended to members' spouses and significant female others: "Ladies may attend.") The letter's third and fourth paragraphs described the wine list for the occasion:

> The selection of the wines has been placed in the capable hands of Dr. M. A. Amerine. There will be provided the exceptional opportunity of drinking delightful California wines twenty-five years and more of age and perfectly sound. There are few such wines in existence, and they are beyond price.
>
> As a surprise, a relatively recent California wine will be presented, which the undersigned considers the finest California wine that he has ever tasted, and which is a refutation to those who believe that California is incapable of producing a wine of superb quality and breed. [The wine selected was the Paul Masson Cabernet Sauvignon 1936.]

Obviously, Dr. Amerine had already persuaded Harold Price that Martin Ray was the winemaker whose new wines were demonstrating, above all others, California's potential for world-class winemaking— renewing that bright promise shown in the decades before Prohibition.

The Quest for Quality

By 1940 Amerine had already written several articles on wine tasting that would begin establishing a more scientific basis for judging wine quality and defining special characteristics in wines, based partly on the demanding and complex wine research that he and Dr. Winkler had begun in 1935. And as a co-author with several other enologists, viticulturists, and oenophiles he was publishing a series of monographs about different types of wine.

Undoubtedly when together, MR and MA often discussed technical issues related to winemaking, when MR's own opinions and conjectures about cellar phenomena probably intrigued and sometimes amused his wine-scientist friend. Unlike his winemaker friend, Amerine couldn't really afford to express an adamant disdain for the many winemakers who used metabisulphite and hot-room tactics to sterilize and pasteurize wines to prevent them from going bad, and to clarify with chemicals and fine-filtering to make them suitable for fast turnover in commercial release.

This passage in an MR letter to Julian Street surely reflects the sort of talks he often had with Amerine.

> No, it is not necessary to fine, filter or otherwise clarify a wine if it is of a good year and care is taken with the vines, grapes, picking, crushing and care of the wine. My experience shows that our wines are so well balanced they will and do become crystal clear for a few days in January or February, but not every wine or every year—most of them, ¾ the whites. Then, one of those few days, we rack the wine off its lees and dead yeast cells. Soon the few remaining yeasts in the wine start to work and the wine hazes-up very slightly as it works through Spring and Summer, those yeast feeding on the little remaining sugar and struggling against the alcohol. But it is a losing game for those yeasts and after a couple seasons of it, they give up, drop out of suspension for the last time and the wine may be racked clear of them and it remains completely clear. It may be bottled in the third or fourth year, after two, three or four Christmases. But sometimes it is longer. I have some 1936 wine I will not bottle until January next. A storm side, especially a north wind, will make the wine haze-up, too. Most people tell you this is untrue but they just don't know about wines. If their wine has been killed it cannot be expect[ed] to act like it is alive. [MR disapproved of all "treated" wines, which deliberately eliminated minute living organisms.] Atmospheric pressure seems to affect the wine and I would not be surprised if the moon does although I may go too far there, I haven't proved it. I do know the wines while yet a year or two old are very easily disturbed and something does change them from month to month. Storms, winds and temperature I know effects [*sic*] them. There is not more than a very few days in the first January or February of a wine's life that it is completely clear.

MR then ends his long monologue to tell of the UC Davis enologist's sometimes amused reactions to such assertions and speculations.

> Amerine laughs at some of my declarations, too. But he has a cellar controlled by artificial means. His temperature, atmospheric pressure, does not change naturally. But in general he sees with me, I think. [6/15/40]

Though based on observations and perhaps touched a bit by an almost mystical affinity for winemaking, MR's opinions weren't products of the painstaking scientific research being conducted at UC Davis. (It must be remembered, too, that little was known then

about crucial microbial activities, such as malolactic fermentation, that came after the early, post-harvest fermentation to alter wines as they aged.)

Much as Amerine at that time, and for some years afterward, respected the elemental purity of MR's approach to vintaging grapes into wine, and admired many of the results he got by using it, he would need to view this mostly past-entrenched, almost primitive methodology as restrictive and impractical when applied to truly commercial—that is, frankly profit-seeking—winemaking. After all, MA was employed by the University of California's College of Agriculture and its Division of Viticulture for two main reasons: to educate a new generation of young winemakers in the best, most practicable, and cost-effective methods of producing wine as a principal product of the state; and to conduct research into all processes of winemaking, from testing the vinous properties of a multitude of grape varieties to studying the complex stages of fermentation (and what could go wrong during them, and why) to determining the proper aging, bottling, and labeling of wines.

Amerine in the late 1930s and early 1940s saw few opportunities open up for his handful of enology students. But that would change, and then the University system increasingly would rely upon the California wine industry's most prosperous wineries to supply funds to help defray the costs of training professionals to work at their facilities, and to underwrite innumerable specific research projects that someday might well benefit their grape-growing and wine-producing and -selling abilities.

So Maynard Amerine needed to be highly politic to enable him to move adroitly through several very different realms. Primarily there was the academic one, and there he basically earned his living; corresponded and met with European enologists, whose investigative work hadn't been halted by Prohibition's stultifying 13-year hiatus; conducted his own wine research while initiating and supervising the work of others; and wrote papers and books that explicated wine technology. Then there was the aesthetic realm in which Amerine had already become a widely acknowledged judge of wines, and he could also educate lay people, in person and through popular writings, in the niceties of wine tasting. Finally, Amerine played an outreach role whereby he interacted frequently with winery proprietors and winemakers, conducting applied research projects while trying to persuade them to increase the planting and vintaging of fine winegrapes—always with the goal of improving wine quality.

> He has a very good attitude toward making wines as they must be made to be fine. In fact, he has little interest, I believe, in the factory type wines. He is the only one out here, unless it be some of his friends at the University, that really takes prides in natural methods. But he has more theoretical knowledge and it naturally makes him think differently at times than I think. This is good, too, for after all he is a teacher and he must deal with theory. But he is about as close to the soil as he could be. He has close touch with all the producers, knows all the vineyards. [7/4/40]

Martin Ray Takes on the Wine Industry

Amerine's ardent quality-promoting advocacy had led to his forming a close personal friendship with the activist outsider Martin Ray, despite their personality, temperament, and lifestyle differences. They mostly traveled in very different social circles and working environments. What bound them most closely was their passion for wine and a wholehearted agreement on the changes most needed to achieve quality in the benighted wine industry: planting far more fine-varietal grapevines; not blending the wines made from them with those made from lesser, much more abundant varieties; then labeling and marketing all superior-class wines honestly so that the winegrape varieties and regional origins would be given, along with the year of vintaging; and introducing self-regulatory measures in the industry that the government could help to enforce.

Even when operating Paul Masson in the late 1930s and early 1940s, MR didn't pay much attention to the latest findings in wine research, though he must have heard a number of things from Amerine that pertained to recent technical innovations in winery paraphernalia and lab work or vineyard-tending tactics and machinery. But MR was a fundamentalist; he subscribed to what he called the "classical methods," which tended to use traditional equipment appropriate for small-scale vintaging, fermentation, and aging, and to eschew practices that sped up the natural and slow progression of a particular vintage's development toward marketable quality (which even then might require further years in wine collectors' cellars).

In his decided liking for hands-on work in both vineyard and cellar, and later (after 1941) the economic necessity to do as much of this himself as possible, MR had little time for perusing research reports. Furthermore, he resisted making any changes in his methods once he had achieved, through deliberate experimentation, results that thoroughly satisfied him. He also believed that much of what went on in viticultural and enological research didn't apply to his fine quality-focused winemaking, since it was done largely to benefit large-scale vineyard operations and wineries that mass-produced their wines—because the funds that supported such investigations largely came from the big commercial companies.

Almost from the start of his tenure at Paul Masson

in 1936, MR became a contentious critic of the wine industry's status quo. Making insulting remarks about other wineries and their wines, he wasn't at all concerned that what he'd said would create enemies or exacerbate his reputation as a curmudgeon; in fact, at times he actually seemed to glory in doing so.

Privately, Amerine clearly agreed with some or many of MR's strong opinions, and at times contributed backup evidence to sustain them, along with sheer gossip. It's evident that he supplied adverse information about other wineries and vintners' practices and results. For instance, here's an excerpt from a letter from MR to Julian Street containing one of his typical diatribes about another winery.

> Why, Dr. Amerine and Dr. Winkler of the U of C shake their heads over Wente's wine, even Frank Schoonmaker suggests to Wente how to make their wines and even has now made certain definite conditions to which his purchases from them are subject. They simply don't have any top grade natural wines. But they can be bought cheap. They have hundreds of acres and are a commercial business making the best wines in their valley [Livermore], that is all, nothing more. One of these days, someone will show what can be done with their grapes and then their wines and the wines of that whole valley will be classified for what they are. [8/24/40]

MR must have frequently sent Amerine tasting reports after trying out wines made by his competitors, which he did often with his head vintner, Oliver Goulet. Fortuitously, this one letter— again the Wente winery took a hit—survives because he sent a carbon copy to Julian Street; thus it got preserved among the Street Papers at Princeton Library. Otherwise it would have been destroyed in the Masson winery fire of July 1941, and it's doubtful Amerine preserved the original.

> Dear Amerine,
>
> Today Goulet and I tasted Wente Bros.' Pinot blanc 1937 which Frank had told me was a very good wine. I had expected that they might "have something" in it as Besone wrote that it is being sold at a premium price as something very fine. (Is it $18 per case?) But as we poured it into the glasses I told Goulet it would either be just like all the rest of their wines, else it would be a pleasant and interesting experience.
>
> Well, it was just like all the rest, sulphur, no total, not varietal, not a natural wine and tasting like it had been cooked. And it was sweet, that is, high in reducing sugar, suggesting SO_2, pasteurization, filtering. We could detect no trace of Pinot in it and it was a great disappointment to us. Looking at the wine in the bottle, before it was opened, we rather expected a natural wine as it was very dirty and we thought, "they have made a natural wine which wouldn't clear up and they bottled it anyway." Afterward, we thought it had probably gone into the bottle clear but failed to hold.
>
> Now, what I want to know is, have they any Pinot Blanc. I want to know because I would like to know if it is possible for a Pinot to be so made and treated as to lose all traces of its varietal characteristics. I always found Wente's wines uniformly high in sulphur and that artificial cooked taste, regardless of label, and I suppose it is possible all varietal characteristics are lost in their treatment. But since they sell this as their "best" I expected more. I am, even so, very anxious to know if they actually have the grapes, so let me know. [12/12/40]

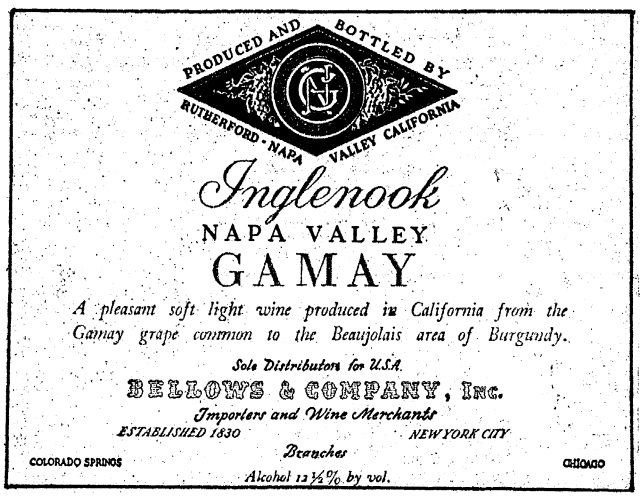
"It is pure folly."

MR's letters to Street often express a vehemence he must have spouted at times in Amerine's company. He especially got worked up, it seems, after his East Coast correspondent, friend, and wine authority had just written something favorable about other California wineries that were building good reputations back East—at least among wine distributors like Bellow, with whom Julian was affiliated. It's likely that a lot of MR's information actually came from Maynard Amerine, who knew the wineries, the vineyards, and the wines better than anyone around—though of course he wouldn't have carried on in this churlish manner.

> I am becoming impatient with the ignorance and fraud of producers. After all, it doesn't require a lifetime to identify the varieties of the vines growing in a single vineyard, and when they deliberately refuse identifications of experts or themselves rename their grapes to comply with trade advantages, it is time that innocent bystanders seek refuse from what is sure to ultimately ensue.
>
> With the good of the industry at heart, I have been more "general" than specific, in discussing these things with you at times in the past but now I must tell you my opinion, just as herein above expressed. You have often wondered why, in California, the great varieties do not appear to produce wines true to varietal character, as suggested by wines claimed to have been made from such varieties. The answer is, they are not made from such varieties.
>
> Inglenook's so-called Pinot Noir is not Pinot Noir. It is what was named by a certain leader in viticultural circles, "Pinot St. George." From that, they came to call it "Pinot Noir." It hasn't the slightest resemblance to the Pinot Noir, nor is it in any way related. Naturally, the wine doesn't taste like Pinot Noir. This is the grape scattered all over the northern part of the state and called by ignorant or fraudulent producers, Pinot Noir.
>
> Inglenook's so-called "Pinot Loire" is in fact the Chenin Blanc and two years ago they called it that. It is in no sense related to the Pinot Chardonnay and does not resemble it in any way. Beauleau [*sic*] have this same grape, also calling it "Pinot Loire." Both have been told by experts, it is no Pinot. The Chenin blanc is grown in

the Loire River Valley, Anjou. It has sometimes been called, "The pineau of the Loire," never a Pinot. Our little friend, Chellicheff [*sic*, meaning André Tchelistcheff] told one of the viticultural authorities only recently, "Oh well, we call it Pinot Loire." Chenin blanc is the Vouvry [*sic*] grape. It doesn't belong in the Pinot family....

Do you suppose anyone up there knows the difference or even, which, if any of the varieties, they have? I can tell you the answer to what they have is in their wines. I can also tell you upon authority, they do not have the true Gamay Beaujolais and it is impossible ever to make, from what they have, a Gamay wine. The character of a great, or lesser but distinguished, variety is always to be found in its natural unblended wine. To hell with all their claims! Look to the wine. Whether good or bad, the answer to whether or not they have the varieties is in their wine. I have the added advantage of being able to look also at their vines.



And Inglenook's "Johannisberger Riesling" is not Johannisberger Riesling. What I am telling you should lead you to the unavoidable conclusion that Inglenook is not the vineyard you are trying to believe it is. From it can come excellent wines, their quality varying with the ability of their wine-maker but always limited by their varieties and their soil and climatic conditions. If you will accept their limitation, you will be happier with Bellow's selection. After all, it is just what they need. Why must they covet the leadership in the commercial bottle-wine business and at the same time endeavor to ride in on our wagon [Paul Masson's reputation for pure, high-quality varietals] to an associate-position in which they enjoy none of the necessary requirements or even understanding? It is pure folly. If I were you, I'd get Mr. Wildman to employ Dr. Winkler or Dr. Olmo at the University of California to identify all Inglenook grapes for Bellows because otherwise they are going to look mighty foolish. More interest is being shown in varieties now and people find out in time. But you can always play safe by relying on the wine. That is the only true test. Even vines growing in the field do not insure their being in the wine named after them.

I have already told you about the Cabernet grown out here. "Cabernet" is like saying "Claret" or "Burgundy." It isn't enough by which to identify a wine or grape. What Cabernet? Cabernet franc or Cabernet-Sauvignon? In California, it is likely to be the "Cabernet Pfeffer," which is not Cabernet at all—it is a grape so named by Mr. Pfeffer, upon whose acres I used to play when a youngster and which were later acquired by the late Fremont Older, a great man. Remember him? If not Pfeffer's Cabernet, it is in California probably Cabernet franc. I have yet to see in California a pure Cabernet-Sauvignon wine outside our own and every so-called Cabernet-Sauvignon vineyard I have yet visited has been one of these other varieties or all mixed up. There aren't many who can tell the difference. [10/17/40]

These pointed attacks by MR on other wineries' winegrape plantings and varietal wines would continue in the years to come, both verbally and in letters, then eventually in print. As word of such things got around, they were bound to infuriate the people thus targeted for criticism and scorn. Yet surely there was some truth in various statements he made. MR himself didn't travel around much to inspect other people's vineyards, but he spent time with the three UC Davis scientists who frequently did: Maynard Amerine, of course, but also Albert Winkler and Harold Olmo. They kept statistics on the varieties grown in specific locations throughout the state—and noted the pitiful acreage accorded to the grapes needed for making fine wines. Thus, whenever MR made forceful pronouncements about somebody else's misidentified grape varieties during his Masson years (and afterwards), whether as vines growing in a vineyard or as an erroneously labeled varietal wine, he often had an expert's expressed opinion backing him up. His University sources, though, wouldn't ever care to admit that they had given him information to use as ammunition against some winery or vintner's reputation. Over time, they would learn to be more cautious in supplying him with information they had accumulated from observations in vineyards and wine tasting experiences.

It can also be said, though, that MR himself had an exceptionally sharp eye for details in grapevines and an excellent memory, which gave him the ability to differentiate among them. (At the time, little attention was being given to clones, the varieties' variants.) Therefore he knew most varieties when he saw them in the field. Furthermore, he maintained when writing to Street that his experience with tasting fine European vintages (and therefore his ability to detect the presence of particular varietals) was far wider and

deeper than that of all other California vintners of the time. Therefore, he felt he could readily dismiss the likes of John Daniel at Inglenook, Georges de Latour at Beaulieu, Louis M. Martini, and the Wente brothers.

Martin Ray, unlike many winery proprietors and winemakers of his time or all time, just wasn't a joiner. He didn't really wish to mingle with his peers. He mostly stayed close to home, entertaining a wide variety of guests before or after busying himself in his own vineyards and wine cellars. He really expected people to come to him, not vice versa, and though he could be a convivial host, sometimes his tolerance level for sociability would suddenly be exceeded, and he'd explode like fireworks. The choicest documentation of MR's behavior toward a visitor who roused his ire can be found in his long report to Julian Street of a turbulent encounter that took place some months earlier, either in late 1939 or early 1940, with André Tchelistcheff. Street must have been delighted with this telling, for at the top of the first page he wrote "Martin Ray = Bully letter" and in the left margin, "Swell!–the visit of Tchelistcheff." (Street had been a friend of Theodore Roosevelt's, and from him must have picked up that expression.)

Witness to a Wine Squabble

Maynard Amerine probably realized early on that maintaining a friendship with Martin Ray would be much like riding a roller coaster. There could be few if any dull moments when in his proximity. MR often mentioned in letters to Street that the Davis enologist had come with someone else, to meet him and then look around the immaculate, well-organized Masson cellars. Such occasions usually went well ... but decidedly not when he had the idea of bringing André Tchelistcheff to Masson, thus precipitating a fantastic contretemps between these two now-legendary winemakers, both of whom were still in their 30s.

The Russian-born, French-trained agronomist and wine chemist had been invited to the U.S. in 1938 by Georges de Latour to become the new winemaker at Beaulieu Vineyards. Present too for the occasion, no doubt to make the Russian expatriate feel more at home, was Prince Vasili Romanov, a member of the exiled Czarist nobility, who was the sales rep for Paul Masson Winery in the San Francisco area as well as a minor shareholder.

Julian Street, who had already heard about Tchelistcheff, apparently asked MR about him and got this reply. MR's entire account of his meeting with "Chellycheff" appears here in its entirety.

> The story is, that fellow came down here one day to visit. Dr. Amerine and Prince Vasili were here. Amerine brought him. I haven't his name here for spelling but you call it Chellycheff, so that's how I'll spell it here. Chellycheff is a wine chemist and a wine maker. He came from France to Beaulieu, is a Russian, has lived in France and is supposed to have worked in important cellars there in important capacities—you know that sort of thing! Well, I rather believe he wanted a job with me and thought he would get it by demonstrating how much he knew. This he undertook by means of attack, as you shall presently see. But whatever his objective may have been, Vasili had been telling me in advance of this visit that I should get Chellycheff for our cellars. A brilliant fellow, a fine chap, and all that. Amerine had spoken to me about him, too. So, when he arrived by appointment, with Vasili and Amerine on hand, we visited the cellars with Goulet who as you know was formerly a Jesuit Brother but does not pride himself on a formal education beyond possibly a few years in high school. Goulet is a practical chemist, trained by the Chemistry department of the (Jesuit) University of Santa Clara, respecting chemistry for what it is worth in wine making but no more. We believe chemistry has no place in wine making beyond the fact a knowledge of it permits one to better understand wine making, and when something goes wrong with a wine, chemistry may prevent its loss. But chemistry can never make that wine a fine wine again, nor can chemistry do anything to a potentially great wine other than make it less great. Or, so we feel. When all goes well and when everything is done as it should be done, there simply isn't any need for chemistry. Anyway, you will understand, there exists a feeling on Goulet's part and on my part, that anyone who prides himself on being a wine chemist, is no wine maker but a doctor of sick wines. With this feeling, with the build-up Chellycheff had had, we went into the cellar to taste wines.
>
> Chellycheff asked if he might be completely frank, in his discussion of our wines. He had, coming up the hill, asked Amerine if he (Amerine) thought it would be all right for him to speak right out to me about the wines as he found them, about cellar practices, wines in general. Amerine told him he thought it would be expected of him. Vasili also was asked, and he gave his assurance. So, the fellow had himself all set. And I rather believe he had actually mapped out a campaign to sell himself. I permitted him to see and taste all he wanted of the wines in wood and this took up all of the morning, as I recall. He is very sharp and thinks as fast as lightning, but some things he is utterly blind to. So it is with the finer qualities in wines. I doubt if it is lack of experience, although it may be. I think he is simply blind to the finer qualities in wines.
>
> But the communication was good, he knows how to talk a great deal without either saying much or disclosing much of what he thinks. Looking back to that day, I rather think he was just getting ready, learning to know his man. For, he found the wines very nice, very clean, very pleasant, exceptionally pleasant, yes, even

exceptionally fine. He was interested to know about the alcohol content, at what temperatures they were fermented, the total acid, the pH and all that you can imagine he might want to ask of. I was a bit puzzled with him as yet because he hadn't said one thing in the whole morning to tell me if he knew anything, was able to judge the wines or if he was even enjoying himself. The only thing I then felt instinctively was that he felt this was an event for me or at least wanted me to feel so. I tried to draw him out on a couple of wines but he wouldn't go into them. He was cagey. Then we took some bottles of Champagne and went into the house. And that was the time for him to do his stuff.

We tasted the bottles as the excitement of the ensuing explosions of conversation wore off, but for all practical purposes, the tasting that day was concluded in the cellars. As the bottles were carried to the house, I had another conversation to make before joining Chellycheff and Vasili at the house, for Amerine and I had something to go into. So Vasili and Chellycheff were alone in the house for half hour or maybe an hour. Then we joined them. And Chellycheff said, "Mr. Ray, may I be very honest and frank with you and tell you what I think of your wines?" I told him he might say whatever he liked. So he said, "Mr. Ray, I am very sorry, very sorry to have to say this, but I find that your new wines are very fine wines but that you do not know how to make the most of them and that you do not know how to take proper care of them, that in the wood I find them very good but by the time they get into the bottle they have lost their quality." He kept on telling me with his hands and his voice, how sorry he was, to have to tell me this, and for a little man, I never heard a stronger, louder or more penetrating voice, as he became more sorry. He beat on his chest and put his face up under mine and thrust his whole personality at me in a most amazing way. I sensed, at once, this was no ordinary conversation but I could not tell what it was directed at or how it could be as important as I sensed it to be. So I told him I could not understand what he meant and I drew him out. He took a bottle of my still wine and told me it was not clear, that wine could not be sold if it was not clear. I told him that particular bottle was a Still Champagne, that it had undergone a certain amount of secondary fermentation after being bottled in its first spring. But he didn't understand, and I doubt if the fellow had ever tasted a bottle of Still Champagne. It was merely taken from the cellar for tasting, anyway. I told him it would be clarified in time if it needed it. Then he got onto the taste of my bottle wines, said that they were all flat, had lost all their real character, some place along the line. I was still very meek. But as he developed confidence, seeing me take it, he let out. Then all of a sudden I lit on him in a manner that he may not soon forget. I had to shout him down and it was as close to being physical violence as it could be while remaining entirely conversational. I told him what I thought. I told him of all the Russians, Frenchmen, Germans, Italians, Japanese and others that had in the past 80 or 90 years come to California to make great wines. I told him that some had settled down on the land and produced grapes and learned to become growers with varying degrees of success, as wine makers. Then I told him of those others, who never learned anything about the land, the vines, the practical and essential back-ground to successful wine making—those fellows who came filled with theory, chemists like himself, who had grand ideas for doing great things, but who did not last. I called to his attention that no chemist had yet made a fine wine, that all the theories they studied and put into practice were but theories after all, tried and possibly proven in making ordinary wines, but having no place at all in the making of fine wines. I asked him what had happened to all these chaps like himself who came in an endless stream from the colleges and chemistry laboratories to tell growers how to make wine. None have remained. In no single cellar in California does a chemist direct the operations with a record of more than a year or two. I told him of examples, of what they had done with their damned fancy ideas. And I told him he didn't know anything about making fine wines, that he was unable to judge them.

You can see, it was a queer thing. He utterly jumped upon me. And I turned and jumped upon him. There was no basis for it at all, except that we had directly opposite ideas, neither would or could accept the ideas of the other. He was making a play, had to see it through. I had Amerine and Vasili here and my own honor to defend. Besides, I had come to dislike the fellow and had to have a bit of his flesh. The very idea, I thought. The whole thing was artificial and planned. I can sit down and talk about anything with anyone who will be honorable and considerate, but this sort of thing I had never seen before.

These things said were in shouts, all mixed up, first one talking, then the other. We were both talking most of the time. My voice became louder even than his and there was profanity like you never heard in such a wrangle. There were many things he had said that I had saved up to crash on his head and I find I can no longer remember much about the actual fight. But Mrs. Ray was upstairs and she thought there was hell downstairs and couldn't understand what it was all about. In the end, he became silent, almost brooded. He seemed to me to be unable to understand what had happened, so badly had he blundered. And through about three hours of this Vasili paced up and down, never said a word, Amerine sat at the table too shocked to put in a word until it had just about spent itself. As the visit ended Mr. Chellycheff was still so sorry, now that he had perhaps offended me. I told him he had not offended me at all but that by God he had better not come down here and tell me that I didn't know how to make or care for wines and that he

did. I told him that he had been at Beaulieu less than two years, had never made one wine fit to drink. I told him I had tasted them and found them all a doctored, unnatural, overworked bunch of stuff and that until he had made one natural, undoctored and good sound wine, he could not raise his voice to me. I invited him to return when he could bring one such wine with him but not before. And he was more dazed than ever. The poor fellow thought he had been taken advantage of, perhaps. He admitted he had no unsulphured white wines, that he had not as yet made the wines he expected to make. I then admitted I was but getting started myself but called to his attention, we are working in different directions. If I'd let Chellycheff get away with the conversation he undertook, it would have been all over the state, what had happened and that what Chellycheff said is true. Things are like that here in California. What people say becomes truth among winemakers and the wine crowd simply because they are unable to tell themselves and they are always ready to take up [that] which some new chap says if he has a fancy background. A year later, they accept just as readily that the fellow was a phony. But to date, Chellycheff has impressed a lot of people with his knowledge and ability, and he is getting bold. Now, he knows his place here and he knows I know he doesn't know much, certainly nothing about winemaking as we carry it on. He would be all right if he would accept the fact he is in a commercial plant making commercial wines. But he won't. He thinks he is working in the correct direction to make the very finest wines and he even thinks he will make them in this manner. Wherever he worked in France, it was clearly a commercial establishment, for he is completely ignorant of the better wines. Why, he even thinks a deposit in a red wine makes it a poor wine. He shouted at me that my Pinot Noir and Cabernet have small deposits in them and he couldn't understand how I could call them good wines under such conditions. So you have the fellow. He is an interesting little man (he is very short) but not as interesting as all this writing would indicate. I have overdone the story, so will say no more about it. It was a case of a man getting into a place where he didn't belong and of having made a blunder of selling himself. Vasili now sends word to me Chellycheff may shortly lose his job at Beaulieu, as the old man is dead and he has seen the handwriting on the wall. [7/3/40]

MR later maintained (as recounted in Eleanor Ray's *Vineyards in the Sky*) that this heated verbal argument at the Masson premises, which nearly got into shoving and fisticuffs, took place over a bottle of putative Pinot Blanc (Vrai) brought that day by Tchelistcheff. When tasting it, MR declared that it was not Pinot Blanc at all—thereby infuriating Tchelistcheff, who said that the grapevine cuttings had come from Paul Masson's own vineyard, given by the Frenchman to his friend Georges de Latour. According to that version, after the violent altercation MR himself later went up to Beaulieu to identify the grapevines, and determined that they were the inferior Aligoté, not Pinot Blanc.

But MR's letter to Street given here surely gives the correct story. He also sent him copies of subsequent correspondence between Tchelistcheff and Goulet (although it's evident that MR in fact was the letter writer), which contribute in part to the last part of MR's story, which adds an intriguing follow-up to the winemakers' battle. This passage indicates that the conflict in the tale MR later told actually relates to a second incident—over a here-unnamed "dry white" that caused yet another dispute between the two volatile men. It also indicates how MR often used his head vintner, Oliver Goulet, as his mouthpiece, go-between, and factotum.

Goulet visited him, months later. Chellycheff showed with pride his new pasteurizing system. They tasted his wines (some of them). Goulet asked for their best Cabernet and dry white, samples to bring to me and there was a promise I would let Chellycheff know through Goulet what I thought of these wines Goulet brought home. In a little while, Goulet wrote my opinion, which is enclosed herewith. Then came the reply which brought on this letter of Goulet's to Chellycheff. You will recognize, possibly, I write the letters for Goulet, as Goulet is not much on letter writing himself and I am foolish enough to say what I want to say. Usually Goulet and I talk the thing over together as I dictate the letter, if it is for him. In this way I write for him but he is a part of it, which is better than my trying to do the thing for him. I wouldn't permit myself to get into a letter writing bout with the fellow Chellycheff. [7/3/40]

It's unfortunate that the carbon copies of MR's two "Goulet" letters to Tchelistcheff, and the original of the latter's intermediate letter conveying his incensed reaction, all obviously sent on loan to Street for his interest and then returned to MR, are no longer (it appears) extant. Doubtless they were consumed in the Masson winery fire. But is it faintly possible these three letters—two of them the originals—are all hidden away deeply somewhere in Beaulieu's archives, someday to be unearthed?

During Martin Ray's lifetime Tchelistcheff was surely the best known and widely respected California winemaker. His influential work also continued on for two decades after MR's demise. Though both were intensely interested in perfecting wine, as well as genuine lovers of hands-on vineyard care, the ways in which they dealt over the years with other people in the wine industry were wholly different. Each man had strong opinions and a hot temper. However, Tchelistcheff could get along with most people, and even compromise, in order to get the work done. He was also more patient in his expectation that the

necessary improvements in American winemaking would ultimately take place, partly through his encouragement and help. Moreover, unlike MR, he never owned a winery or vineyards; he was either an employee or a consultant, and even when opportunities to operate his own winery in a partnership were proffered, he declined them. Tchelistcheff worked for three decades for a sizable commercial winery, producing many thousands of cases of wine a year. In contrast, MR from the start *owned* both vineyards and winery.

Obviously he wasn't looking to make friends among his winery-owning peers. Amerine, though, for a number of sensible reasons, wished to establish and retain cordial relations with winegrowers, so naturally he didn't wish to infuriate and alienate them. He may have been mostly unaware of MR's inclination to turn information given him into ammunition in his attacks upon the legitimacy of fellow winemakers' honesty and honor.

As would become increasingly evident as the years went by, MR's deliberate isolation from the wine industry's mainstream, technically and socially, prevented him from exchanging useful information and ideas. This was coupled with a decidedly arrogant attitude toward the results (i.e., wines) of most other California (and American) winemakers' aims and efforts. At base, there was a savage competitiveness in him: an egoistic need to feel that no one could possibly achieve what he had achieved, and would continue to achieve—despite his clarion call for others to join his fight for wine quality and fine varietals. MR's inability to recognize and laud achievements by others inevitably led to semi-publicly expressed verbal attacks on them through self-generated publications distributed far and wide. His negative attitudes, along with information and opinions, were based on his wine industry experiences in the Repeal, WWII, and postwar periods; eventually becoming badly dated, they contributed to his irrelevance and obsolescence as a vintner by the time the Wine Revolution had begun transforming the landscape, better wineries, and consumer interests. ■

— The next two sections of this article about Martin Ray's friendship with Maynard Amerine will cover the remaining years of their relationship, which was closest in the 10-year period following Amerine's return to UC Davis from WWII military service. A house fire in 1951 consumed MR's collection of letters from MA, and MA at some point destroyed the letters he had received from MR over the years. Fortunately, though, plenty of epistolary evidence of their connection was kept by Eleanor Ray after marrying MR; she herself adored Amerine. The Rays' correspondence with MA during the first half of the 1950s reveals how MR began envisaging how to expand his winemaking enterprise, and also why and how MR launched his fervent, hard-hitting "wine quality fight" in 1955, thereby losing forever his best friend.

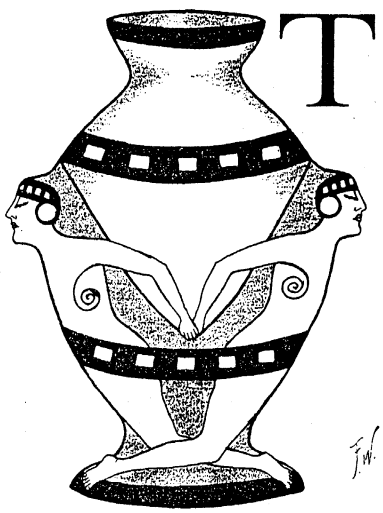
SONGS OF STRANGENESS

by

Gordon Jones

[*Gordon Jones has been a Tendril since our founding in 1990. At that time, he and his wife, Dorothy, had been collecting wine books for some 35 years, and had formed an enviable collection. We featured this splendid library in our October 1996 issue (Vol.6 #4), "The Joneses and their Wine Books." Gratefully, Gordon periodically pulls a gem from their library shelves and entertains us. We welcome his latest contribution!* — Ed.]

James James
Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great
Care of his mother
Though he was only three.
James James
Said to his mother,
"Mother," he said, said he,
"You must never go down to the end of
the town without consulting me."



This poem, written many many years ago by A. A. Milne, has caused numerous thinking people to wonder exactly what was going on at the end of the town. The answer has been available in a strange little wine book, *Ballads of the Wine Mad Town*, written and published by Florence Wobber in San Francisco, 1916. Miss Wobber also illustrated it.

This book is quite possibly unique among wine books, as it was written by a young woman who did not drink wine, sell wine, make wine, or have anything whatsoever to do with wine. She was merely filled with a deep desire to write. Apparently she had a lot more desire than writing ability: this was her second book—she had not been able to get her first one published.

In writing this book she tried to take advantage of the strong prohibitionist sentiments of the time. In fact, a cursory glance at the book might make one think it is Prohibition literature. It is not. It simply uses wine (alcoholic beverages) as part of the plot.

Miss Wobber drew upon the settings and characters from her unpublished book, *Silver and Black*, "the