Vinaceous Correspondents: Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles

The Third Article in a Series / Sixteenth Section

by Barbara Marinacci

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

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This segment continues the complex story (begun in WTQ's July 2004 issue) of the longtime relationship, carried on both in person and in telephone and letter communications, between these two intensely wine-focused men: the Saratoga-based vintner, who took pride in vintaging and marketing only pure varietal wines in very limited amounts, and the hardworking, eminent UC Davis enologist, who by the mid-1950s was known and respected internationally as a researcher, educator, and wine connoisseur. At this time, because of MR's renewed and national publicity-seeking battle with the California wine industry over his insistence upon the need for quality control measures, Amerine was acutely aware that his known close connection with MR imperiled his crucial, necessarily amicable dealings with the proprietors and winemakers of much larger and far better known wineries—so that he had backed away from their friendship.

With the 1955 holiday season under way and most wine orders shipped out or delivered to wine shops and private customers, Martin and Eleanor Ray decided to bring the old, tumultuous year to an end with their own kind of bang. What cheer could they now disclose about the status of their Wine Quality Control Fight to all those loyal retailers and distributors, ardent connoisseurs, and wine writers on their mailing list? For the past half-year about two hundred of them had been receiving reports aimed at enlisting them in a war against the higher end of the California wine industry. And to the Rays' immense satisfaction, many recipients had been cheering MR on in his reactivated war with the dozen or so bonded wineries whose proprietors claimed to be producing fine wines and labeled them accordingly. The real wine aficionados in America, though, knew that the industry's best offerings were scarcely good enough, and that only Martin Ray's pure varietals could stand proudly next to the French models of perfection.

The Rays had tried by various means, even a veiled blackmail threat, to induce that new group calling themselves the Premium Wine Producers of California (intended to appear prestigious, but to them it was pretentious) to self-impose quality standards on their winegrowing and winemaking, and to pursue honesty in their wine marketing. But it appeared now that all these strenuous efforts of theirs had come to naught. However, it was not in Martin Ray's nature ever to admit downright defeat in his perpetual demand for quality control measures. Imbued with missionary zeal to convert people to his high standards in winemaking, he was continuously motivated by righteous anger against all those vintners guilty of abundant malpractices that he could readily specify (though at times he probably distorted or possibly just imagined some of them).

So what would the Rays mail out? Whatever it would be was bound to go to Amerine. After all, toward the close of his October letter to Maynard MR had expressed this intention: "Very soon I am going to send out another Memo to our mailing list and one that may interest you and of which I trust you will approve." [10/23/55] At that point, MR still harbored a faint hope of success: that Dr. Winkler might finally bring about the changes that he and Maynard Amerine—those two renowned viticultural and enological professors at UC Davis—had been advocating for years in order to raise the quality of California's better wines.

In the first week of December, fortuitously, a two-page letter arrived from a wine connoisseur in St. Louis. ER retyped it on stencils so it could be duplicated to provide ample copies. With the words on the letterhead stationery replicated, its author was identified as W. MacLean Johnson, president of Webster Publishing Company. A one-pager from Martin Ray introduced the missive. Above his three paragraphs was a cautionary message, as if the contents were flammable: PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL. Yet by MR's standards the tone was relatively subdued.

> The attached is a copy of a letter recently received from a man who is genuinely interested in and drinks fine wines and who, with his wife and a Stanford scientist, visited our vineyards last summer. He is one of a large and growing list of important people from all parts of

the country who are placing themselves on record as opposed to the mislabeling and legalized blending-out of our fine California-grown varietal wines. This letter is typical of expressions received constantly by us and it indicates clearly enough the soundness of varietal growers adopting now self-imposed Quality Control. By making only 100% straight varietals and honestly labeling them, our firm has established that this important and discriminating market will buy and pay premium prices for wines comparable to the finest imports. But these people have turned away from other California wines for the simple reason they are not good enough (as stated in another recent letter from a famous New York gourmet [Alfred Knopf].

We have in our California Northcoastal districts some magnificent varietal plantings which are now sufficient to satisfy the probable immediate demand, should the Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and white Riesling be made and kept unblended in small oak cooperage and brought to market properly and free of sulphuring, heat and cold treatment, filtering and other short-cut-easy-method-but-injurious cellar treatment now openly permitted and practiced.

Every day the buying public is becoming more educated and more discriminating as evidenced by the growth in the sale of fine imports and by the growth in the sale of Martin Ray true varietals. As indicated in the attached letter, those who want fine wines are the logical purchasers of California varietals. The small group of top growers must be encouraged to turn away from volume toward quality. And retailers and consumers will bring this about by making known to them these facts. [12/14/55]

"Mac" Johnson's letter itself reported in detail to Mr. and Mrs. Ray about a recent blind wine tasting in which a Martin Ray 1952 Pinot Noir had easily bested a French burgundy from the renowned Clos des Ducs vineyard in Volnay. His letter ended:

You have proven that California wine can equal, or excel, Europe's best, provided that it is fermented with care and bottled in its pure form, unblended with the juice of inferior grape varieties. Now, if people like myself and my friends who were here last Wednesday are to drink California wines, and to serve them to their guests, they will have to be as good as yours. Although we are the logical purchasers of California varietals, we seldom do so. We know when a wine is top-notch and when it isn't. Most California varietals are not because they have lost character through blending with inferior wines. The people who make and sell wine, I am convinced, simply do not understand their consumers. They apparently believe we all buy wines by names or labels alone and that we cannot evaluate what is inside the bottle. This is a fatal error. This may lead us to buy one bottle, but we don't repeat. With a true varietal we would become steady customers. [12/1/55]

Among recipients targeted for MR's year-end report was *Life* magazine editor Pollard, who earlier in the year had expressed interest in what Martin Ray had been stirring up in the wine industry but needed more newsworthy drama. MR's note told him of the latest news from the battlefront.

Am sending along the enclosed to keep you advised that I'm still keeping up my fight for Quality of our top wine-varietals—and hope you'll be able to pick up a controversial news angle one of these days to break a big story, which it certainly deserves.

Incidentally, the growers recently got the Federal Government to crack down on me. They came up here and set up a miniature chemical lab, tested anything and everything they could find, to harass me. Try as they might they couldn't find anything serious to pin on us. We laughed and told them we understood why they were here and that they weren't personally to blame. Privately they admitted to me the source of the inquiry. [See the April 2008 *WTQ*.] So it goes. But every day we get more letters such as the enclosed ["Mac" Johnson's], showing the public is not so ignorant or unable to judge a wine as growers and dealers seem to think. Who wants to buy butter blended 50% with margarine? —milk only 50% milk and the rest God knows what? Wine alone remains the crook's dream, where anything goes! [12/17/55]

Amerine, of course, would have received the "Mac" letter too. But as an inadvertent casualty of MR's QC warfare, and doubtless weary of it all anyway, he may have resisted reading any more verbiage coming from his erstwhile friend, even if mostly written by someone else. Another even longer report would soon follow it into his mailbox.

The Year-End Battle Summary

By the third week of December, paying little heed to Christmas-celebrating preparations, the Rays had composed and sent off a more ambitious and extensive QC statement—this one taking up five pages. Like the "Mac" letter, it was duplicated and sent off for wide distribution to those on the Martin Ray Winery's extensive mailing list. Rather like Amerine's May 13 TAC talk printed up by the Wine Institute, this one was declared "Private, Confidential, and NOT FOR PUBLICATION"—though doubtless MR would have been delighted if someone, somewhere, actually published it.

It is necessary from time to time for all of us to review our efforts and accomplishments if we are to see ourselves realistically and judge our achievements in relation to others or to what they might have been.

This is intended as a review of the efforts and accomplishments of the varietal table-wine growers of California since Repeal—with full memory of their pre-Prohibition years and the evil effects of the Prohibition

period which still plague us. By table-wine growers I refer herein only to those growing all or substantially all their own grapes and those bottling under their own labels and selling in the upper-quality field—the names we all know, less than dozen of them.

The document recapped much of the same historical perspective that ER had presented in the summaries she had provided in May to magazine editors and writers whom the Rays had hoped would rise up to join their battle for quality control, as well as the arguments that MR had thrust forth in many letters. In writing about his winemaking peers he declared:

> Publicly they have taken the attitude that the problem does not exist. Yet privately, they all know the extent and depth of the controversy which if ever fully aired must alter entirely the methods and merchandising of California varietals. They have taken the attitude that we are trying to injure them or their business—some [*e.g.*, John Daniel of Inglenook] have personalized it and others [Robert Mondavi of Krug] have likened our efforts to actual libel. But the simple truth is, we are trying to help California's top growers exactly where they need help and, as one authority in a high place [Mrs. Julian Street] has said, "Yours is the only defensible position." We have it straight from Mlle. Christiane Latour of the great Burgundian house of Louis Latour that the growers in Burgundy fought just as furiously against reform and in the formation of their Appellation Controlée, whereas now they find it their meal ticket. And so it will be here. Some day the top growers will realize how their interest can be best served and protected.

(How prescient were these last two sentences of his, once the "boutique" wineries began changing the winemaking scene!)

Then came mentions of an unnamed organization formed earlier in the year to represent exclusively the needs of the better table-wine growers—obviously the Premium Wine Producers of California (PWP); MR's subsequent challenges to them; and finally the seeming conflict resolution when this group asked Dr. Winkler of UC Davis to meet with them so as to help set up a QC plan. In his last three paragraphs MR provided the dismal update.

> But no meeting between the growers and the University has ever taken place, as of this date, and no study of the subject is under way. Three of the growers concerned have said they will be willing to discuss the subject "in the late spring" (of 1956). But we learned that last April a group of growers indicated they are now aiming at blends of 75% instead of 51%—in 10 or 15 years! At this rate, it might seem, the industry has no intention of ever considering 100%. [It took much longer, for this 75% ruling finally arrived in 1983, after *28* years. And even then MR would have denied its value, particularly if frequent and stringent inspections weren't conducted in both vineyards and wineries.] Raising the legal unit to 75% would in fact have no effect at all on quality. For all purposes the barn door still would be left quite as open to malpractice, whether it be held open at a legal "loophole degree" of 51% or 75%! It followed, at the quarterly meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee of the Wine Institute on August 5, 1955, it was actually proposed by one grower that the minimum percentage of varietals be increased from 51% to *75%*. The sub-committee promptly reported that the wine industry was not ready at this time to request an increase in percentages of varietals to 75%. This same sub-committee did, however, decide to meet and discuss further the proposal that a vintage wine no longer need be 100% wine of a given year! Thus, it would seem that the industry is never ready to consider moving forward, but is always ready to consider reducing standards!
>
> In any event, nothing has been done about "Quality Control," just as nothing was done almost twenty years ago by the Wine Institute in the same regard. This brings us to the conclusion of the report on the effort and progress which has been made to establish Quality Controls beyond our own vineyard. Despite the fact that for some twenty years [beginning during MR's ownership of Paul Masson] we have made unblended, 100% varietals, and been able to sell them at prices two and three times higher than those of any other growers in California, it still remains impossible to get others to renounce the legalized blending privileges and set up a system of labeling which would authenticate and publicize such wines, and thus establish California as able to grow truly great wines in many vineyards and several districts.

Once again MR, both disillusioned and angry, was explicitly handing over to retailers and consumers themselves, and to activist writers who loved wine, the duty to agitate for upgrading the quality of California's premium wines. After all, he could make his own wines, but he couldn't alter how other wineries made, labeled, and sold their so-called varietal wines.

> We turn now to you who are engaged in the trade and especially to you individuals who buy and drink fine wines and respect them for what they are. You, and only you, can bring about some form of self-imposed Quality Control, by demanding authentic 100% varietals, properly grown, labeled and merchandised. [12/20/55]

It seems, actually, that Martin Ray hadn't yet entirely abandoned hope that a few of the better vintners might eventually be persuaded to join with him in establishing quality control in California. Even *one* might help his cause! Thus shortly before Christmas, in tune with the holiday spirit, MR sent a conciliatory note to Herman Wente, whom he knew

and liked best in that bunch of growers. He first thanked him for having graciously hosted the summertime visit from Christiane Latour and her escort, MR's adopted son Barclay. Then he explicitly invited Herman to join him in introducing wine quality control in California, even if they couldn't get a group to back their initial effort. "You are definitely a leader," MR wrote, "and others seeing your example will follow, especially when they see our gain in prestige as well as higher prices." They'd put a QC stamp across their wine bottles—"and begin educating the buying public that the stamp can be relied upon to assure getting 100% varietals." And for this favor MR touchingly offered Wente his aid in any and every way. "If we could do this, Herman, we would be leaving our children a far, far better heritage than mere vineyards. And believe me, we would be thanked for having brought about a new era of better wines out of California." [12/21/55]

There's no indication that Martin Ray ever received a response to this plea.

Starting Out in the New Year

The lack of any letters covering the first months of 1956 within file folders of correspondence between Martin and Eleanor Ray and Maynard Amerine, whether carbon copies of theirs to him or originals from him to them, indicates that the vociferous winegrowing pair living at the top of Saratoga's Mt. Eden deliberately restrained themselves. They were holding off on any new attempt to revive the much-missed camaraderie with their friend in Davis, who had turned down several invitations to join them for dinner parties they gave during the holiday period.

There would be occasional references to Amerine, though, in the Rays' letters to other people, as in one that ER wrote to her son Peter, when she mentioned actor Burgess Meredith's ardent wish to buy a piece of their mountain, since he'd decided that he too wanted to be a winegrower. So Rusty—as Eleanor, Peter, and many other people usually called MR (but not Amerine)—would create for him a new vineyard, within which their new pal "Buzzy" would build a vacation home. They had even already settled on the site, and MR was eager to move ahead with the hard work of clearing away the trees and chaparral, then scarifying the ground deeply prior to planting, which he wanted to do by the following year.

> So far the deal is not made, as there's no money or agreement or anything definite. But you can be sure that Rusty has no intention of involving this quarter-section up here in any possible arrangement, it must be separate, and our wines separate. It's true that time changes the best of plans, and it's surely best to avoid complications if it is possible to keep things simple. Remember Amerine and his desperate efforts of recent years. "I've got to simplify my life!" he'd end most of his scribbled messages by saying. [2/5/56]

(In the coming years, the Rays would have it confirmed repeatedly that since "time changes the best of plans," they would have been wise to keep steering clear of dire complications that could ensue when setting up joint business ventures with others. But of course sooner or later such relationships were apt to get snarled by MR's perpetual tendency to skew, misinterpret, and overreact; and when suspicious, upset, or outraged, he could become outlandishly offensive.)

ER's last statement was decidedly an exaggeration, as a viewing of Maynard's actual "scribbled messages" proves. But having that remembrance of Maynard's occasional remark— whether made in person, over the phone, and in notes—aided the Rays to explain why he had withdrawn almost totally from them. When they had reached out to pull him back into their sphere, naturally he had recoiled. Getting involved with Martin Ray, and then remaining involved, was no way to simplify one's life.

Well, that poor fellow, MR and ER reasoned (and told others): Maynard had a bothersome, lingering infection that sapped his energy and spirits; was spending all too much time nowadays in the fellowship of outlandish male friends, eschewing the company of women; had been overworking on all sorts of research, teaching, writing, and consulting projects; was hypersensitive over being criticized (as MR liked relaying to him) by people he thought were his friends—even though he might in private expose the tasting errors of these snobs—for being interested only in California wines and knowing *nothing* at all about the fine European ones; and on top of all else felt ostracized, even persecuted, by people in the wine industry because of his insistence upon adherence to quality standards and truth in labeling. That last rejection seemed especially due to the assumption that he was in league with that cantankerous troublemaker Martin Ray, who had again been stirring up a big fuss about setting up quality control—though Maynard, totally disapproving, had nothing whatsoever to do with it!

When John Melville revealed how upset he was over Amerine's dismissive review of *Guide to California Wines* in the Autumn issue of *Wine & Food*, MR tried to console him. "You see, John," he wrote, "while I am not a writer there is some bitterness in me, too, about the way fate deals with some of the things I am devoted to." Then to make Melville feel better about the situation, he told of rumors he had heard as well as cited his own experience. "Never mind what Amerine has said or done. He is currently a very bitter man too! He has

broken with most of his friends, is under a doctor's care, and recently told me on the telephone that practically nobody in the industry will any longer speak to him and that he didn't want to hear any longer from me either!"

MR told how Amerine was greatly upset and envious that his own book, *Table Wines*, written with Maynard Joslyn, had only sold a measly few copies, whereas Melville's had leaped into bestseller lists in California. And as a final solace, MR assured Melville that "The number of people who read Amerine's review is very small." [3/17/56]

Correspondence Reactivated

As spring came around, Eleanor began vividly recalling the happy time just a year ago when Maynard had driven away from a luncheon visit, heading down the mountain road in his new convertible, carrying away sprays of wild clematis in bloom and a nest holding two turquoise bird eggs—the basic ingredients for a dramatic centerpiece for his dining table at an upcoming dinner party.

So she was the first to break the somber epistolary silence—or was it a standoff?—between the Rays and Amerine. On the 3rd of April she composed another of those lighthearted-seeming letters to "Dear Maynard" that consisted of a series of questions. Instead of the 10 she had asked him in December, she'd more than doubled the number, to 22. The questions, which filled two typewritten pages, started out thusly, to set the tone:

> 1. Do you know when you send someone a letter on passionate pink it means spring is in your heart as well as in the air, nests of eggs are readying themselves for decor on your table, vines are bursting forth, we think of you even more than usual, send darting messages by ultra-sonic, love you, miss you, and all that sort of thing?

(Probably ER had found some pretty pink paper for the original; the filed-away carbon copies were usually made on standard canary-yellow, second-sheet stock.) There followed 21 more numbered paragraphs all ending in question marks, ranging from a simple ? to triples, even quadruples. Here are some samples:

> 2. Do you know Jim Beard who's coming up to lunch Friday? ...
>
> 4. Did you ever get a report on the GRAND CRU tizzy I put on at a dinner party here some few months ago when a couple of so-called gourmets announced to eachother [*sic*—ER often seemed to deliberately combine these two words, perhaps of the opinion that they should really be joined] across the table that <u>you</u> knew nothing about foreign wines, only California wines???? (Rusty was down in cellar getting bottles so he never heard me, but I not only roared like an MGM she-lion, but told these fellows off. I recall saying that they were mere <u>youngsters</u> in their knowledge of wine, alongside of you, and now I don't suppose we'll ever entertain them again up here but does it matter & do I care, ha?

[This actually had been the notorious Thanksgiving dinner that MR would later describe in detail when writing to Maynard.]

> 5. Would you say you had an EXPANSIVE PALATE?
>
> 7. What do you think of Henry Charpentier, and would you be flattered or insulted to be invited (as we have been) to dinner at his place in January 1959???

[During this time period, the famed French chef offered specially catered meals in his Redondo Beach home in Southern California. Reservations, widely sought by gourmets, had to be made several years in advance, and the cost was exorbitant. To be invited, therefore, was scarcely insulting!]

> 11. Could a family have a more wonderful time than we've just had when Barclay and Peter both flew home for two weeks of glorious pruning together on the mountaintop and celebrating every night with great tastings, great drinking, great fun, amidst which we frequently toasted you?

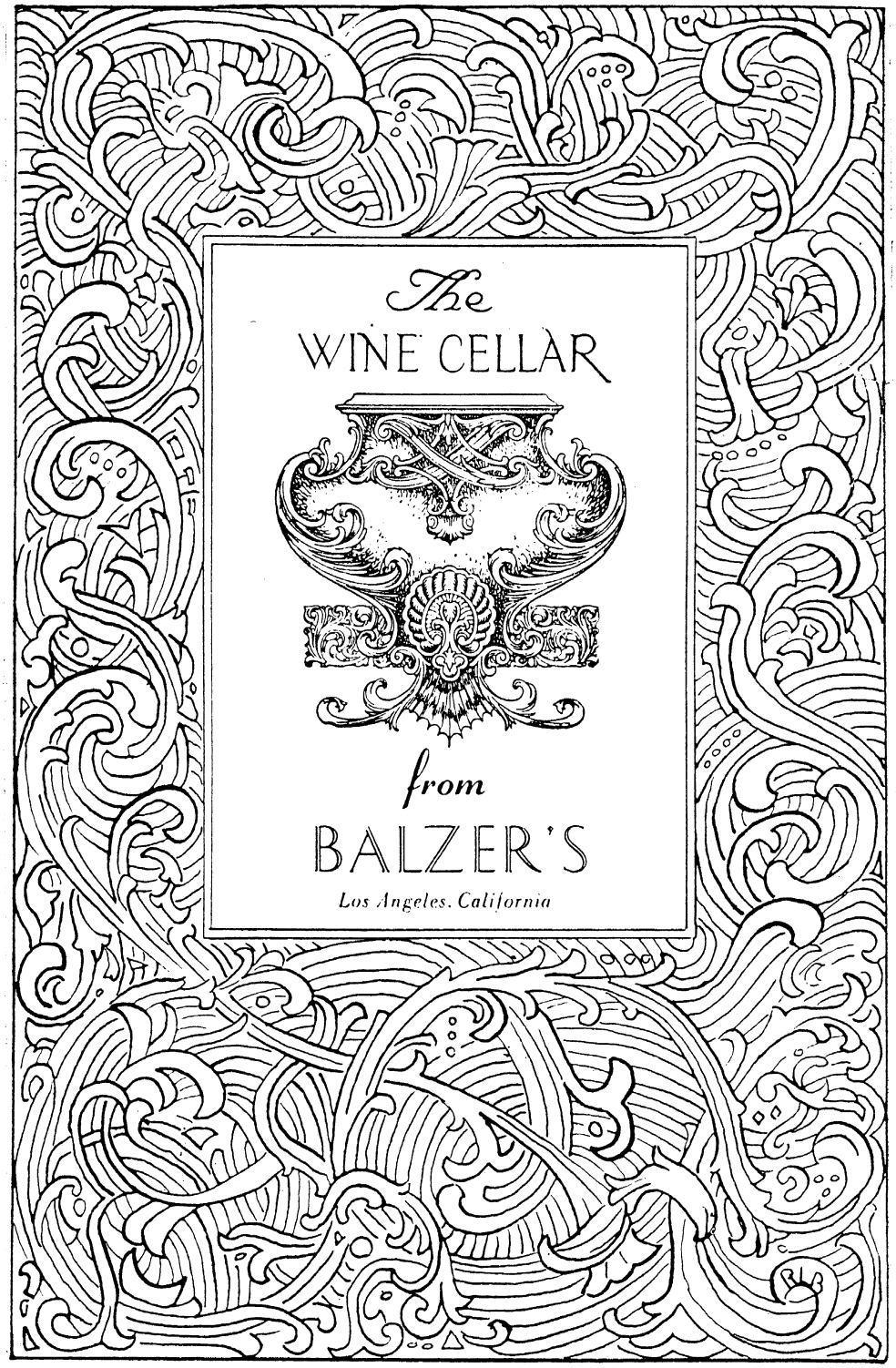
[ER was hoping that Maynard would regret that he hadn't been there as well—to be treated like a member of this close-knit, wine-focused family, as he had often been in the past.]

> 12. Did you catch up with Bloeker's column in which he referred to you as "a charming genius with increasingly irascible moods"?
>
> 13. Is it true you are carrying on like mad with the titillating er wife or a certain er friend?
>
> 14. How do you account for the fact that Rusty's 5-gal. jug of Champagne Cold yeast exhibits a half-inch collar of foam in the narrow neck every morning but by evening it is gone; do you think this is related to Bob Balzer's becoming a Cambodian monk, or the fact that most people die in the night?

[Balzer, as most older wine buffs know, was a wine columnist as well as gourmet-store retailer in the Los Angeles area. They first became acquainted when MR owned Paul Masson, from 1936 to 1943, and MR later claimed he'd been Bob's mentor, steering him toward a wine-connected career.]

> 15. Speaking of Bob, did you know he has had his head shaved and had to beg in the streets of Cambodia for whatever scraps of food he got to eat for two weeks in order to feel properly humbled, and the Los Angeles papers simply went crazy over all this, and Bob's grocery manager is about to commit hari kari because customers get the idea that he must be going out of business because the papers say a Cambodian monk takes the vow never to touch gold or any form of alcohol? ...

[It might be commented here that when wine writer



CATALOGUE OF A "SELECTION OF WINES" IN THE BALZER CO. CELLARS
circa 1940 "All Wines Selected by Robert L. Balzer"

Robert Balzer came back to the States a few months later from his apprenticeship period as a Buddhist monk, before returning to L.A. he stopped first in the San Francisco Bay area and went up to Mt. Eden. There the Rays cunningly contrived to seduce him back into consuming alcohol by serving him a delectable succession of wines that he simply could not resist. A few Ray letters afterwards recounted with glee the event's outcome, since by rescuing Bob from Buddhist restrictions they had benefitted wine journalism.]

17. In your opinion is it a justification for celebration when you find yourself in the eye of a storm?...

[The Rays, who found all sorts of reasons for celebrating, naturally felt they were now at the very center of a figurative hurricane that they had initiated within the wine industry.]

19. Did you hear that Pelly [Angelo Pellegrini], flushed with the success of his recent blow-up [*i.e.*, laudatory portrayal] of two ex-bootleggers among other things, now announces he is going to write a book on wines, and judging from the way he took words about quality from Rusty's mouth & put them into Martini's, you might say anything at all can happen, and the Wine Institute will probably salute with 30 guns and underwrite the whole thing?

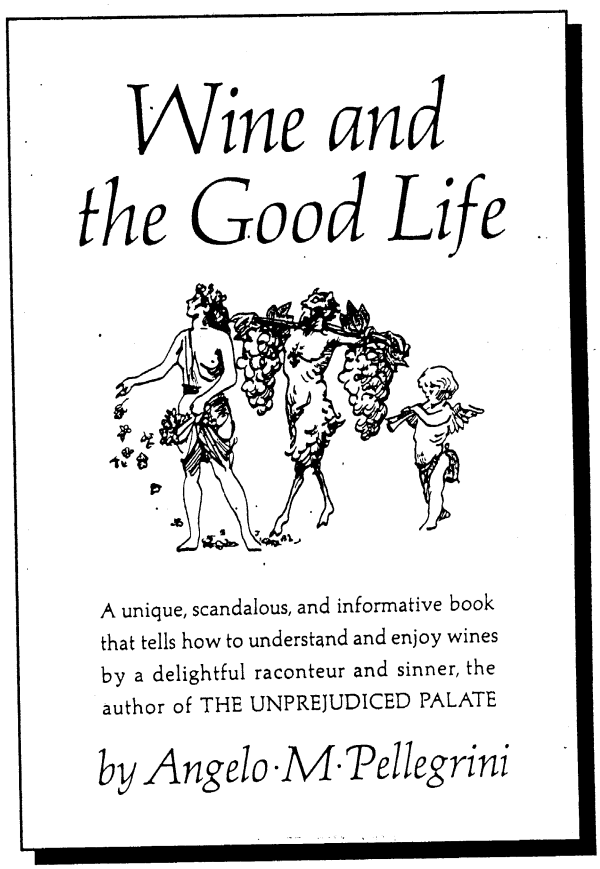
[In his just-published book, *Americans by Choice*, Pellegrini had written chapter-length profiles of Louis M. Martini and the Mondavi family. The Rays were outraged at his glorification of these Italian winemakers of his generation and the one preceding it—all of whom MR claimed were virtual criminals. MR soon thereafter broke off his close friendship with the University of Washington's Italian-American professor of English—who eventually did publish a book on wine, *Wine and the Good Life* (1965)—using in the title a phrase in praise of the winegrower's life, favored by both Robert Mondavi and Martin Ray.]

20. Did we tell you we cleared 5 more acres of land which we're fencing today, for more Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, and speaking of Chardonnay we can't meet orders; have to back-order it, and sales pressure on Cabernet is so big we've had to up our price to $4 the bottle like the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and also increase its planting; isn't this fascinating to think upon even if we kill ourselves from overwork and then what will people do without wines like these?

[Here was an early indication that the French white Burgundian varietal was starting to gain favor among American wine consumers, thereby triggering increased planting, to finally result in annual statistical tracking of its acreage as well as yield in tonnage figures by the state's Dept. of Agriculture, which previously had just lumped it among miscellaneous white grapes.]

Eleanor's final question to Maynard was this: "Who do you think recently referred to you as 'a man of mystery'?" There was barely space enough at the bottom of page 2 to type in the closure: "We luv you, man of mystery ..." [4/3/56]

Then she and MR waited for a response.



Putting It All into Words Once More ...

No doubt Eleanor's daring foray into Amerine's postbox encouraged MR to make his own epistolary move about a week later. "Dear Maynard," MR's letter began. And what followed was a lengthy, single-spaced letter that reverted back to the gargantuan lengths of many previous long-winded epistolary monologues.

This letter I have been wanting to write for a long time. But I have felt it best to let some little time pass and now I want to present to you a definite proposition with the request simply for positive reaction on your part in what ever way you wish it to be between us hereafter. By this I mean by your action our friendship can continue actively or it can cease to exist. The decision is yours. And it is your decision because I have all along stated what I want is an active friendship between us. I still want it that way. But I do not know how you feel about it now and if you wish to not answer this letter I will take it as meaning that you do not want our friendship. In the latter case I will continue to respect

both our position and your achievements but I will treat you as one hostile should be treated.

Please understand, I do not attempt to threaten you. [?!] For, friendship is not so established. And it is your friendship we want. But we have so very many interests, common friends and movements and undertakings related, it must be known how we feel toward each other. It is not unlike some element forever present in vintage. It must be learned if it is good for the winemaking or not, and if not it can not be ignored but rather dealt with.

So far as I know, the only serious thing that has come between us is related to my interest in Quality Control, a thing you did originally assist me with. I did not try to force you against your expressed wishes to become involved in my efforts once you had made clear to me how you felt, you will recall. Those closest to you have explained to me their version of just what it was about all this [that] angered you. On the telephone you made untrue charges which you must by now know were unfounded. Whatever you may think, I am going to tell you here my side of the story as it really is and, as I have said, I aim to make to you a proposition. Rather than to let the latter hang suspended in our consideration, I will give you first my proposition. It will be my intention to state simply here the things that may have come to look very complicated.

I propose that we get together very soon, either at your place or at ours, as you wish it, and that we have a dinner and some fine wines and conversation with, however, no reference whatsoever to Quality Control and all that may have come to involve. I further propose that the next time we meet or at some further meeting not distant we both be prepared to talk the entire matter over with determination not to get hurt, angered or exercised but rather to understand each other fully. I pledge myself to answer any questions you may ask and request the same of you. The conversation should be conducted toward the end that we would reach an agreement on certain basic principals [*sic*] so that we might thereafter engage freely in conversation that might at any time arise out of your work and mine. All you need do in answering me is to accept an invitation to come down at a time stated by you or ask us up. It might be best here at the vineyards. But, you may feel otherwise and that will be accepted without question.

Then MR, with his "proposition" now stated, wanted to dip back into history and "outline" how his commitment to Quality Control had led to disagreeable struggles—above all with the organization that he always considered his most powerful and determined adversary.

The idea of Quality Control first came to me when I first became a grower. It was not then either clear to me what I might do, if anything, or how I might go about it. It was simply an idea. The Wine Institute was actively soliciting my membership. I have not bothered to look up how far back this may have been but it is close on to 20 years ago now. This fellow Gomberg worked for the institute and he & one or two others finally offered me a Vice Presidency and membership on all the important committees if I would join. I agreed to this with the provision they would do certain things within the Institute and this they never were willing to agree to. I do not recall now just what things were foremost in my mind. But I know that I had fought them on what manner of legal description a California Sparkling wine should require. I had employed a firm of attorneys to appear in opposition to them and I had lost.

Since MR's assertion that these celebratory, bubbly wines should not be called Champagne had been rejected, most American sparkling-wine producers continued to call their product Champagne; eventually even MR was obliged to do so when at Paul Masson he produced several different kinds of sparkling wines from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, using *la méthode champenoise*. At the time, though, he had labeled them "Extra Dry." (In recent years, though—almost seven decades later—that pugilistic stance taken by Martin Ray got vindicated when the American wine industry, pressured by the European Union, was forced to assent to the ruling that such wines made in the U.S. should no longer be labeled as Champagnes, since that term could rightly apply *only* to sparkling wines made in the Champagne district in France.) Meanwhile, on another battlefront, he had become the outspoken foe of vintners who either combined different grape varieties during vintaging or else blended different varietal wines later—yet labeled the bottles as if they contained a single fine varietal, thus eligible to fetch a higher price. So MR reminded Amerine:

I also remember I had gone on record as believing that it should be illegal to blend a varietal wine. My position was that a Pinot Noir should be 100% Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon the same and so on, including all varietals. From being friendly opposition to the Institute I gradually was forced into a position of considering them a group of greedy and ignorant men running hog wild. They forced me [into this belief] by a series of acts which have continued to this day. In the estimation of the public with which <u>we</u> are here concerned the Institute has destroyed itself because I have seen to it that what they have done has become known.

This last statement displays MR's inflated sense of his own potency, which ultimately, and somehow, would enable him to triumph over his foes, even destroy them. He then went on to tell how the Wine Institute for many years had been trying to sabotage him by virtually forbidding, through financial pressure, any press attention to him and his

wines—though surely Amerine had heard from him many times of this for-instance.

> I will give you a single example. The magazine Wines and Vines came to me with an apology and explanation. They could no longer publish anything I wrote or carry an advertisement I might wish to buy. The penalty would be loss of the subsidy received from or through the Institute. I believe this was said to be $1,000 per month. And to bring it up to date, now years later I am told directly by the Bureau Chief in San Francisco for Time Life that the Institute through the placement or withdrawal of advertising determines what may be carried in the editorial columns or news columns of every publication other than Time Life. I have personally confirmed this in several instances. Now then, as I have said, this has done great damage to the Institute in certain quarters. But, I have made capital of it. When I speak here of the Institute I speak of the [California Wine] Advisory Board as well because, as you know, they have in the past been convenient twins of a sort. This situation I describe refers also to our friendship and its present state of break down.

Then MR went on to remind Maynard of opinions they had held in common. He acknowledged that much of what he'd learned over the years about current doings in the wine industry had come directly from Maynard. Now MR indicated that he had recently replaced him with some unnamed insider-informants.

> You have worked with the Institute in much the same manner I did at first. That is, you have not agreed with all they do nor have you failed to openly take issue with them. There is no need for me to try to recall here all the conversations we have had. Many times you have told me with great pleasure of your disagreements, our intentions and theirs. Always we used to see alike on these matters. And for many years I knew very little of them other than what you told me of their behind the scenes workings. Now I have several other active sources that keep me fully advised especially with specific happenings and the long term intentions they have. For, there is coming a day when the Institute will not even claim to represent the best interest of the better table wine growers. And it is important that I keep advised.

Once again MR underscored Amerine's own vulnerability, caused by his longtime advocacy of significantly boosting the quality and of honestly labeling the better California wines—along with the consequent pairing of the two of them in other people's minds. These had led to the unfortunate ostracism that Maynard now suffered, outside of his more insulated academia, when mixing with industry people—whether winery proprietors, vintners, or Wine Institute officials.

> In this correct position you have taken, you have made enemies. You have told me of it many times, over many years. One of the members of the Institute has told me personally that he intended to get rid of you as a factor in the industry. He named no others but he made it clear that he was not alone.
>
> Because we were known to be friends, it came about that we were looked upon by the Industry as working hand and hand together and this was especially true within the Institute itself. Lou Gomberg told me this with special reference to Quality Control. Last June you made a speech before the Technical Advisory committee in which you denounced certain practices of members and this was at a time when I was bringing pressure on the newly formed or forming Quality Producers. .... It was taken by a group that we were working together and when, in one of my letters I stated I was not alone in my activities, it was taken by them to mean I referred to you. I explained to them that I did <u>not</u> refer to you and that I referred to all our retail and consumer customers. But the milk was spilt. They had waited for years to put their finger on something and some of them evidentally [*sic*] did or said or failed to do whatever it is that has so hurt you and for which you blamed me, saying that hardly anyone in the industry would any longer speak to you. Well, circumstances have been influencial [*sic*] in our relations, it is true enough. *But it is because of the things we have both done and said for some 20 years and especially it is because we have always had good friends and strong enemies as all men must have if they do things.* [Emphasis added.]

At this point, MR, feeling that the time had come to wind up this intense part of his letter to Amerine, summarized his current feelings.

> It is out of this that has come many other things in one way or another related. I have heard things almost continually about you that I know to be untrue. I do not know what has been related to you of me but a letter such as this can hardly be ignored. After all, I do not have to have your friendship. I am making a substantial effort because I want it for the sake of the things we are commonly devoted to and the pleasure of the friendship that comes out of such common interests. It would be rather difficult to find another two so completely in agreement on the thing we have both devoted all our mature life to.

And then MR launched into one of those usual long, gossipy paragraphs to Maynard telling of people badmouthing or occasionally praising him (MA) or other wine-connected personages.

> James Beard and Helen [Evans] Brown were here at a luncheon last Friday. You no doubt know him as the writer and her of cook books and now also of Sunset and I believe in some manner connected with Lucius Beebe and his Nevada paper. Anyway, at the table Helen Brown asked me if I thought you knew anything about wines. I expressed some surprise but told her in no

uncertain terms that I knew damned well that you are the foremost authority on wines in the state and told her I had never met anyone that knows from personal experience and knowledge acquired from drinking, study and research as much about wines. She was shaking her head before I finished my statement and negatively. She could hardly wait until she could tell me that she did not believe it and that she considered you a fraud and that you knew nothing about any wines other than California wines. Beard was very interested and finally made a statement which I considered intelligent. But we almost had a brawl at the time before I talked her down. Beard said that in New York Alexis Lichine has hardly a friend other than himself. Yet, he explained, Lichine knows his French wines. He told me that Schoonmaker has hardly a friend here or abroad. But, he asked me, has Frank not done a good publicity and merchandising job and does he not have certain abilities regardless of his failure with money. I agreed. He told me that in Los Angeles he had heard several people speak of me with extreme hostility.

One of the Amerine detractors named by Beard was Dr. Marcus Crahan, with whom MR had corresponded (see the previous issue), but later had had one of his bitter feuds, which he'd recounted to his guests. "Beard told me," he reported with satisfaction, "that I was not alone for he had had with Crahan one of the greatest fights of all times a few days ago." MR then told Maynard that he should expect to be both hated and admired—as he himself was. And from there he poked anew at the integrity of his perennial bête noire, the Wine Institute.

[Beard] told me of hearing from those who dislike you mightily and run down your abilities and hearing also great praises for you. He offered the idea that no one worth knowing could help but have enemies and did well indeed to have any friends. We laughed at that but not Helen Brown. Why she has this feeling toward you I do not know. But the Wine Institute tried to prevent her coming here with Beard and if he had not expressed his wish to me personally a few days earlier in Los Angeles to come here he would have passed through the state without ever seeing our place or us. Additionally, I literally snatched the party out of the hands of the Institute after which this Jew baby in San Francisco who works for them sent her regrets. [*Note*: MR could become notoriously, and sometimes crudely, as here, anti-Semitic, verbally and in letters, when he thought (at times wrongly) that he was conversing with goys with similar prejudices; he would similarly vent, with differing sets of complaints, about Italian-, Japanese-, and Mexican-Americans, as well as diverse national groups, such as the English, depending on his disposition at the time.] I had invited her. She had been given the assignment of taking the party about. Helen Brown may or may not be paid by the Institute, I do not know. But he made it very clear that she believes their policies good and correct and I told her the facts of the case which she did not accept.

One can readily spot here Martin Ray's penchant for getting into squabbles with tough-minded, articulate women, who would argue with him (either unaware of or ignoring ER's frantic signals to desist, for heaven's sake), showing that he hadn't utterly charmed them. As a macho autocrat, MR expected all women around him to be physically attractive and winsomely pliant—never to assert themselves, let alone argue with him, as Helen Evans Brown, a much-published epicure, was now doing. Any females that he (and ER too) approved of tended to be described as unthreateningly "little" or "small"—though in reality they might not be diminutive. Almost invariably, innate feminists took umbrage at MR's blatant chauvinism. Eleanor, who had quickly learned of his labile mental and emotional condition when marrying him, rarely if ever challenged this necessary show of alpha-male dominance—even though before marrying Rusty she'd been a feminist herself, first as the daughter of a prominent suffragist (one of the first female legislators in Washington state), then as an accomplished career woman, single mother, and book author. (Readers might be reminded, too, that this scene took place in the mid-1950s, seven years prior to the publication of Betty Friedan's call-to-arms, *The Feminine Mystique*, and the subsequent launching of the assertive Women's Movement, which would peak in the 1970s, when MR's overbearing potency had faded away.)

Now in his letter to Maynard MR delivered one more blast at the Wine Institute. Because it was targeting them *both* for destruction (how much of this view was paranoid, how much actual?), they really should mend their break and help each other.

In this day when publicity men and women are hired, when those who take you about are paid to do the will of the great institutions, it would be naive to think the Wine Institute is not actively working all the time to destroy me and you too. Now, lets not let them and what they say overshadow the fact most important: Our interests are common. That is the only sound basis for any lasting human relationship.

Maynard might also need now to know that MR's modus operandi, including his outspoken attacks on the wine industry during the past year, had actually helped boost his small winery into an extraordinary success.

My methods of conducting myself and my business have been successful financially and otherwise and never so much as in the last year. Today we are a full thirty days behind on shipments and have achieved again the enviable position of making the largest part of our shipments to individual consumer customers while at

the same time keeping our wines available at all the most important package stores.

Then MR proudly told Amerine about one of his latest wine-promoting triumphs.

The most elegant and successful tasting of wines ever put on in this country [!!] was that staged by Burgess [Meredith] in Chicago a few days ago. It was done voluntarily by Burgess and the man who controls all the fine wine outlets there. It was made a social achievement and was attended by some 200 who have expressed unpresidented [*sic*] enthusiasm. No day passes we do not get orders and inquiries from all over the country. I have not spent a day in sales work since last fall. Our mailing list has grown to several hundred and all these people are working for Quality Control, each in his own small way but most effectively.

MR went on to indicate that "two of us"—which meant when he'd combine with Burgess Meredith as a new winegrower on Mt. Eden—would establish their own Quality Control plan, since the Premium Wine Producers hadn't, and wouldn't, do it. Maybe Amerine would be willing to come up with the actual controls they'd implement.

We will announce our beginning before the year is out. At first there will be but two of us. If we can get things together between us I would like you to oversee the writing of the Controls. If you can not bring yourself to do it I will then ask Dr. Winkler. So far as that other bunch, the Premium [Wine] Producers, goes I realize they never had any intentions to cooperating. In fact, I have never heard from them in all these months [phone calls and letters to him from Gomberg obviously had ceased] and I am beginning to wonder if they really ever did get organized and if so what they can possibly find to justify their existence. Perhaps they have become a subsidiary of the Wine Advisory Board.

As with his letters of the past, Martin seemed reluctant to stop chatting and get to the signing-off point.

We will look forward, then, Maynard to hearing from you again. We stopped in Sacramento over night the other night while enroute to Reno. That group of which I spoke of that gets together up there gave us a great dinner which was the biggest event of its sort I ever attended. It must have cost a fortune. We left the James Beard luncheon table and drove to the Rancho Friday afternoon late and then on up to Reno Saturday. The weather was beautiful and we got back at ten last night. The first toast of the evening at that Reno dinner, after the very personal ones, was to the Success of Quality Control, made by a member of the [state] Supreme Court. There were two MD's, a Corporation and Railroad attorney, a Bank President and a group totaling 15 that drink all the fine wines that ever go into Nevada. I was told this by the principal wholesaler of Reno. In passing by Davis we would like to have stopped in but I wanted to write you first.

There was still more to impart. "[Dr. Salvatore] Lucia sent us recently an enlargement of a picture he took of us when we were last at your house. It came out very well." [Note: Unfortunately, the gift photograph taken by their mutual friend was unaccountably lost. This physician-oenophile, in charge of preventive medicine at the UCSF medical center, had recently authored a book about the healthful efficacy of wine drinking, *Wine as Food and Medicine* (1954), and later wrote *A History of Wine as Therapy* (1963).]

And MR couldn't resist bragging about his adopted son's latest triumph on the wine front. "Peter just gave a talk on wines at Harvard which lasted two hours and he showed a great number of slides, about two thirds from French and German vineyards and one third from our place. He told the story of our fight for Quality Control and had a very receptive audience who are ordering our wines as a result. He is now going to continue this same talk at other groups. Eleanor joins me in sending our best." [4/9/56]

The letter tells a lot about MR's recent activities and thinking. But after typing this five-page letter to Maynard, the Rays appear to have become uncertain about the strategic wisdom of sending it. Before sending it off, they should at least wait until they received Maynard's reply to Eleanor's letter—if they would ever even get one. The original pages were put into the folder that held correspondence with Amerine, and on the front page MR had attached a small note that simply stated, "NOT SENT."

Amerine Responds

Maynard didn't feel obligated to answer that long letter from Martin Ray, since he'd never received it. On the other hand, whatever he might have said in reply might have been interesting and edifying to future readers—though his inevitable rejection of the proposed peacemaking tête-à-tête would surely have upset MR anew. Amerine doubtless was determined never to put himself in a position wherein he'd either fight bitterly with Martin further or else be seduced into falling again under MR's undeniably charismatic spell.

Maynard did, however, respond diligently if briefly to most of Eleanor's questions—even some impertinent ones, which he'd accepted with humor. Moreover, he had written his letter on the same day that MR had composed the one to him that hadn't been sent after all.

Here is much of the entire letter Amerine sent off to the Rays. He managed to get the entire succession of responses into two paragraphs. (The two slashes given here [//] additionally had hyphens through them in the original letter, which he'd done by backspacing twice on his typewriter—obviously his

way of separating his answers to ER's questions without taking up a lot of space.) In his letters, Amerine tended toward verbal terseness.

> April 9, 1956
> Dear Eleanor and Martin: Jim Beard I do not know, didn't he write a couple of cook books? // Glad that Barclay has decided on the academic life. // No, never heard of Grand Cru tizzy. I am rarely in gossip-ridden San Francisco. But thanks for your defense – I have an expensive palate. – Present 51% law is pre WWII but I do not know its genesis. // Who is Henri Charpentier? I'd not feel flattered. // I am sorry that Melville didn't like my review. It was mild. You and he flatter me to suggest that I have any influence. I do not now have, never did have, and don't aspire to any "influence." Anyway, surely 500 W & F members in the USA wouldn't buy 4000 copies of his book? // I have only the greatest respect for those who are making good wines, and ever shall. // Who is Bloeker? Irascible – seldom; genius – never; charming – too nice to deny. [//] No carryings-on-for years. // Balzer's story I was told. It's an escape. He doesn't have to stay poor as I understand it.... // "Eye of the storm – celebration?" Too subtle. ... // I haven't seen Pellegrini's book and am too broke from local and state income taxes to buy. Will read the library copy. // Man of mystery? No, I just work morning, noon and night and I'm seldom seen in the fashionable places. // ...

Then came the final and most telling part of Amerine's letter, which would have been directed explicitly at his old friend Martin. Probably feeling rather like Candide, MA wished to tend his own garden, both real and figurative, retreating from that dangerous territory beyond academia—the wine industry with its ugly conflicts, which Martin Ray, in his quest for quality control, had been exacerbating for many years now.

> Your invitation is kind but I must respectfully decline. The great commercial world of pressure and profit is for other people not me. Having been once bitten fore and aft I prefer growing lettuce; ever so much more fun. I admire those who survive but "the ends never justify the means." Stalin should now appreciate this. Yours, Maynard AA [4/9/56]

[*Note:* The ruthless methods of the Soviet dictator, who had died three years earlier, were currently being denounced, to considerable worldwide fascination, by his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, who began the slow but relentless "destalinization" process in communism's previous idolatry of the rabid ruler.]

An expectable refrain in Amerine's more sociable communications with the Rays was this reference to ends never justifying the means, for it was this disagreement that had split them apart. Be that as it may, the very composition and bantering tone of Amerine's letter indicates that from time to time he may have actually regretted that firm decision to terminate his special relationship with the Rays. In his personal and professional lives few people, if any, could ever replace the special bonhomie and sometimes quirky intimacy that they had provided; and before Eleanor there had been the incomparable Elsie, whom Maynard had known in his youth. True, he would know other men, and women too, who had a fervent desire to make great wine out of California-grown grapes. But none of them would ever have quite the same fiercely passionate zealotry as Martin Ray, or be as colorfully outrageous.

Amerine and others might disapprove strongly of MR's methods, but for four decades not one of them was ever "out there" on the battlements as he was, in ways that nobody else dared to be: in fighting that perennial bent of the industry toward quantity not quality, as well as in making and marketing a very small volume of high-priced true varietals. Their own inching along toward wine quality was thereby made easier as gradually far more acreage of fine varieties would be planted ... and far better, more honestly labeled varietal wines would be made, often proving to be gratifyingly profitable, just as MR had predicted. And with these efforts California finally proved itself capable of making world-class wines, as he had been insisting it could, all along.

This was the last rather personal letter—at least among those found in the Rays' file folder—from Amerine that displays the full idiosyncratic style that often characterized his earlier writing to his friends on Mt. Eden, especially on postcards. From then on, from time to time there would be either brief personal notes or else businesslike letters dictated to a secretary and typed on UC Davis letterhead stationery, mostly commenting on wines that MR had asked to be tested.

[*To be continued*]

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