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### BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

#### BORDEAUX

The vegetation in Bordeaux is about three weeks behindhand, but the hysteria is about normal. It is said that late vegetation entails a risk of late vintaging and lack of sun for the gathering: advanced vegetation would of course risk annihilation by spring frosts. Experts who have inherited the wisdom of generations in viticulture and have themselves spent a lifetime in the vineyards say that, because of the effect of 1956 and 1957 frosts on the vines, a big vintage is impossible. They read the signs from the budding of the vines which is now in progress. We respect this opinion but remember also the surprises which nature has sprung on the expert from time to time. In short, nothing is known of the prospective quality of the 1958's and no disasters have so far interfered with the quantity likely to be made. A little hard frost in the middle of April, particularly in St. Emilion, was probably too early to have any effect. The soil is healthy and in good condition. The areas that have to be replanted after the 1956 disaster will produce nothing: we have seen no figures to indicate the extent of these, we estimate them at some 5% of the whole vineyard of Bordeaux (to be added to the normal area always under replantation) concentrated in the areas of St. Emilion, Pomerol, and Graves which suffered most from the frosts.

There is little activity between growers and shippers at the moment. Some 1958's have been sold at 1957 prices. At an estimate, there is left in growers' cellars unsold amongst the 1957's, about 60% First Growths, 33% Classed Growths, and 40% Bourgeois. The early enthusiasm for the quality of the 1957's has cooled considerably and opinion is generally in accord with the impression we formed of the wines in January. In view of the large proportion of this vintage bought "on the vine" and immediately after the vintage date, it is not surprising that growers still demand high prices for their remaining stocks. Many who sold "on the vine," anticipating a normal vintage, found that they had sold more than the year eventually produced. It is, however, significant that small parcels of these early purchases are being offered on the market at lower prices than those demanded by growers. We believe that prices have reached a level at which sales become difficult. The eventual prices at which these 1957's are offered will depend firstly on the quality and quantity of the 1958's, and secondly on the reaction of consumers when they are faced with the full impact of the post-frost prices. Consumption in the U.K. has maintained its relatively high level but this has been achieved largely by the importation of a cheaper quality than usual, average export prices to U.K. having increased by only 42% since 1954, compared with a total average increase of 50% in export prices from Bordeaux over the same period. The U.K. remains third in importance of export customers, taking in 1957 13.7% of the total exports of Bordeaux at an average price of £38.10s. per hogshead.

The total amount sent to Britain in 1957 amounted to 19,600 hogsheads, as against 44,000 hogsheads sent to Germany at an average price of £21 per hogshead, and 35,500 hogsheads sent to Belgium at an average price of £32.10s. per hogshead. Clearly, the British market is of great importance to Bordeaux and the reaction of importers to present conditions and prices will have a decisive effect on the market. It should be noted that the exports amount to about 14% of an average good crop, so that the U.K. takes between 1% and 2% of the total crop produced in Bordeaux. The average price of wines exported from Bordeaux in 1957 was 50% higher than in 1956, but only 30% higher than in 1952.

### 1957 Vintage

1957 was a neutral sort of summer in Bordeaux. From the time of the flowering in June to the vintage at the end of September, the weather was mostly neutral: not hot or cold, wet or dry; until October, when it was hot and dry. There was a short period of hot sunshine in July when, because of lack of moisture in the soil, many grapes were "grilled" and so prevented from developing further; for a long period after that there was a lack of sufficient heat and the healthy grapes did not ripen properly. The fine weather during the vintage in October went some way towards mitigating this deficiency. Less than half a normal vintage was made—about 572,000 hogsheads of appellation contrôlée wines. In our opinion, the wines are incomplete. They generally finish short, are sometimes so immature that they taste green, and lack completely the generosity and courage of a fine year. Some of the wines vintaged late are distinctly superior in quality. All have a remarkably good colour, and many show a distinction which, though a little anaemic, is pleasing. We do not think any of them as good as the 1955's and certainly none approach the quality of 1952 and 1953. They will probably be ready for early bottling but we doubt whether they will be suitable for laying down for more than four or five years.

If prices were reasonable, many of these wines would be useful for filling temporary stock deficiencies, but on present levels and on the basis of the usual price structure, the public would have to be asked 35/- to 40/- a bottle for First Growths; 17/-, 18/- a bottle for well-known Classed Growths; and 13/6 to 15/- for varying qualities of good Bourgeois wines. These prices are all some 50% up on those charged for similar categories, but far better qualities, of 1953's.

Amongst the White Wines, the Sauternes are more plentiful than the Graves. The latter cost about 25% more than the 1955's, but the quality is not very interesting in either district. Cheaper Sauternes have increased in price by about the same proportion as the Graves, but the Classed Growths, owing to a decided lack of demand for fine quality Sauternes, have remained static in price.

### 1956 Vintage

The majority have by now disappeared in non-vintage blends of district wines, but some of the best have been shipped to this and other export markets, where they will make extremely good bottles of light, well-flavoured, complete and easy wines for drinking after two or three years in bottle. Their prices are interesting in that Classed Growth wines of character and a pleasant, fresh quality can be offered to the public at about 13/- per bottle. There are still a few available in perfect condition for bottling this summer.

#### 1955 Vintage

Now mostly in bottle, they are fulfilling their early promise. They are well-made, complete and characteristic of their districts. Possibly many will be ready for drinking before the 1952's. Their development in bottle has been normal and very satisfactory: they are well-covered, direct and uncomplicated. There are still some available in cask but they should be selected with care since only a few have conserved that freshness and liveliness desirable at the time of bottling.

#### 1953 Vintage

This vintage continues to be as charming and attractive as ever. It is developing quickly in bottle, as was expected; the wines have acquired attractive and very forthcoming bouquets, and we predict another three or four years of gay life for them. They are perhaps the most drinkable of wines generally quoted on wine lists today.

#### 1952 Vintage

More restrained than 1953 and probably more solidly constructed, now, after about three years in bottle, are beginning to show their quality. We consider them fine wines which will continue to develop for several years: amiable and definite in character, they are likely to be at their best after the 1953's have reached their summit.

#### 1950 Vintage

The characteristics of this vintage are well known to the Trade. Stocks are unfortunately very low. The wines have in general reached their full development, are soft, long, bouqueté, light and well-flavoured Clarets.

#### BURGUNDY

The situation in Burgundy is less hectic than in Bordeaux. Prices are very high, as they have been for the last five years, but the average increase in export prices is only 21% as compared with 50% in Bordeaux. There is no buying on the vine, and at the moment there are few transactions at the high prices being asked for the 1957's. Burgundy, with its small vineyards in the hands of many proprietors, has its own special problems, but a broad division can be made between the wines of the Côte d'Or and those of the Beaujolais and Maconnais. Wines in the latter two areas, which between them produce three or four times the amount of wine produced by the Côte d'Or, are at present expensive because of a very small crop produced in 1957. Prices are 33% above those quoted last year. This position may change quickly with a good vintage for these are wines which the proprietor is not accustomed to keeping in his cellars and generally prefers to sell during their first year. We hope that a normal 1958 vintage will once again enable wines from Beaujolais and Macon to replace the medium categories of Côte d'Or wines as they had started to do in 1956 and 1957. There is some hope that good Beaujolais, Fleurie, Moulin-à-Vent, etc. may again be available to the public from 9/- to 11/- per bottle. There seems little immediate chance of Côte d'Or wines being available in this important price category.



The White wines have in general become extremely scarce. Good Chassagne-Montrachet and Meursault have increased by 50% on prices of 1955's and are much in demand. Chablis made a total of some 750 hogsheads in all qualities of 1957, and the growers, who maintain that their crops are destroyed by frost three out of every five years, are discouraged and gradually abandoning their vineyards.

The U.K. took about 5,100 hogsheads of Red and White Burgundies in 1957 at an average price of £57 per hogshead, as against 45,000 hogsheads taken by Switzerland (mostly from the Beaujolais) at £34 per hogshead; 13,000 hogsheads by Germany at £33.10s. per hogshead; and 11,500 hogsheads by Belgium at £42 per hogshead.

#### 1957 Vintage

About 62% of an average crop on the Côte d'Or: there are, however, some complete and pleasant wines here which have benefitted considerably from the specialised methods of vinification employed in Burgundy. Franc prices are about 20% higher than in 1955. The wines are lighter even than that vintage. There is a range of wines available of a quality suitable to the British market.

In the Beaujolais and Macon about 57% of a normal crop. Prices, quality for quality, are up by 40% on 1955's.

#### 1956 Vintage

Some really good White wines. We have found these wines the more acceptable to British taste because they are lighter, more lively than many White Burgundies in big successful years. The interesting wines are well constituted and will develop quickly in bottle; the best of them develop a most attractive bouquet.

#### 1955 Vintage

All in bottle and developing well. Fairly light, they are well-flavoured, long, and often show great breed. They are direct in character without a great deal of subtlety.

#### 1953 Vintage

Another light year that has developed quickly with a great deal of charm and obvious attraction.

#### 1952 Vintage

A solid vintage. Developing a pleasant bouquet and a satisfying complete flavour. The wines have both breed and finesse, and are worth keeping for future development.

#### CONCLUSION

It must be remembered that comparative prices are calculated in francs at the vineyard and that the devaluation of the franc on August 10th, 1957 affects directly the sterling price. Also that average export prices are those received by the French exporter and do not take into account the commission or profit earned by British agents. By the end of 1958 prices of wines offered to the public in the U.K. should have adjusted themselves to the ruling prices in France, and it will be possible to judge the reaction of consumers. Considered in conjunction with possible price trends in France and the general political situation in the U.K., this would seem to indicate the necessity of a cautious policy for the next six months.

SICHEL & CO.