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### BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

#### BORDEAUX

Vintage reports of the future may have to be written before the vintage, if present tendencies continue. The majority of the Bordeaux Wine Trade—growers and shippers alike—deplore the growing custom of dealing in wine which does not exist. There are certain intermediary groups who, being without responsibility, are tempted by the general shortage of good wine to “get in first”, and there are a few sellers and buyers willing to gamble on the risk involved. Not all the buyers are French shippers. We do not expect the custom to continue, since by the very nature of the transaction, either the buyer or the seller is eventually dissatisfied.

At the moment of writing this report, there is as good as nothing left of the 1959 vintage in the vineyards. Two nights of fairly severe frost damage have reduced the prospects of a fine yield in 1960. The vine has given early signs of prolific production, there is still a possibility of a normal vintage, but it cannot be denied that the frosts have already reduced by perhaps 15% to 20% whatever quantity there would have been. The degree of maturity of the vine seems to vary greatly in different vineyards—there are those who predict a flowering before the end of May and others who do not expect it before 9th June. Early flowering means early vintage, and nearly always an early vintage has meant good quality. By the time this report is published, this first hurdle will have been taken. The vine appears to be in good fettle. The transactions in 1960 wines which have so far taken place in Bordeaux are picturesque but insignificant. The fever may take hold and spread quickly. The principle is irresponsible and speculative—it only becomes a possibly justifiable risk about the month of August.

The sixty-five Classed Growths have borne the brunt of the heavy buying that has taken place since the beginning of the year. The resultant high prices will undoubtedly reduce the demand for this group and leave the market open for good Bourgeois wines that can be sold at between 9/- and 14/- a bottle. There are over 2,000 of these to choose from, many of them outstanding in value. We feel strongly that this broadening of the foundation on which the Claret trade can be built up is a good thing and offers a welcome opportunity to the traditional wine merchant to justify his existence and consolidate his business. In 1959, Great Britain and the U.S.A. were responsible for 17.6% of the gallonage exported from Bordeaux. This may seem unimpressive, but the picture changes when the value of this 17.6% is shown to be 30.4% of the total exports from Bordeaux. Britain and the U.S.A. are clearly Bordeaux's best customers for fine wine. When, furthermore, it is seen that the U.S.A. share was 6.8% of the gallonage and 16.6% of the value; and Great Britain 10.8% of the gallonage and only 13.8% of the value, it is clear that the U.S.A. has become Britain's competitor in the search for fine wine and the rise in the prices of those wines which interest the U.S.A. may be expected to continue. The United States at present is not interested in Bourgeois wines, which is another good reason for directing the attention of competent British wine merchants to this group. Germany

is Bordeaux's biggest customer with some 40,000 hogsheads in 1959 against Britain's 16,000 hogsheads, but Germany only paid £60,000 more than Great Britain for her total imports from Bordeaux. This still leaves the traditional middle road wide open to the enterprise of British wine merchants.

The reduction of the duty on bottled wines in the recent Budget will no doubt result in an increase in the importation of Château bottled wines. It has also made possible the importation of lesser wines properly matured in Bordeaux. Because of the shortage of cellar space in the United Kingdom and the consequent expense of storing wine, it seems that four or five years' free storage in Bordeaux will compensate for the extra cost of freight and duty involved in importing in bottle. We incline to the belief that wine is better if bottled in the cellar in which it has matured at the moment it is ready for bottling, and it seems likely that these new facilities will do something towards the consolidation of the reputation earned in the past by sound wine of good quality.

#### 1959 Vintage

The opinion formed of this vintage after the early preliminary tastings in December and January has been amply confirmed. The vintage was a comparatively small one, being only three-quarters of a good normal, and the quality was uneven. It is estimated that only some 25% to 30% was really successful. The important factor is that the successful wines are fine in every sense of the word. They are big, dark-coloured, full of fruit, stamina and aroma, and there are enough of them to give the vintage a great reputation. As mentioned already, the Classed Growths have nearly all been sold and those that remain are quoted at very high prices. The Bourgeois Growths have also at this early stage been sold in large quantities and are now unobtainable in the vineyards at prices that United Kingdom importers are accustomed to pay. They will be generally quoted in autumn lists when their value will be dependent on the results of the 1960 vintage.

The White wines are more successful on the Sauternes and Barsac side than amongst the Premières Côtes. A few hours' rain at the end of September, when the vintage began, damaged the quality of the Premières Côtes and reduced drastically the quantity of the Sauternes and Barsac. These are on the whole very attractive, elegant wines unhampered by too much weight, well made and bouqueté. We hope to bottle a quantity of these White Wines of 1959 in Bordeaux in the spring of 1961 and to present them, fully developed in bouquet and flavour, in 1965 or 1966.

#### 1958 Vintage

The 1958's are now for the most part in bottle. Those that remain in cask seem to have acquired an intensity of flavour and a certain fullness that we have noticed before in sound wines of a light vintage. They should, however, be bottled this summer and will make pleasant, clean-flavoured soft wines for drinking from 1961 onwards.

#### 1957 Vintage

The 1957's are developing normally. They are well constituted and full-bodied, without the colour or fat of the 1959's. The best of them are firm and classic in shape, they will need five or six years in bottle to show their quality, and are likely to make the best Clarets up to their time since the 1953's. There are still some available in cask which can be bottled in the autumn of 1960.

#### 1955 Vintage

The 1955's are now starting to settle down. They are pleasant, accommodating and straightforward. They have breed and should develop an uncomplicated bouquet and flavour which will make them easily appreciated in two or three years' time. Some are developing more rapidly than the majority. They are a valuable and useful part of any stock, destined to last until the 1957's can be drunk in another four or five years' time.

#### 1953 Vintage

The 1953's are generally approaching their best, becoming ready for consumption. Most of them are likely to remain at their peak for five to six years yet. They have conserved a great deal of their early charm and become refined in flavour and aroma. The majority are successful and are fine Clarets.

#### 1952 Vintage

The 1952's still are behind the 1953's in their development: rather more solid wines with, we believe, qualities yet to appear of bouquet and flavour. They are well made and worth laying down for the future.

#### 1950 Vintage

The 1950's are another example of a light year that has developed definition of character and flavour. The low prices at which these, and all vintages up to 1953, were sold, combined with their amiable qualities have done much to popularise Claret amongst consumers. The fact that producers could not hope to survive today on the prices then quoted will no doubt also have some effect on consumption.

#### 1949 and 1947 Vintages

The 1949's and 1947's have largely become history. The former vintage has fulfilled more or less its early promise to produce pleasant-flavoured, soft and agreeable wines, whilst the 1947's have been through a prolonged "awkward age" and are now often turning into true, great wines. Some are still hard, but the majority have converted the excessive acidity from which they suffered into bouquet and finesse. The 1949's should consequently be drunk before the 1947's.

#### BURGUNDY

In September 1958, Burgundy prices slumped with the prospect of a big vintage. A year later, in November 1959, Burgundy prices soared—apparently on the basis of a huge vintage just harvested. In the first three months of 1960, according to published statistics, Burgundy (for the first time according to our records) exported more wine than did Bordeaux. Facts can, of course, be misleading as these are, but they have their effect just the same, and for the moment the Burgundian proprietor is disinclined to be co-operative about price. He is, in fact, disinclined to sell wine at all because, despite the double vintage made in 1959, he is once again short of wine to fill the demands made on him; because too a large part of the Burgundian vineyards, mostly in the Mâconnais, has been ravaged by hail storms during these middle days of May. Burgundy has escaped the frosts that have damaged the 1960 crop in Bordeaux and the vine is in good condition and vegetation advanced. Possibly the next few months may produce an easing of prices of 1959's, if the quality of 1960 promises well, for, as will be seen below, we have no high opinion of the 1959 vintage in Burgundy.

Burgundy is a small area. The Côte d'Or, which excludes the Mâconnais and Beaujolais but includes all the other Red Wine areas producing wine normally sold in the United Kingdom, makes on an average only 10% of the crop produced in Bordeaux. Properties are small in size compared with Bordeaux and therefore easily influenced by sudden increases in demand. The United Kingdom is fifth on the list of export customers, probably third on the list of customers for fine wines, and has to compete with the Benelux countries and with the United States for the comparatively small quantity of fine wine made in this area. And the demand is increasing: vineyards are offered for sale on the basis of £8,000 per hectare, and that is £8,000 for a maximum production of 16 hogsheads per annum.

#### 1959 Vintage

247,000 hectolitres of wine on the Côte d'Or as opposed to an average over the past ten years of 120,000 hectolitres; a reputation for quality built up by propaganda before the Hospice Sales in November; a record number of buyers at the Sale, a record sum realised but a lower average price per hogshead than in 1957—more

newspaper headlines but no mention of the lower average price ; a rush of buyers and soaring prices : so that by January, when a reasonable opinion of the quality could be formed, the poor bewildered Burgundian grower wondered why he was being offered fantastic prices for a large crop of undistinguished wines. It is true that difficulties of fermentation rendered a considerable portion of the wines made dangerous, and the demand obviously is for sound wines. Prices have continued to rise in response to an increasing demand, even though our impression is that the next step up the ladder may be on to a rung that is not there.

In general, the wines lack colour and they lack fat. The very few really successful wines we class on a level with the 1952's. Many experts advise early bottling in the autumn of 1960—scarcely an indication of the "Grande Année" of which there has been so much talk. The fact is that in this prolific vintage the grapes were so tightly packed in the bunches that neither sun nor air penetrated to the centre, and a part of each bunch therefore remained unripe.

The White Wines seem to us to be more successful, but good Meursaults and Chassagnes will have to be sold to the public at 16/- a bottle. The best value is to be found in Chablis, where very little wine indeed will be produced in 1960 ; and from the Mâconnais where the White Mâcon and the Pouilly wines are excellent in quality and only a little more expensive than the 1958's.

The Red Wines of Beaujolais are perhaps a little more successful than the Côte d'Or wines, but a larger proportion fell by the wayside during the difficult fermentation period. Prices, however, are more reasonable and there should be some excellent value available to wine merchants in the autumn.

#### 1957 Vintage

The 1957's, now mostly bottled, remain the best value obtainable in Burgundies today. The reduction in price which took place a year ago is hard to justify by today's standards. The wines are well made, a little firm but full of promise. They were bought freely by importers in the United Kingdom and will be very useful stock.

#### 1955 Vintage

The 1955's are easy, straightforward, sound wines, developing quickly.

#### 1953 and 1952 Vintages

The 1953's and 1952's, both good vintages, have presented no surprises in their progress, the former a little more elegant than the latter, and both typical examples of the modern methods of vinification.

#### RÉSUMÉ

The 1959 Clarets are worth buying when they can be found at reasonable prices. The 1959 Burgundies are useful for stock purposes but are not wines for laying down. It is worth while considering the question of bottling wines in France.

SICHEL & CO.