

A wine-journey through Switzerland

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A WINE-JOURNEY THROUGH SWITZERLAND

(By Carl Zuckmayer)

JUST as the small country Switzerland on its limited geographical scale offers perhaps the finest variety of scenic beauties in Europe, if not in all the world, it also shelters an almost incomparable variety of special, and specially charming, wines. Starting with the powerful "Merlot" of the Ticino (for those interested I will list the villages of Morcote, Mezzana, the region of Breganzona, Viarnetto and the sunny Soleggiata), right through to the fine, dry wines off the slopes of the Jura mountains, you can drink yourself through an infinite number of shades and gradations. And each one of us will find the wine from that region the best in which we live and therefore know best, as I myself do with the wines of western Switzerland.

But with all this you should not forget that through the East of the country, the Grisons, Liechtenstein just across the border, St. Gall, and then again in the Northeast, right down to Basle, there flows the daddy of all vineyard-nourishing streams, the great old Rhine! Here it is still the "young" Rhine and thus the wines along its slopes too, are young, slender, cheerful, light-hearted and fundamentally healthy. A prickling "Maienfelder" for instance, enjoyed in the "Old Tower" with a bit of "Bündnerfleisch" — that delicious meat dried in the sun of the Grisons — at its best just as the sun is setting, with light clouds over the green river valley, gives the region a sense of eternity as if Caspar David Friedrich or Peter Altorfer had clad it in a gleam of luminous rays.

Equally enjoyable on a hot summer day in the ever cool interior of the gothic "Ratsherrenstube" — dating from the year 1522 — on the Kathedralenberg in Chur, is the "Churer Chorstift-Süssdruck". (Despite its name this wine is not sweet, but tastes like a "Provencal" from Tavel.)

The Lake of Biemme

The region with the especially well liked and perhaps most wholesome Swiss white wines is the one along the shores of Lake of Biemme. Of these the "Twanner" and the "Schafiser" are surely the best known. The somewhat scarce red wines of this region are less known but that should not be so. Try these white wines with fish and then follow up with a red "Cortailod" from the shores of Lake of Neuchatel with your roast or cheese!

The "Neuenbergur" white wine is also one of the few Swiss wines that are world renowned; and one which even overseas can easily be stored and kept. I, by the way, firmly believe that this could also be the case with many other Swiss wines. For example, the ones from the canton of Vaud. But either one has it there like the people of Schwaben, who rather drink it themselves or perhaps there are other reasons for exporting it less often.

Along Lake Geneva

If you drink yourself from where the river Rhone leaves the Lake of Geneva and enters France, slowly eastward along the lake, you can be certain of many happy adventures and realisations. You'll never get tired of the wines that grow around the villages of the "La Cote" — at the foot of the Jura slopes with Vinzel as its centre — for these are the wines (including the light red ones) that are guaranteed to make you lively — right to the equally lively after effects of the next morning!

But following the bend in the lake farther east you get into the vineyards of the "Lavaux" with its old, crumbly stone walls and steps, sprayed blue-green, where you can again taste every shade of the "degustation" — from the noble white wines, like the "Dezaley" or the "Grandvaux", to the youthful, and sometimes matured, red wines. (There is even a "Bordeaux de Corsier".) It is the region where the great writer Ramuz — sometimes in Epesses or Rivaz, then again in Chardonne or St-Saphorin — used to sit in the small inns with their delicious smells of cheese fondue and garlic.

Central Switzerland

If one talks about drinking writers then a leap back to the wines of Central Switzerland is in order. One of them was a former state secretary, Gottfried Keller, who in his "Opfelhammer" in Zurich enjoyed many a glass. Not only in the region of the Lake of Zurich, in Meilen or Küsnacht, but also in the old canton of Schwyz (the "St. Arbogast") and even in the narrow, high valleys of the Glarus (the "Burgwegler", a rarity like all wines of the Glarus), grow wines that are most enjoyable together with the local cheese, for example a "Schabziger", a local herb-cheese.

The wines of the Valais

Where the cheese is good, the wine too, is good, it seems. And with this I leap across a chain of 12,000-footers into that country where — the Lord willing — I shall spend the rest of my days, into the Valais. The wines of the Valais too, up to a short while ago, have been but little exported. Today though, you can find "Walliser Weinstuben" even in the big cities of Europe, London, Paris or Munich, where, I should hope, together with a "Fendant", "Hermitage", "Dole" or "Pinot", the delicious cheeses of the Goms, the Simplon or from Visperterminen are also served.

The wines of the Valais are so rich and plentiful that one should write a book about them. In a general reflection "about a fresh country wine" one can only give them a superficial coverage. Of course: You have to know your way around, and that is perhaps the secret everywhere. And if you do know your way around, and that means knowing not only the big and old established wineries — which for the most part have yet improved their tradition — but also the "little ones", the "vignerons" of the Lower Valais

which operate on a relatively small basis and which see as their life-work the improvement and care of their product, then you will no longer have any problems. You will be overwhelmed with fatherly and brotherly care. To a stranger though, they don't like to give very much, and to be a stranger here you don't have to come from far away, being from Berne or even the canton of Vaud will do.

The centre of the wine district of the Valais runs roughly between Martigny and Sitten, past St-Pierre-des-Clages, where, by the way, you'll find one of the oldest and most beautiful Romanesque churches of the country, up to the village of Salgesch at the border of the French and German speaking Valais. But even further up there grows a wine, right up to the slopes of Visperterminen, famous for its many-storeyed wooden houses. The wine that is pressed here is called "Heidenwein" probably because it goes back to heathen times.

The big and well-known wine growers whose grapes ripen in the Rhone valley, on the slopes of Siders and Salgesch, at St-Valere and Tourbillon above Sitten, all bring noble bottled wine, ready for export, on the market. And the best of them, like the wines of Mont d'Or, can be found with connoisseurs and wine lovers all across Switzerland. In Sitten itself it was above all Dr Wouilloud — he died a few years ago in his eighties — who made the promotion of the cultivation of the wines of the Valais his life work.

Many of the famous grapes of the Valais were originally imported from other wine growing countries. (Thus the Johannisberger.) But there are also wines which have been grown in this region for a very long time indeed and which surely can be called true wines of the Valais. Among them the well known "Fendant", the "Dole" and the "Pinot", as well as the lesser known "Arvin", "Humagne", "Petit Arvin", "Ermitage" and the little known "Rouge d'Enfer". The latter was formerly only grown in Salgesch but can now be found on the slopes of "La Corbassiere" near Sitten as well. It is the "Hell Red" or "Devil Red", which does not lay far behind the best of a "Bordeaux". —Swissair Gazette

SPORT IN SWITZERLAND

La Chaux-de-Fonds vor dem sechsten Titelgewinn

Der Titelverteidiger baute den Vorsprung auf Runner-up Sierre auf fünf Punkte aus.

Eishockey-Resultate

Meisterschaft Nationalliga A: Langnau - Ambri-Piotta 5:1 (0:1, 0:0, 5:0). Sierre - La Chaux-de-Fonds 4:7 (2:1, 1:1, 1:5). Genf/Servette - Kloten 8:8 (3:3, 4:4, 1:1). Lugano - Bern 6:0 (1:0, 2:0, 3:0).