



The André L. Simon
Memorial Lecture

given by

Mr Michael Broadbent MW

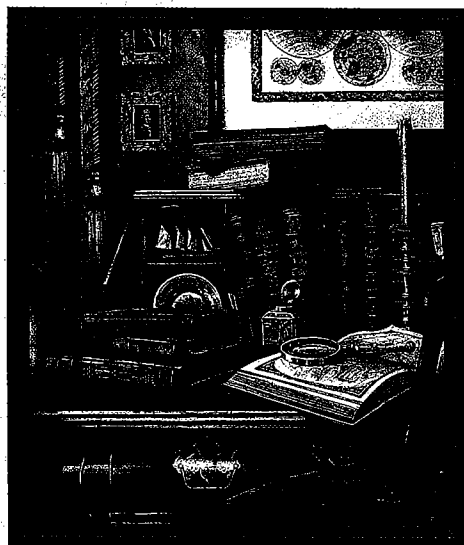
at Christie's London

on Monday

October 18th

1971

Foreword by Hugh Johnson



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What follows is the record of a Memorable Evening. Those who knew André Simon found nothing extraordinary in the fact that an evening should be devoted to his memory. How many times they must have devoted part of one to him themselves, in thinking how he would have enjoyed a situation, or a story, or a bottle, or – most likely of all – simply a person. What they found hard to imagine: I confess I did myself: was an evening worthy of being devoted to him and what he stood for. To pin down André's life's secret is something many of us would dearly like to be able to do. But as a thing of nuance, of intuition, of warmth and love and anger, above all I think of humour, to pin down such a creature is devilishly hard. André would react to a new idea, a new personality, a new wine by a swift sleight-of-thought which produced – always unexpectedly – a little fable. He dealt, like his Master, in parables. A man would be likened to a wine; a wine to man – or very often a woman. You, the listener, were not only entranced by the imagination which worked in this way. You were enlightened by the special power of parables: the power of poetry. Read the way André let the attributes of familiar trees illuminate his subject on page 14 of this little book. – You see: he was a master himself.

In a different way, with as sure – and as personal – a touch, the evening which is so elegantly recorded here did perform the difficult task it set out to do. The spirit of the evening comes through so well in the pages that follow that I need hardly even set the scene for those who were not there. We met in the Great Auction Room of Christie's, where so many of the world's most precious objects have been admired and coveted. It was after dinner, the time when only the richest and rarest of treasures appear on the rostrum. In respect to our old friend we had dined well; but not too well.

Were we at a tasting? Were we at a lecture? An act of homage? A gathering of old friends? Somehow Michael Broadbent caught up all these threads, and made them all fit his own design. What we were at – and perhaps it's just as well some of us did not realize it at the time – was a Happening. We were invited to remember and appreciate a great man. But there was no two minutes' silence. We were instead a shining example of what his spirit – the spirit of inspired discrimination – can do. We were lifted to a level where wine, and argument, and history became parts of a unified, sane, desirable (and attainable) way of life.

Michael Broadbent chose the wines we tasted (and would that there was a

way of recording how good each wine, in its category, was) as a counterpoint to his train of thought. His train of thought wove in and out of the central theme. It was not, perhaps, that I learnt so much that was new: more that I remembered, with growing pleasure, an old, old lesson.

At the end, on hearing the record of André's own voice, I looked at my wife with shining eyes and said 'I didn't think he'd miss an evening like this'.

HUGH JOHNSON

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When, in the early summer of 1971, I was invited – much to my surprise and dismay – to give this Memorial Lecture, I worried, not unnaturally, about the form it should take. My first thoughts were that, to be worthy of the subject and the occasion, I should aspire to the level and seriousness of a BBC Reith lecture. However, the more I thought about this the more presumptuous I realised it would be, though *somehow* I would have to try to rise to the occasion.

A great deal of homework was called for so I invited myself down to Little Hedgecourt to browse and wallow in Simoniana. André Junior could not have been kinder, and I left with early editions of *Wine & Food Quarterly* and the resolve to re-read the Grand Old Man's autobiographies.

It soon dawned upon me that I really knew nothing of André Simon's early years and I was amazed at his tremendous activity and influence on the wine trade of the time. I suspect that I would not be alone in thinking of André merely as the kindly, charming, white-haired doyen of the *Wine & Food Society*, and little else. So the course the lecture should take resolved itself. I would talk about his formative and creative years and select some outstanding and appropriate wines to illustrate certain stages of his incredible career.

On re-reading my talk I see only too plainly how brazenly I plundered his own written work. Nevertheless, I suppose this was inevitable and I only hope that I have succeeded in laying a certain emphasis and useful perspective. To what extent I have succeeded can, to a greater extent, be judged from the transcript – more or less word for word – that follows. Incidentally, the only things added – for the sake of readability – are the side headings.

What cannot be conveyed, by me at any rate, is the occasion itself: the setting, the lighting, the formal dress and distinction of the audience (who little knew what they were in for!), of the delectable wines themselves.

I should like therefore to thank Hugh Johnson, who was one of those who sat patiently before me, for clothing the occasion with his typically warm and individual foreword; also the Memorial Committee and its active Chairman, Iain Wickenden, for having the courage to invite me to tackle the lecture; Claude Morny and Jane Moore at the Society's H.Q. for moral and practical support; Alan Taylor-Restell and the *Wine Department* team for decanting and serving beautiful wines with care and efficiency; and all those nice people in the audience who supported what was for me the greatest possible honour and pleasure.

MICHAEL BROADBENT *Spring, 1972*



My Lord, Ladies and Gentlemen

André Simon was born in Paris. He died – still a French citizen – in London last year. *Introduction*

Over the course of his ninety-odd years he led not one but two lives, not I must hasten to say, à la Jekyll and Hyde, but two full and creative careers.

My aim this evening is to put his life and these two careers into perspective.

Now, it is rather an odd hour (8.30 p.m.) for a talk or a tasting. On the one hand I hope you have not dined too well for if so I will have to compete with snores and jaded palates; on the other, I pray that you had *something* to eat to minimize the distracting rumbles. In either event, I feel it is only fair to sketch in the programme so that you have some idea of what you are in for.

André's life falls neatly into two periods: childhood, adolescence and wine trade career which brings us to 1933; and the *Wine and Food Society* foundation and work from 1934 onwards. I propose to illustrate various stages of his two careers with appropriate wines but it is only fair to warn you that there will be one wine only to represent the whole of the first half.

Quite frankly, until I started my research into material for this lecture, I had really no idea what an extraordinary creative life André led when he was young and what a breath of fresh air he must have been, particularly in the stuffy and prosperous days prior to 1914. Because I suspect that even the staunchest of André's fans may not be fully aware of his influence during those early wine trade years, I am going to dwell upon this period at what might seem disproportionate length.

If what I am to say is 'stale buns' for some of you, my very distinguished audience, then I only hope, for the sake of the others, that you will bear with me.

I might as well start at the beginning.

André was born on the 28th of February, 1877. His father was an artist, his mother musical. He had five brothers and one sister.

He was born in Paris, on the 'Rive Gauche'; and only two weeks ago I spent an hour or so pottering around the place of his birth. I was over for one of the banquets of the third International Wine and Food Society Convention and justified this frivolity (I have to put this in as my Chairman is in the room!) by inspecting three cellars for sale in Paris and by dashing off the very next morning to Dijon for some more work. So, sandwiched between the cellar inspections and the dinner at the Georges V, I indulged in a bit of A.L.S. nostalgia.

The first delightful and totally unexpected coincidence was that Christie's Paris office, in the Rue Bonaparte, is *exactly* halfway between André's birthplace and the Church of St. Sulpice where he was christened. Indeed, he and his parents must have perambulated, as good Catholics, at least every Sunday morning past the shop which now houses Christie's French representative.

By another curious coincidence the first hotel I ever stayed in in Paris – because it was, and still is, very cheap – was the Hotel Recamier, tucked away in a corner of the Place and overlooking the towering sides of St. Sulpice.

Well, I walked from the hotel, through the Church (the cradle of the great classic French organists like Vidor) and up the Rue Bonaparte and sat at a table before the Brasserie Lippe, with my notes on my knees, facing the bistro 'Deux Magots' opposite where the Rue Tourenne used to be. The street was no longer there but otherwise little had changed.

From where he lived to the year of his birth.

For me, for any keen wine buff, the date is significant: André Simon was clearly pre-phylloxera! Just think: 1877 – not long after the Franco-Prussian war and the horrors of the Commune.

Let's try and put that fateful year into perspective:

It was the year that Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India; Great Britain annexed Transvaal; Irish Nationalist M.P.s began serious obstruction of business in the House of Commons (shades of things to come!).

In 1877 Brahms composed his 2nd Symphony; Rodin's bronzes were causing a sensation in Paris. It was the high-day of Degas, Monnet, Renoir and Cézanne.

By an extraordinary coincidence, France's new Premier – the first of several that year – was called Simon. Jules Simon, a leader of the 'moderate

left'. And a man called Martell was the Vice President of the Senate

A browse through the Christie archives revealed a seemingly vast number of sales, including a type in which we had long specialised; the disposal of artists effects and studio contents. The David Cox family, and one of the Prouts', paintings and effects were sold that year.

It is interesting to see that the highest prices being paid at Christies were for the 'High Victorian' artists. The month after André was born a Frith sold for £3,202, a high price in those days.

But not only were artists families selling but, of course, the aristocracy and landed gentry. Also, I notice, those who *serve* the upper classes. Four days before André was born Mr. Poole of Wimbledon and Savile Row sold up. Lot 2 of this distinguished tailor's effects was another Frith, this time an engraving by Holl of Frith's Paddington Station which realised £5.10.-, exactly what I paid in the Portobello Road for an identical print just twenty years ago Clearly, a Frith engraving by Holl is the highest manifestation of art to which we tradesmen can aspire!

In February, the month André was born, we sold 'the VALUABLE CELLAR of Wines' of 'Her Grace CAROLINE, Duchess of MONTROSE' – rather familiar wine name. Her Grace's cellar contained 160 dozen choice old sherry. A 'pale dry' bottled in 1867 fetched up to 80/- per dozen. She also left a couple of dozen 1858 vintage *dry* port.

Ah! but the claret: Lafite 1870 – 17 dozen and 4 bottles which sold for 102/- to 110/-, and a quantity of magnums at 190/- per dozen (compare with the same wine in magnums from Glamis Castle sold by us last June for £1,000 per dozen magnums, a beautiful wine, still full of colour and youth).

The star of the Duchess of Montrose's sale was Lafite 1864 which realised 140/- per dozen bottles.

Enough of 1877. Back to André.

Academically he was not bright. He failed his Baccalauréat, indeed every exam., and recalled that his family and teachers had to resign themselves to the fact that the boy was only good for 'le commerce'!

His ambition was to become a journalist. He seemed, happily, to have a natural gift for languages, and came to England in his teens to polish up his English. Here he met – at the ripe age of 17 – and fell for the girl whom he earmarked as his future wife: his beloved Edith, with the auburn hair, dimples, enchanting eyes and who – wait for it – spoke French without a trace of an English accent!

Wine sales
at Christie's

André
as a youth

Early influences Influence No. 1 was Edith. There was something Churchillian in his single minded attraction to this young lady.

Influence No. 2 was indirect. Upon the early death of his father in 1895, a friend, Guy de Polignac, offered to give one of the widow's sons a start in life. The eldest son was already fixed up, so happily André was offered a position with Guy, who had married a daughter of the redoubtable Veuve Pommery, in Reims. The idea appealed to young André (he was 18 at the time) but he decided to get his military service over first. This didn't seem too arduous and he appeared to spend a good deal of time doing odd journalistic jobs for the *Revue d'Artillerie*.

Marriage and Reims Military service over, he tackled the next and happier hurdle. On 17th October, 1900, seventy-one years ago yesterday, André married Edith in London.

After this he went straight to train in the Pommery and Greno cellars in Reims.

A couple of years later Polignac suggested to young Simon that he might go over to London to work for a time with their English agent. Clearly with an English wife and a good command of the language, this seemed a 'natural' though it was a bit of a blow for Edith who had set her heart on living in France.

Pommery and Greno, London, 1902 At this point we will break for our first wine of the evening. I thought it appropriate that we should open up with a wine made just 60 years after this eventful moment in André's early career: Pommery and Greno, Avize 1962.

This is rather a special wine, not run of the mill but a special champagne from the Pommery estates on the Côte des Blancs. It is in fact a crisp, very dry and light *blanc de blancs* from Avize. Just showing a touch of interesting bottle age. The wine, incidentally, has been presented to us for this rather special occasion by the present Pommery agents in the U.K. In truth, if it was not for this generous gesture on the part of my old Bristolian friend, Willie Beloe, I would have wildly overspent tonight's wine budget!

Early wine trade career, and 'Histories' We must just picture this self-confident young man, happily married, bursting in on what I imagine was a rather complacent jingoistic London wine trade society. His charm must have matched his precociousness for he immediately made lots of friends in the trade.

In 1903, only one year after his arrival in London, the editor of The Wine & Spirit Trade Review commissioned André to write twelve articles on the

history of the champagne trade in England. With an indefatigability which was to be his hallmark he went back through all the old back numbers of the Review and, at the editor's request, came *here* where, and I quote from the foreword of his treatise, 'Christie's searched their old records and supplied some fascinating details of the champagne of the past sold at various times.'

The articles duly appeared in 1904 and 1905; and in December of the latter year they were published in book form, the proceeds being donated to the Wine & Spirit Trade Benevolent Society.

Having been 'blooded' – if I can mix my metaphors – by the taste of printer's ink, he went on to develop his researches into what became his monumental 'History of the Wine Trade in England'. This was published, at his own expense, in three volumes which appeared in 1906, 1907 and 1909. They were not a commercial success though they clearly added great stature to this young man who was by this time a prosperous director of the Pommery agency.

It was about this time that André undertook the first of his many travels abroad. In 1907/8 he took the S.S. America to Chile. Now this seems a curious destination, but at that time Chile, thanks to enormous wealth from the export of nitrates, was the largest consumer of champagne per head of population in the world.

First travels, and the 'Brigade'

Quite coincidentally, both his wife's parents had been born in Chile (and less importantly though even more coincidentally both *my* wife's parents were born there too).

Before he left, he gave a dinner for a convivial group of friendly competitors known as the 'Brigade'. I mention this because it was at this dinner that the idea of forming a wine trade club was discussed.

When he returned from Chile they set about forming the club and at the ripe old age of 32, André was elected the first President.

The wine trade club

The aims of the club are worth quoting: 'To foster and promote the spirit of good fellowship and to try and reduce to the minimum the petty jealousies, the uncharitable comments, the unfortunate misunderstandings ...' (Perhaps the new 'brigade' in the trade today might consider establishing a club for not dissimilar reasons!) Unhappily, owing to meagre support and shortage of funds the old Wine Trade Club pre-deceased its founder by about a dozen years.

One thing leads to another.

Fellowship is all very well, but it was felt by the more earnest members of

Wine trade education

the club that they might serve the trade community in some way.

André simply couldn't understand the ignorance and apathy of the older wine merchants and he at least hoped to instil some greater knowledge of the product amongst his younger fellow club members. So, a Wine Trade Club Education Committee was formed, and, surprise surprise, André L. Simon found himself the Chairman. Not only that, but from 1908 until the outbreak of the first World War, he was its one and only lecturer!

At first his lectures were confined to members of the Club, and held on club premises. He soon moved to the Vintners' Hall and opened his series of lectures to all members and employees of the trade. Commander Donald Ross, the present Clerk to the Worshipful Company of Vintners told me an amusing story about the occasion when André introduced the first cinematograph into the Hall – but only after overcoming considerable opposition from the then Master and Wardens who were alarmed at the fire risk, amongst other things. They and the Vintners' Council finally agreed, but only on one condition: that the London Fire Brigade should be in attendance!

It may not be amiss to say that at this moment of time the Vintners' Company is considerably more enlightened (no pun intended). It does an immense amount of charitable work behind the scenes, particularly for the trade which, I have always felt, tends to take things like the loan of the fine Hall and historic committee rooms for granted. I believe that the Vintner's Company will take an even more active role in trade affairs in the future, harking back a little to its guild origins and responsibilities.

*Lectures
and library*

In 1913, again at his own expense, André published his first six lectures in pamphlet form for the benefit of trade students, one of whom, later on in life asked André how and why he did all this lecturing and what a bore it must have been. André replied that if it hadn't been for the students he would not have known all he did know about wine.

By the same reckoning, David Burroughs, who is here tonight, must be one of the most knowledgeable chaps on earth for, as Director of the Wine and Spirit Trade Education Trust, he has several thousand students through his hands each year.

About the same time André started to amass the Wine Trade Club Library and I think it is true to say that the present collection, which has now passed into the care of the Institute of Masters of Wine, was entirely built up by him over the years.

1914 – 1918

Upon the outbreak of the First World War, André was one of the first to volunteer. He returned to France where his abilities as a linguist put him in good stead.

He tells the story of his first interview upon joining up. Asked by the clerk what was his occupation, he replied 'man of letters' – and was promptly given the job of an army postman!

By-passing this considerable chunk of his life I must pick up the threads where he returned to 'civvy street' and back to running the Pommery and Greno agency. He also returned energetically to trade lectures which he again took on single handed from 1919 to 1921.

Some idea of his stature in the trade at this time can be judged from the dinner given in his honour in 1922 by 'a number of your friends and admirers for the purpose of presenting a memento of their esteem and high appreciation of the invaluable services rendered the wine trade by your writings and lectures'. The scroll from which this is taken bore a roll call of names of the most distinguished members of the English wine trade of the time, merchants and shippers, many of whose names, or their sons, are familiar to some of us today: Francis and Charles Walter Berry, Nicholas Block, Byass, de Ville, Sarson (distinguished Leicester merchant), Victor Seyd, Will Todd and so on.

All these honours – including a 21-bottle presentation decanter (still at Little Hedgecourt, which incidentally he bought in the early 20's) were heaped upon him at the age of 45.

*Post-war
and trade
honours*

This was a period of prosperity for André. He became sole owner of Pommery & Greno in England; a man of property and substance. Yet he was still bursting with ideas and activity.

It was during this period that a little book was published which had a profound effect on wine writing and attitudes to wine. I refer to 'Notes on a Cellar Book' by Professor George Saintsbury (incidentally, the 't' in Saintsbury, as in Montrachet, is pronounced, but very very *quietly*. Unlike that excellent chain of food shops where the 'T' is left on the counter!)

At one of André's office luncheons in Mark Lane an idea cropped up. Someone said – apropos a bottle of pre-phylloxera claret – how they wish Saintsbury had been present. It was thereupon decided to hold a meeting in his honour, but without the Professor's presence as he had very ungraciously declined to attend!

At this meeting, on May 28th 1931, Maurice Healy proposed a bi-annual

*The late 1920s
and the
Saintsbury
Club*

tasting club in his memory. The Professor was elected President in Perpetuity and in Absentia. André Simon became the first 'cellarer', and the very first dinner was held at Vintners' Hall, on the Professor's birthday, almost forty years ago to the day (23rd October, 1931).

This exclusive dining club is still going strong. I am not a member, but have been privileged to attend a dinner which was quite wonderful though it gave me a severe bout of indigestion. You see the mix was so rich: marvellous food, outstanding wines, stimulating company – the people, for a change, being even more memorable than the wines. I remember the honeyed and fast flow of anecdotes from Wynford Vaughan Thomas seated on my right; worldly and wine wisdom from Professor Jack Plumb sitting opposite. What gave me indigestion was the unholy speed of service.

Why, why, why, do London banqueting managers think they are doing everyone a good service by serving the repast as though it was an extra event in the pentathlon? They do things much more sensibly at Clos Vougeot.

The crash On 30th November, 1932 Melchior de Polignac told A.L.S. that they were going to withhold supplies of Pommery champagne and give them to another agency. This was the culmination of difficulties following England's coming off the gold standard. Clearly there were considerable complications and it is too far back to bother ourselves with the full story, even if we knew it. The upshot however was simple and abrupt:

On 1st January, 1933, at the comfortable age of 55, André found himself without job, without income.

He was understandably bitter. He wanted nothing more to do with the wine trade and vowed never to sell another drop of wine. Nevertheless, he was soon invited out to Madeira and returned to do some public relations work for the Madeira Wine Association. This, however, did not last long.

From heady success and a substantial income he took stock, looked around, and decided to turn to gastronomy and the appreciation of wine and food.

Wine and Food Society beginnings Really the idea cropped up during a conversation with the then editor of The Observer. Soon after the seed was sown André discussed it with A. J. A. Symons, the founder of the First Edition Club and publisher of the Book Collector's Quarterly. Between them they created the new Wine and Food Society whose aims were to 'bring together and serve all those who took an intelligent interest in the problems and pleasures of the table.'

We can safely say that the birthday of the Wine and Food Society was on 30th October 1933, thirty-eight years ago on Wednesday.

The first meeting of the Society was held at the Café Royal in the following

month. It was an Alsatian luncheon (vin not chien!). The first wine at this lunch was a four year old Riesling – which is a very appropriate moment to have our second 'commercial' break.

Here, from the wings, comes a five-year old Riesling which I think you will find of the highest quality. The wine before us is in fact a Riesling Auslese, Réserve Exceptionnelle, vintage 1966. It is further described on the label as the 'personal selection of Monsieur Jean Hugel'.

Now I make no apologies for producing a Hugel wine, with its very recognisable yellow label, for I believe that it is this firm, and their English agents, above all others, who have done more to demonstrate and popularise the very real virtues and qualities of the wines of Alsace since the early 1950s.

At worst, Alsatian wines are just sound and drinkable; at best they are outstanding – and still excellent value for price.

This wine is, in my opinion, a supreme example; pale in colour, straw shot with green, and star bright; with a clear pure penetrating bouquet just sufficiently mouth watering to make a good aperitif. On the palate dry and clean as a whistle, with a lovely backbone and flavour and an excellent long finish.

Every society needs its journal. The Wine and Food Society was no exception.

It seems that A.L.S. had long had a magazine of this sort in his mind. Indeed I believe the idea preceded that of the Society itself. It is probably true to say that the new Wine and Food Society became the necessary vehicle to carry such a journal. And like many ideas which have been brewing up for a long time, the journal appeared with force and assurance and in a form which survived, little changed, for about thirty years.

It came out in the spring of 1934. Here it is, 'a gastronomical quarterly edited by André L. Simon, price 2/6d.'

One thing which strikes me, looking at the first issue, is that despite falling out of love with the trade only a year previously, he clearly had the full support of the trade in this venture judging by those who took advertising space. Merchants like Dolamore, Findlater's, Hankey Bannister (now Saccone & Speed), Denman's, Mayor Sworder and so on; shippers like Graham's, Exshaw, Lanson, Bollinger & Krug (but *not* Pommery); restaurants like Boulestin's and the Savoy, and the Holborn, Frascati's and the Carleton – alas now only a memory. (Incidentally, why don't merchants, shippers and restaurateurs pile their support into journals like 'WINE' magazine, in such strength. After all they could not have a more captive audience?)

Last but not least – indeed the *first* full page of the journal was (and continued to be for a long time) taken by the Hind's Head at Bray.

Wine and Food Quarterly

It was at the Hind's Head that the first of the reported 'memorable meals' took place. At Barry Neame's table was André, André Junior and Ambrose Heath.

When the host, Barry Neame asked André for his first reaction to the wines he answered (and wrote in the journal) that his 'first thoughts evoked memories of Berkshire'. A 1926 Chablis reminded him of the 'grace of the silver willow'; the 1919 Montrachet 'of the stateliness of the Italian poplar'; the 1920 Cheval Blanc 'of the magnificence of the purple beech'; the 1870 Lafite 'of the majesty of the Royal Oak.' But as to the brandy (an 1842 Rouillet and Delamain), 'there was no tree with its roots in common clay to be mentioned in the same breath'.
Mind you, not all André's reports were as poetic.

I can just see the twinkle in his eye when he wrote 'I remember a very good oyster and venison luncheon at the Gargoyle Club. David Tennant was there but I cannot remember who was his wife at the time!'

(I doubt incidentally if he would get the same fare or take the same company to the Gargoyle Club today, to which I invited the more daring members of the Institute of Masters of Wine after our annual dinner last May!)

What is so remarkable to me is that the first Wine and Food Quarterly makes such good reading today. Clearly, the contributors were of a high order. One of the most distinguished, G. B. Stern, wrote an hilarious account of bad meals. It included one partaken in a Railway Hotel. After a lurid description of the fare, she summed up: 'the trouble with the Railway Hotel was that psychologically speaking it had no burning desire to please.'

Oh dear! How true those words ring today, not, I might hasten to add, necessarily in a railway hotel context, but certainly in the eating emporiums of so many of today's big hotel and restaurant groups.

Following up the last remark I really must put in a plea for protest. It is the duty of gifted amateurs, without whom standards would never be sought-after, to speak up against the dull uniformity and sheer badness of so much commercial cooking (of wine as well as of food). Organisations like the Wine and Food Society could surely confront commercial organisations from strength.

Indeed, I should like to remind Members (for we have quite a few in the audience tonight) that the original aims of the Wine and Food Society were –

- (i) to raise the standard of cooking in the United Kingdom
- (a) for better health and contentment;

- (b) to improve, for the benefit of visitors 'the deplorable state of country inns' (!) by periodic luncheons and tastings.
- (ii) to set up local circles, the chief task of which was to visit hotels and restaurants, and to issue a badge of approval. (Well the AA, RAC, Good Food Guide and Egon Ronay have taken these duties upon themselves – not the Wine and Food Society, worse luck. What we really need is the objective force of a Michelin guide).
- (iii) the publication of a Quarterly.

Well, the Society now has Chapters all over the world. It organises excellent tastings, luncheons and dinners. But it seems to me that the influence of the Society on outside commercial establishments or upon public taste in general is virtually nil. At any rate, there is certainly room for improvement in this sphere.

Somewhere André wrote 'without gastronomes – without people who know or care for the best – quality would soon go down to the level of what pays the seller to sell best'.

I sincerely believe that society is already suffering enormously from the drop of standards and that the fight for quality should be taken up as forcibly, if not more so, than that for the current fad, ecology.

I consider myself a professional in this context but truthfully I value amateurs more highly; true Amateurs, with a capital A. I quite seriously believe that without them none of the professionals, and here I mean creative, producing, professionals whether they be great *maitres de chai* or great chefs, would die of broken hearts if there were no true amateurs to appreciate (and, let's admit it, pay for) what they created. Fine things would just wither away.

There are individuals and groups. Groups are usually more vociferous and lively. Apart from the Wine and Food Society there are gourmet groups like the Aquitaine Society based in Northampton, dining societies like the Wednesday Club, tasting groups like the Oxford University Wine Circle, to mention just a few.

However I believe the greatest growth is to be found on the other side of the Atlantic. But first back to a bit of history.

We in this country, particularly those of my father's generation, can be thankful for prohibition. Had it not been for this piece of monumental wrong-thinking the Americans would have priced us out of the market for fine wines in the 1920's and the lovely wines that our fathers bought oh-so-cheaply, and which happily still come up in the salerooms here, would not have flowed so freely.

Prohibition ended in 1933.

André Simon, always alive to an opportunity, crossed the Atlantic soon after the repeal but had a sluggish time. Not surprisingly, Americans were not wine conscious at that time – at any rate, not in the right sort of way.

Nevertheless, André's influence had some effect and there is no doubt that American Wine and Food members were largely instrumental in keeping the Quarterly going during the war, not to mention André's achievement in getting hold of supplies of paper.

The war was as much a dead time for A.L.S. as for the Society (and for Christie's, which was bombed flat). For everyone the immediate post-war problems were the same: re-starting a normal life and Society and business in a period of austerity and continuing shortages.

I think that one should remember that André was seventy in 1947, already a Grand Old Man and on what he himself described as his 'last lap'.

For obvious reasons the post-war period saw a growth of activities of the Wine and Food Society in America. I believe that the great surge of interest over the past few years – at fever pitch now – this great new passion for the civilized pleasures of the table has been strongly influenced by the dynamic growth of the local chapters of the Wine and Food Society of America.

Old André had an enormous personal interest in and influence on the American Wine and Food scene and even in his more advanced years was no stranger to those shores. Though respected, he was occasionally misunderstood. As when an American Society hostess, after A.L.S. had had the temerity to ask for a little cheese (to finish off his red wine), snapped haughtily 'certainly not – you've had *enough* to eat'! Mind you I am inclined to agree with the hostess for in my experience an American gastronome's idea of a dinner party would make even Edward VII burst at the seams! And more about American feasts shortly.

G.O.M.
of the Wine
and Food
Society

I have already said that in 1947, at the ripe old age of 70, A.L.S. was already the Grand Old Man of gastronomy and wine. A decade later, in 1957, he was still in top gear. In fact he was just eighty when I first made his acquaintance. It was at a dinner in Chester to mark the opening of a new Chapter of the Society.

At the time I was second-in-command of Harveys in Manchester. My much revered No. 1 was George Delaforce and I well remember him receiving, with his usual exuberance and enthusiasm, the charmer – a lady of course – who came to 'sell' us the idea of participation. It might be an embarrassment to the lady in question, and indeed to 'Wog' Delaforce in the audience tonight, to go into too much detail. But when the huge brimmed

hat had departed I went into Wog's office to see him in a gentle daze; with a gentle haze of perfume lingering around his desk! I knew that we would supply all the wine – probably for free!

Anyway, I remember André's speech at this banquet, with his charm, his delectable and ineradicable French accent, and his wit – and that he condescended to shake hands and pass the time of day with Harvey's northern office boy!

I confess that around this period I really held the Wine and Food Society in a similar light to the Hallé Society, a sort of social club where locals of standing foregathered to chat and admire each other's hats – despite Barbirolli's musical distractions, despite lovely wine and delectable food. But I have since then learnt better!

I have also in recent years learnt something about American tastes in wine and food. Believe me they are not to be despised. No longer is it a case of endless dry martinis followed by all that money can buy.

As many of us know, when an American takes up a hobby, he really gets to know the ins and outs. And I personally have been put to shame by the depth of knowledge of the really keen wine buffs. One of them, Dr. Bob Adamson, took a day off work (if you know what American doctors earn this is quite a sacrifice) and was the first person ever to take me up the Napa Valley – the 'Médoc' of California.

After an exhilarating but exhausting tour of the wineries up that lovely valley, we repaired to the Adamson's for a dinner party which was being prepared by his wife Dottie, who is a terrific cook. To give you an idea of the scale of the evening, let me just say that we (a party of ten) had six different white wines before the meal, three rieslings and three pinot chardonnay's (all of course from California). We had six different red wines during dinner, starting with a 1955 Zinfandel and going back through four Cabernet-Sauvignons to a magnificent 1941 Zinfandel. We then had three dessert Muscatelles and I then went to bed with a bottle of cold water leaving some of them still at it.

This, I can assure you, was not an example of gluttony on their part, or even an attempt to show off; merely the result of the most infectious and passionate interest in wine.

These Californian wine buffs are lucky. They live in a lovely part of the world, in an idyllic climate and one hour or so's drive from the heart of the wine valleys. All of them seem to know all the leading wine makers intimately and they buzz like busy bees from one winery to another pollinating ideas and enthusiasm.

The current
American
scene

Well, it is time to see what they get enthusiastic about. Here, for our next wine, is one of California's best.

Its full title is Beaulieu Vineyard, and the wine is a pure Cabernet Sauvignon, Reserve Georges de Latour, Vintage 1965 (a very good vintage in the Napa Valley).

I chose this wine for several reasons:

- (i) it is good;
- (ii) it will give you an idea of the style of a 'premium' Californian claret-type wine;
- (iii) the late Georges de Latour was a man with whom André struck an immediate and admiring friendship;
- (iv) B.V. is one of the few Californian wines available in this country.

Avery's are the agents, and these are the last nine bottles of this particular vintage.

The colour of this wine is very deep – fine and only just beginning to mature. The bouquet is rather holding back, a deep 'meaty' aroma which is reminiscent of Bordeaux but clearly not classic claret – perhaps slightly burnt and more graves like. On the palate it is a huge mouthful of a wine, soft yet laden with extract. Quite alcoholic and fair tannin and acidity. This wine will clearly last and indeed improve over ten and even twenty years.

It is not surprising, when serious wines of this quality are being produced, that the American wine scene is so vibrant.

Wine societies, tasting clubs and gourmet groups abound. And it is very apparent to me that it is the amateur who is pathfinding, whilst the American wine trade, some of it trying to shake off its prohibition origin and 'hard liquor' image, is struggling manfully to keep up.

*American
wine writing*

Feeding, and feeding on, the amateurs are new American wine magazines and many gourmet columns in newspapers. However, by our standards their wine writing is a little verbose and elaborate. Let me quote from a recent journal:

'The wine tasting has become a cultural institution with its own ritual and circumstance within which many people enjoy the aesthetic experience of wine.'

The same writer goes on to warn the novice that at 'the wine tasting' he may overhear remarks such as 'our lady has not arrived' (which refers neither to the naughtily absent hostess or some undelivered Liebfraumilch) and 'a harmonious balance of all basic attributes' (has this writer never seen the classic Thurber cartoon??).

But this is only the beginning. At 'the wine tasting' mere cork drawing is

clearly considered vulgar for the earnest wine buff is advised to muse awhile 'attention concentrated on each bottle as an individual – a living breathing being – whose origin age and personality oblige us to provide the grooming peculiar to each so that all can greet the taster in their most congenial demeanour'.

Somehow the cork *does* get drawn. Now comes a bit of decanting: 'These are the extremities of the decanting technique – the ultimate gesture of respect and courtesy to a wine: fastidious handling of an experienced wine of breeding, resplendent in facets of crystalline elegance'!

What a far cry from André's pure poetry in the very first Wine and Food Quarterly, or the more down-to-earth prose of the present day English wine writer.

Oh! for the gentle intuitive touch of the three muses of wine journalism: Kathleen Bourke of 'Wine' magazine, Pamela Vandyke-Price, late of 'Wine and Food' Incidentally, I am reminded of the jingle which appeared about 15 years ago in an underground train advertisement:

'Pamela's party was better than mine

The minx got her drinks from Victorian Wine.'

Kathleen strenuously denies that she penned this in a fit of pique!

The third muse is that odalisque of La Revue du Vin de France, Odette Kahn. She is one up on Kathleen Bourke for she has as her assistant-editor the wife of the French Minister for Agriculture – all *very* high powered.

Now, if I have soft pedalled on André for the past few minutes it is because the latter part of his life was ostensibly quieter – his great periods of creativity were over, though activity was not.

His beloved Edith died in 1963 (André was 86) and he relinquished his hold on the Society he created.

He was honoured by the Vintners' Company and became the first foreigner ever to be given the Freedom of the Livery.

But instead of relapsing into a gentle old age his energy appeared undiminished. I remember calling upon him in Evelyn Mansions somewhere around 1966/7 to show him an old bottle. There he was busy tapping away at his typewriter, curious to know what was in the bottle, showing me his wonderful collection of books, always delightfully busy and interested in everything around him.

He finally gave up his London flat for Little Hedgecourt. Around this time his eyesight was failing and he greatly missed company and attention.

I was told that he was lonely there, despite the presence of his family – André Junior was anyway away a lot, travelling the world markets. So one

*André,
Penultimate*

day I plucked up courage and took him out to lunch at Gravetye Manor, a lovely country hotel quite near to his house. By this time he was quite blind. He could only show me his books by feeling the bindings. Yet before we left he opened a bottle of old champagne and he was marvellous company all through the meal, eating and drinking everything put before him.

*The last
memorable
meal*

Significantly it was at Gravetye that he had enjoyed and reported the very last of his memorable meals. And with a further example of the coincidences I am so fond of, this meal brings back Bob and Dottie Adamson to the scene, for they were co-hosts with (Dr.) Barney and Belle Rhodes (another enchanting pair of Californian wineophiles) and one of the most brilliant amateur wine men from San Francisco, Dr. Bob Knudtzen. Fellow guests were Otto Loeb, John Avery, André (junior) and Jan.

André wrote: 'of all the wines the magnum of Latour '29 stood out as supreme.'

*Chateau
Latour
1929*

Well, for your delectation, the penultimate wine of the evening is Latour '29. I couldn't find magnums and have to thank Bill Shand Kydd and my old (not so old) mentor Sir Guy Fison, Bt. for parting with their last seven and two bottles respectively.

What is so extraordinary about this forty-two year old wine is its tremendous depth of colour with its rich mahogany edge; a bouquet which is supreme, deep rich classic – all that great claret should be. And surprisingly sweet on the palate, sweet, soft and full with a fine arching flavour and lingering after-taste.

I feel I should at this stage thank Alan Taylor-Restell for decanting this wine so perfectly, and his team for serving it at its very peak of perfection.

*Diversion,
old claret*

Whilst on the subject of fine wine perhaps I can have a stab at the knotty question of the greatness of pre-phyllloxera claret. In my experience, and I have been fortunate to taste quite a few over the last six years, Latour seems to hold up, to retain colour and body, longer than Lafite, but the latter has finally more finesse and elegance. The most beautiful pre-phyllloxera wine I have ever had was the Lafite 1875, in my office in the company of that 'grand seigneur' of claret, Jack Rutherford. It was delicate, sweet and gentle, holding perfectly – and the loveliest possible drink. For me the closest runner up was a magnum of Lafite 1870 from Glamis Castle, entirely different in style and weight; deeper even than this Latour 1929 and showing no tiredness let alone decay on the nose or palate.

Well, I have tried during the last hour or so to draw the threads of André's *Summing up* life.

I think he was truly a pre-phyllloxera giant of a man.

He had the frame and capacity of Churchill; the white flowing mane, the leonine head, and the charm of Lloyd George.

In other ways he was Churchillian. As a precocious and self-confident young man he knew exactly what he wanted. He spotted Edith, and had a long and happily married life. She was his Clementine Hozier, his constant companion and support when, like Churchill, he had a period in the wilderness.

He was blessed with good health and was tremendously strong and fit. In his own words he had 'hardly a pain or ache in 80 years' – and put it down to a daily diet of champagne!

His curiosity was insatiable and he never appeared to get bored with people or with wine. He was always active, always creating. Over one hundred books stand testimony to his energy and intellect, just as the Wine and Food Society is a dynamic memorial to his ideas and ideals.

At times, like many other great names: Krug, Beluga caviar, Rolls-Royce, Churchill again, he was occasionally, by the ignorant and ill-informed, lightly and wrongly considered 'over-rated.' *Over-rated?*

As it happens there is another wine which one also hears is over-rated – I refer of course to that Emperor of great dessert wines, Château d'Yquem.

So, for the last wine of the evening I have chosen a 1950 Yquem; this particular vintage because it is great but little known. The classic vintages of Yquem of this century are 1921, 1928, 1937, 1945, 1947, 1949, 1952 and 1955. But right up in the front rank, but overlooked, is the 1950 – a particularly fine year for white Bordeaux. *Château
D'Yquem
1950*

Well, here it is, with its rich golden colour, gleaming like a topaz. The bouquet is a 'bouquet' of flowers, set in a honeycomb. Sweet yes, but not unctuous. Rich yet with crisp fruity acidity giving it a backbone or keel. And what a finish!

Incidentally, this wine proves old Sauternes can travel: I brought it to London by train from the British Transport Hotels' cellars in Derby only last Thursday.

Before finishing off the wine in your glass, I would like you to hold back a moment or two longer. We have heard a lot about André this evening. Now, I want you to sit back for a minute or so and listen to something in

his own voice which will, I think, summarize his 'credo', his charm and all he stood for.

*The ninetieth
birthday
address*

(Then followed a recording made by André Simon on his 90th birthday to be played at Wine and Food Society birthday gatherings, particularly overseas.)

'My friends, much as I would like to be with you tonight it is not possible, so let me tell you by tape recorder how much I appreciate your good wishes on my ninetieth birthday. Also, how much I welcome the interest in the art of good living which you must be taking since you are all members of the Wine and Food Society. I do value your support very much; even more, your friendship and the affection which I have good cause to know some of you have for me.

I have indeed received from heaven and on earth many blessings all through my long life. I was blessed as a child in having a very happy home and five brothers to play with – and also to fight with. I was greatly blessed indeed getting a winning number in the marriage lottery. My dearly beloved wife was a wonderful partner during the sixty-three best years of my life. Blessed also in my good children and my many good friends. Of course, I have lived so long that all but one of my good friends have gone to heaven where I am sure they do not mind waiting just a little bit longer until I join them.

But what is so marvellous is that I have in my approaching old age so many friends all over the world – more even than I ever had before. But there is only one old friend who has stood by me and has been a great comfort and joy all my life, all my adult life, a friend who I am perfectly sure will be with me to the end when I close my eyes and maybe leave my mouth just slightly open. I mean wine. Wine is my friend and your friend. It is the middle course, the fairway between iced water and fire water. The best partner of our daily food.

They tell me that my books, articles, lectures, and my example, as well as starting the Wine and Food Society has done much to make more people take a greater interest in wine. I sincerely hope it is so; not out of sheer pride or vanity but because I have always been anxious to pay my debts; and I owe so much to wine, my bodily and mental fitness and many of my best friends, that I shall never repay in full what I owe to wine. So I must leave it to you to pay my debt to wine by carrying on the good work of making wine your friend, the friend of your children and the generation to come. There is nothing that you can do that they will welcome more heartily and I shall value more your great help in that way than in anything else.

May wine and good friends be with you as long as they have been and still are with me. Good night.'

The Toast

I would like you all to stand with me and toast in Yquem –

A man who earned all the laurels in his
lifetime – but never rested on any of them.

The Toast: André

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