

SACAVIN



COURIER

COMMANDERIE DE GRANDE BRETAGNE DE LA CONFRERIE DES CHEVALIERS DU SACAVIN D'ANJOU

Summer 1987

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Even though Winter has passed into Summer - although except for two memorable weeks in July, one can hardly tell the difference - the Commanderie's AGM has remained an outstanding memory for all who attended on Monday 1st March. The Orchid and Holford Rooms of the Dorchester were an inspiring setting for the superb Seminar on "Music to the Ear - Wine to the Mouth" presented by two distinguished Members of our Order - Commandeur John Braun, one of the three Founders of the British Commanderie and a former Chancellor, and our Chef des Beaux Arts, Commandeur Leonard Salzedo.

The series of seminars held these past few years in conjunction with the Annual General Meetings have concentrated on one of the five senses. This year, the focus was on sound with the two speakers treating this subject in the broadest sense - assisted by a piano, discs, stereo-speakers as well as glasses and bottles. The Seminar, which was Chaired by Chancellor Derek Sheen, was Opened by the Grand Commandeur. It is because of the enjoyment of all present at the Seminar, that the contributions of John and Leonard are being repeated here.

Leonard Salzedo opened the Seminar with a review of the 'Sound' that is 'Music to the Ear':-

"In the past, we have had talks on colour, perfume and, of course, taste. This afternoon, sound is the subject. However, to begin with I would like to look at the definitions. Both sound and light exist separately from our perception of them which is hearing and sight. It is arguable as to whether taste, smell and touch actually exist outside our experience of them.

I have been asked to talk about sound because I am a musician and music is sound - but sound is not necessarily music although there are some composers today who might appear to think otherwise.

I am a composer and so I work with sound and time. All musical works must have a duration and, unlike graphic art, do not exist except when they are performed. As a composer I create music, and I think we all know what music is but, in fact, no satisfactory definition of music has ever been found.

Now music consists of various combinations of notes. Each note has two main qualities: Pitch and Loudness. We all understand a sound can be

loud or soft but pitch needs a little explanation. The pitch of a given note is in terms of vibrations per second. The term now used is Herz. This means that, for each note, the air vibrates at a frequency which can be measured very accurately. Musical pitch has now been standardized. The A to which we tune is fixed at 400 Herz. The modern piano has 88 notes from about 25 to 4000 Herz. Although we can hear notes above 4000 Herz they are not really useful as musical notes so the useful range of musical notes is covered by the piano.

Now we live in a world of almost continuous sound. There is no such thing as absolute silence. Today, more than ever, we are surrounded by sound. Not only natural sounds like the wind and rain and birdsong, etc., but also artificial sound: traffic, machinery and all the ordinary noises of everyday sound. And of course today, more than ever, we are bombarded with music - in hotels, restaurants, shops, airports, music is coming at us from every direction not to mention the almost continuous music on the Radio and T.V.

But this is a phenomena of the present time. One hundred years ago the situation was different. The natural sounds were the same but artificial sounds were very different although probably no less obtrusive. As far as music was concerned, though, the scene was very different. In the street one might hear street musicians and there were mechanical instruments like musical boxes and barrel organs. But if you wanted to hear a proper performance of a piece you had to go either to the concert hall, the theatre or a place of worship. In those days, too, there was considerable music-making in the home.

Then came the invention which changed our lives: sound recording. Of course, the early recordings were very primitive and if we listen to them today they sound rather strange. We can recognise the music but the actual sound is very constricted.

Now you might think that in a stereo recording instruments on the left would sound louder through the left speaker and instruments on the right louder through the right speaker. In fact, although that can be the case, it does not give the effect of stereo sound. So exactly how do we perceive stereo sound? What is the difference between the signals from the two speakers?

The answer is Time. We actually hear a sound coming from our right, through our right ear, a fraction of a second before we hear it through the left ear and vice versa. But, I can hear you say, surely the actual time difference must be very small - and you would be right. There is a sense organ in the brain which can tell the difference in time between the two signals reaching the two ears and informs the brain from which direction the sound is coming. It has been measured clinically that the brain can distinguish between two sounds reaching the ears thirty millionths of a second apart - that is, 3 over 100,000!

Many predatory animals use this ability when hunting. An owl can locate a small rodent with pinpoint accuracy in almost total darkness. If you have a pet cat or dog, watch its ears move when it hears a sound. It can move them independently and so locate the direction of the sound with ease.

While talking about the direction of a sound, I must point out an odd quality which sounds possess. The higher the frequency of a sound, the easier it is to establish what direction it is coming from, and the lower the frequency, the more difficult. In fact, it is impossible to tell what direction low notes are coming from.

When recording music it is not very important where the low instruments are placed. All the stereo effect is created by the higher instruments. Usually in recording an orchestra, you will hear the violins on the left and the upper woodwind in the middle and the upper brass on the right.

At this point, let us look at how musical sound is actually produced. The piano has strings which are struck by a small hammer which falls back after each stroke and lets the strings vibrate, and the sound gradually dies away. This is called decay. On a grand piano you can see that the lower strings are longer than the higher strings. In fact, there is an optimum length of strings to produce each note. When, as on a grand piano, the strings are parallel the shape produced is an exponential curve. There is also a mathematical formula which shows the relation between the length, the thickness and the tension of a string. When a tuner tunes a piano all he is doing is changing the tension of the strings.

Other string instruments produce their sound in different ways. On the guitar and the harp and other similar instruments, the string is plucked and the sound decays in the same way as on the piano.

Violins and cellos use a bow with horse hair which acts like a very fine brush and the string can be kept vibrating and even get louder during a note which is impossible on the piano. In wind instruments a column of air is set in vibration and can be kept vibrating as long as the player has any breath left.

Now we can recognise the sound of different instruments and of the voice. We would never confuse a flute with a piano or a guitar with the human voice but how do we do this?

There is an important aspect of musical sound which we call tone colour. Earlier I mentioned that notes above 4000 Herz were not really useful as musical notes. However, they are extremely important in defining musical sound. When a note is played on any instrument we hear not only the fundamental pitch but a number of upper frequencies at the same time and it is the relative strength of these upper frequencies which gives each instrument its characteristic sound.

One other characteristic of some musical instruments and of the human voice which I have not mentioned so far is what we call Vibrato. That is an Italian word meaning vibrated. Of course, all notes vibrate otherwise there would not be any note. What is meant by vibrato is that the pitch varies very slightly above and below the note. It is that vibrato together with the upper frequencies which gives a human voice its special quality.

In conclusion, I would like to read you a quotation from Adoro Te by Saint Thomas Aquinas:

'Sight, touch and taste cannot satisfy you: hearing alone assures my faith'.

Nothing is truer than this word of truth! "

John Braun then spoke on "Wine to the Mouth":-

"This is an unusual tasting, the wines having been selected not upon their geographical or grape affinity but for their literary or musical connections. They are presented by my two selves - John Braun, lawyer

and judge of wine and John Cromer, poet and drinker of wines.

Poets are always said to sing. Virgil's Aeneid opens with "Arma virumque cano" - "I sing of arms and the man". And how often was Ulysses being tossed on "wine-dark sea"? As to music, here is an anecdote from E.O. Hoppé: Michael Kelley, a friend of Mozart and a tenor at Drury Lane in the mid-Eighteenth Century, was in business in the Haymarket as a wine merchant. The sign over his door read: 'Michael Kelley, Composer of Music and Importer of Wine'. Sheridan, known for his biting wit, is said to have suggested the following alteration in the wording: 'Michael Kelley Importer of Music and Composer of Wine' for, he observed, "none of his music is original and all his wine is, since he made it up himself".

And here is a thought on tasting from Pierre Poupon: "To taste wine is to read a book slowly, phrase by phrase; to draw out its marrow; to taste wine is to listen to a concerto with the deepest concentration; to taste wine is to contemplate a work of art, picture, sculpture or monument, letting oneself bask in its colours and forms; to taste wine is to feel one's body open out on the sand of a sun-soaked beach; to taste wine is to be available to all - it is to be master of one's self, of the whole universe. In brief, to taste wine is to live". So let us live!

Wine No 1 - Muscadet

The wine is a Muscadet 1985 by Guy Bossard from Sèvre-et-Maine, on the left bank of the Loire, which gives wine which is, in the words of Hugh Johnson "most scented, soonest ready". This is as near as we could get to Anjou, whose Muscadet was not available. My poet is Joachim Du Bellay, born some time between 1522 and 1525 at the Chateau of Turmelière, near Liré in the Coteaux de la Loire.

You all know the wine well, with its familiar pale yellow tint, light, fresh and supple. Its basic grape variety is Burgundian Melon. Its charm rests with its youth and it ages badly, becoming yellowy. While you sip - you may even find a pearl or two of its liveliness - let me tell you more of Joachim, the greatest name of the Angevin Renaissance and the brightest star of that constellation of seven poets, the Pléiade.

Du Bellay never stopped thinking about his native countryside, or singing its praises. On the title page of a number of his works, he added after his name, the description 'Angevin'. I have chosen one stanza, the 12th, from his great poem "To Phoebus", to illustrate his work. It was not easy, translating from Old French and the sustained use of feminine endings means adding an extra foot in each line in English to keep the balance and rhythm, but I have done my best:

Oh how the rays of your eye divine
Bring to your senses such deep flavour,
Enticing from the abundant vine
Its nectar, to bestow good favour,
Nectar which comes from none but you,
My sweet vine country of Anjou

I am sorry that we could not get the Coteaux de la Loire of which Joachim was so fond. Sorry for another reason - it is less acid than the wine you have tasted. Indeed, all Anjou wines are very low in acid. Take heed from Brillat-Savarin on diet: "Drink, every summer, thirty bottles of soda water; a very large glass when you wake up, two before breakfast and the same number when you go to bed. Prefer for the most part white, light and sub-acid wines, like those of Anjou".

Wine No 2 - Arbois

Brillat-Savarin was a Savoyard and it is to the Northern neighbour of Savoy, the Cotes du Jura, that we go for the next wine. Through the good offices of Michael Druitt, I am able to present a Domaine de Grange Grillade Arbois, 1983. Mention Arbois and you think of Henri Maire, the firm which has controlled most of the wine production in the region since 1632.

The wines of the Jura are among the oldest in France. In 80 AD Pliny spoke of "this grape which carries a savour of resin" and through the ages a faint trace of it remains today. The poet-bishop Sidoine Apollinaire - no relation to the later Guillaume - enjoyed it. And was not Arbois one of the fifteen wines drunk in the Temple of the Holy Bottle in the fifth book of our venerated Rabelais ?

It was the wine of Arbois that sealed the pact of reconciliation between Henry IV of France and the Duc de Mayenne. We learn, too, that Boileau, Furetière, Chapelle and Racine clinked glasses of Arbois as they drank in the Mouton Blanc; and its virtues have been proclaimed by Voltaire and Rousseau.

The person most associated with Arbois is Louis Pasteur. Although not born in the town, he spent his youth there in a house which is now a museum in his honour. His first laboratory has become a café, marked by a plaque. He studied at the college there, a promenade bears his name and at the end of it stands his statue.

What of the wine ? In the Middle Ages Grange Grillard was part of the famous Abbaye de Balerne and is an excellent vineyard. Good limestone soil, mixed with clay, much liked by the Savagnin grape. The white Gamay, called Melon d'Arbois locally, is mixed with it. The undulating slopes catch the maximum of sun to produce this well-balanced, fresh, invigorating wine. The whites can be a little acid and hard when young and do not develop their full bouquet until several years in the bottle. This has had nearly four.

Wine No 3 - Othello

I had hoped to link the next wine with Wagner. I tried very hard. If there were such a wine as Albrecht Nibelheimer Hagenlöse, I should have tracked it down. Instead, it has to be Verdi. So here is Othello, a red wine from Cyprus, spelt the Shakespeare way. You will recall Act I of Verdi's opera and the great drinking scene following the tremendous stormy opening chorus. The splendid refrain "Beve con me" was no doubt followed by copious draughts of this light drinking wine you have before you. It was certainly too much for Cassio but he had a light head.

Cyprus wine today is not, by any standards, of the best, but it has a long and noble history. There are many references to it in Greek and Roman literature. It is said that Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love and Fertility rose fully grown - and nude - from the sea near Paphos and I was tempted to include a white Aphrodite wine in this tasting. Richard I married Berengaria on the island on his way to the Crusades and they honeymooned in Castle Hilarion. He sold Cyprus to the Knights Templar, who with their successors the Knights of St John made the island their headquarters. Large areas of it were known as Commanderies which is where we get our title. I was therefore strongly tempted to offer you a taste of Commanderia, a concession to import which was granted by Queen Elizabeth I to Sir Walter Raleigh. But the wine is rather too

sweet and cloying - at least, to my taste.

Othello is a wine that tastes better in its native surroundings. Remember that it needs a good drought-resistant grape, which in this case is the red or black Mavron or Malvoisie, which accounts for 80-85% of the total grape yield. Traditionally, the only other grapes grown on the island have been the Xynisteri and the Muscat but KEO, who produce this Othello, have been making great efforts during the last 30 years to introduce others

My first taste of Othello was in 1943, when in Cyprus, on leave from Cairo. In those days it was very good. But then anything tastes well after a surfeit of the locally made Egyptian Clot Mariut and Clot Matamir. The best time to drink it was, and still is, in the evening as the sun sets. It was at such a time, glass in hand, that I wrote the following poem:

Kyrenia at Evening

Day sounds descant to evensong -
Muted ripples across the rocks,
Faint cries of homing seabirds,
Bells of night-grazing sheep
As they slide on the darkening pebbles.
Light deepens into afterglow;
The staring Mediterranean blue
Softens to turquoise, with a fringe of gold
Singeing the Western edge.
Beyond the olive orchards
Blurred out of perspective,
The high crag of Hilarion is already black,
Its magic castle furled back into dream.
Earthy day-smells are lost in the soil
As evening fragrances capture the air
With jasmine and mimosa.
There is an end to sight and sound
As night falls on Kyrenia

Wine No 4 - Falerno

Let us now go back to antiquity, to Italy and Campania. The wine is a Falerno Villa Matilde 1983. It comes from what was the beginning and home of the most famous of Roman wines, the Falernian. So many of the Roman poets knew it, drunk it and sang its praises. Pliny said of Virgil that, gracious poet though he was, he only mentioned 15 varieties of grape.

As for the others, let me take Horace first and read his ode "Vile Potabis Potabis ..." finely translated into English by my friend, J.S. Blake-Reed, who was a judge in the Mixed Courts in Alexandria and a member of our Salamander society during the war:

Of Sabine wine a shallow cup,
Maecenas, you shall first essay;
In a Greek jar I sealed it up
Upon the day

When the applauding echo ran
From all the theatre's crowded ranks
Far as the slopes of Vatican
And Tiber's banks

of Cales you shall drink a toast
No Formian or Falernian vine
My hills can boast.

Horace, you see, could not afford the best Falernian.

Martial wanted to drink the kisses left in the loved one's cup and to kiss lips moist with old Falernian. In another of his epigrams, it was the scent of Falernian wine wafted from afar from a broken amphora which he put among the delights of his favourite kisses.

Petronius makes Trimalchio serve his guests with the most expensive wine obtainable in Rome - Falernian 100 years old, crying out "Alas that wine lives longer than man!. Let's wet our whistles - wine is life". Catullus, too, sang its praises.

But today? As far as I can ascertain, there is only one producer of this oldest of Italian wines, importing direct into this country, based in Liverpool. Falerno had almost disappeared as a commercial product and 25 years ago the Villa Matilde estate was purchased by the present owners. To help with the huge task of putting the vineyards back into production, the University of Naples was commissioned to research into the history of Falerno. Records show that the Romans made Falerno Red with Aglianico, Piedirosso and a small percentage of Primitivo grapes. Those grapes you are tasting now. Of course, the taste is not what the Romans knew - a dense wine spiced with honey and resins and high alcoholic degree, as high as nature permits, since their growers knew nothing of distillation and had no means of artificial reinforcement.

Today, methods are different and you can see that this is an aristocratic wine, elegant, balanced, soft and generous. It has matured for two years in oak barrels. Its strength is 12.50 degrees. It has a purple glow with dark red nuance.

I would like to leave this wine with a piece from our Master Rabelais, Book 5, Chapter 45: "Panurge, gaping as wide as his jaws would stretch, Bacbuc took the silver book, at least we took it for a real book, for it looked just for all the world like a breviary, but in truth, it was a breviary, or flask of right Falernian wine, as it came from the grape, which she made him swallow every drop".

Wine No 5 -Valpolicella

We now go north to the Veneto region of Italy for this Bosciani Recioto della Valpolicella Amarone, a well matured 1971 vintage from the cellars of Chris Wilkinson. Valpolicella has a good historical pedigree, traced back in Coria's Italian Wine Encyclopaedia to the ancient retico, much praised by the poets and greatly loved by the Emperor Augustus. There are no more readings from Roman poets, but those interested may look up the references in Virgil, Catullus, Martial, Pliny and Strabo.

In recent times,* as the proprietor of the Locanda Cipriani on the island of Torcello will tell you - and do not fail to have a meal there - Sir Winston Churchill drank it as he painted there and Ernest Hemingway sank many a bottle while he was writing "Across the River and into the Trees".

Valpolicella comes from the hillsides near Verona. It is without doubt the best wine of the Veneto, ruby red, of medium alcoholic content (10-13 degrees). At its best it is smooth and delicate, with the scent of strawberries in its bouquet. It has a rich, mouth-filling texture.

The Amarone is made from the choicest bunches of the typical grapes which go to make up Valpolicella -Corvina Veronese, which loves the local clay and produces that rich ruby colour, Molinara for brilliance and Rondinella for suppleness. Selected grapes are left to dry for a few weeks on special racks to increase the percentage of natural sugar which transforms into alcohol. It has a long fermentation period, prolonged by the cold temperature of the winter months, thus producing a big wine suitable for aging. It is a generous and harmonious wine and as you can test for yourselves has a somewhat intense bouquet. You should also note the characteristic after-taste reminiscent of almonds.

Wine No 6 - Muscat de Frontignan

This vin doux naturel, from Michael Druitt's cellars, comes from Languedoc, near the port of Sète, the birthplace of Paul Valéry (1871-1945). The College of Sète has been named after him in the poet's honour and there is a room devoted to him in the local museum. He was buried in the town and his tomb is in the upper part of the Cimitière Marin, which is also the title of one of his poems. His poetic reference to wine is unusual, which I have done my best to capture in translation:

The Lost Wine

One day I cast into the sea
(But where I cannot now divine)
An offering to Eternity,
My tiny store of precious wine ...

What was it willed that nectar's loss ?
Some necromancer's deadly spell ?
Some secret anguish of the heart
That blood, not wine, poured in the swell ?

The sea was running pure again,
The smoky rose had left no stain
Upon its old transparency

Lost was the wine, drunk were the waves !
Into the salty air like braves
I saw shapes leaping from the sea.

The nearest wine area is Frontignan. The wine is made primarily from the intensely aromatic small-grained muscat grape. It is a vin doux naturel, which is finer than the vins du liqueur. It is a slightly fortified wine with a minimum alcoholic content of 15 degrees made exclusively from muscat grapes in the vineyards of Frontignan and from the adjoining commune of Vic-la-Gardiolle. It is fruity, luscious and robust. It is sweet, has an excellent bouquet and the taste is one of strongly developed grapiness. It keeps a long time and gains extra quality with age.

I have not written any eulogies to wine myself but I did write a poem in Sète while I was there, in which I tried to picture the return of the fishing feet one afternoon:

On the Sea-Wall at Sète

All day long there have been no seabirds
But now they come,
Wheeling and diving,
As the fishing boats return.

The clear sky, slashed by daggers of cloud,
Is speckled by the flash of wings
As the gulls whirl in the wind.
The Boats approach,
Noisy with chugging motor,
Stained sails untidily bound to the mast.
Men brace against the gunwhales,
Tugging at knots, unravelling the nets,
Stabbing with bloody knives.
Fish fragments scatter into the tide,
Scraps for hungry birds.
Rounding the outer buoy beyond the mole,
The first boat slows and swings into the bay
Shrugging the oily waters from its bows.
The small fleet straggles in untidy line,
Brown sails awash, nets in a tangle.
Holds heavy with tunny and squid.
The sea subsides in a sunny quietude,
Fish-reek hangs on the thunderous air,
Waves tickle the barnacles upon the long sea-wall;
The birds have fed and flown.

Envoi

I conclude with a brief quotation from Boswell's "Life of Johnson";

"He said that few people had intellectual resources
sufficient to forgo the pleasure of wine. They could not
otherwise contrive how to fill the interval between
dinner and supper".

But you have other things to do to fill that interval - the Annual General Meeting!

Inspired by John Braun's words and well mellowed by the wines he had chosen members attended well to the business of the AGM for which the Grand Commandeur, Col. Hector Mackenzie, was Chairman. They adopted the Annual and Financial Reports, elected the Officers for the forthcoming year and took an active role in discussions upon future Sacavin activities. All these details were included in the AGM Minutes which were circulated in May.

Obituary

Just one sad note was sounded at the AGM with the announcement that Commandeur Frank Moody was seriously ill. We were able to re-elect him as Delege-General but he died not long afterwards - on 28th March - just a few days short of his eightieth birthday. Frank was an engineer by profession, running his own successful business for many years, until his retirement. He learnt to fly before the war and served with distinction in the RAF, reaching the rank of Wing Commander. He was a member of the Queen Mother's Squadron and became a Member of the British Empire.

Frank was a staunch and enthusiastic member of our Order. His cheerful personality and obvious enjoyment in our activities added to everyone else's enjoyment. None will ever seem quite the same without him and he will be greatly missed. The Commanderie's sincerest condolences are extended to his wife, Muriel, his daughter, Chevalier Mavis Gilhespy and beloved grand-daughter Karen, and to all his family upon their sad loss. We sorrow with them at the passing of one of the great characters of our Order but take comfort at the delight and privilege it was to know him.

We also sadly report the death of another of the Sacavin 'Grand Old Men'. We have just learned of the passing of Mr W W 'Bill' Baxter last September. Mr Baxter, together with his great friends, Chevalier Clive Wilson and Chevalier Deirdre Buchanan, were instrumental in the plans for our first Northern Chapitre - held at Castle Howard in May 1982. This was another truly memorable Sacavin event and, again, one which those who participated will never forget. The Commanderie's sincerest condolences are likewise extended to his wife, Betty, and to his family upon their sad loss.

Those members who tend their own vines are already aware the noble fruit is beginning to develop. This comes as a reminder of the Commanderie's next Tour to the Anjou district in late September when the bunches should be ready for picking. A party of about 25 will be departing on Monday 21st September to stay in Angers for the whole of the Tour with sorties to various vineyards in the Angers/Saumur/Chinon area. It is hoped the programme will conclude with the Confrerie's Autumn Chapitre in Angers but the date of 26th September has yet to be confirmed for this. Chef de Voyage, Nick Kyriakides, has made the travel/hotel arrangements and Chef de Protocole, George Wilks, the itinerary which will include visits to Coulee de Serrant, Ackerman Laurence and the Cointreau Distillery. It is still not too late to join this Tour and members interested should contact Nick Kyriakides on 01-373 1186 without delay.

Mention of Chef de Protocole, George Wilks, as Tour Arranger for the next Visit to Anjou, reminds us that George is a Chemist with more than a little touch of Magic and, therefore, is an opportune moment to include his account of:-

ORIGINS - The Story of Alchemy

Words are the embodiment of history. We have been conquered by invading forces, we have received immigrant peoples fleeing oppression in their own countries, and each occasion has brought a new language to add words to our vocabulary, words to be adopted and adapted to our use. Changes have been made in our etymology to give us a language which is broader, more capable of defining subtle meanings, of expressing fine nuances of meaning, given us a language and literature which is probably the finest in the world. With the passage of time, words change in pronunciation and in meaning; the slang of one age becomes accepted usage in a later age. Try reading Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" in the original; what meaning does Shakespeare have for "humorous" or "the music of the spheres"?

The language of wine is interesting not only in its present day connotation but also in its origins. We find many words which have their roots in ages hundreds of years before the great Renaissance of Learning in the

14th and 15th Centuries. Of course, in these modern days when much of oenology and viticulture is treated as a special branch of science, the everyday usage of chemical and biological terms is common place. Words like anthocyanin, diethylene glycol, acetaldehyde, saccaromyces, bacilles graciles are in common use. The stories behind such names as Claret, Hermitage, Syrah and Chateauneuf-du-Pape are well known, but to appreciate the origins of such words as alcohol, carboy, etc., and even of chemistry itself, we must go back to much earlier times.

The ancient Egyptians were expert goldsmiths and were skilled in various arts based ultimately on chemical processes, glass making and tinting, enamelling, dyeing, preparing essential oils, wine-making and embalming. They were practical workers, not theorists, indeed, the basic chemical knowledge underlying these skills was not understood until thousands of years later. Egypt was known in the Arab world as the Black Land. The fertile silt carried by the Nile was black and "Al Khem" was the land of the black soil. The land gave its name "al khem" to the black arts which were practised, the name of the pseudo-science coming from Egypt and Arabia, through Greece to the rest of Europe was alchemy, the word from which our word "chemistry" is derived. This reported Greco-Egyptian origin of alchemy is emphasised by the frequent references by alchemists to Thoth, the Egyptian god and to Hermes, his Greek equivalent, the gods of healing and of wisdom. The various experiments of alchemists associated with the gods of Egypt and Greece were often in their reporting, so obscure as to be completely incomprehensible. The Greeks were theorists and experimenters and, like generations of men before them, they used and developed ideas of men who preceded them. One of the most general, first-hand observations, was the universal presence of earth, air, fire and water, an observation leading the Greeks to postulate the theory that the whole of the visible universe was made up of four elements, four changeless, unalterable factors combined with complementary properties of dryness, wetness, heat and cold. The word "element" itself is derived from "elementation" meaning a nourishing, a primal principle. Parallel with the Greco-Egyptian era was the development of scientific theory and experiment in Islam, Persia and China with such names as Avicenna (Ibn Sina), an early worker in medicine and Geber (Jabir Ibn Hayn) an experimenter in chemistry. The accumulated scientific wisdom was eventually disseminated through Western Europe.

Our word 'alcohol' is derived from the Arabic 'al kohl' or 'al kuhl', the name given to a cosmetic eye-shadow, stibnite, a metallic-looking grey compound of antimony. By association, the word was generalised to include all cosmetics and thence the "spirit of wine", the solvent of wax oils and essences used in cosmetic preparations. 'Al kohl' became our 'alcohol'. The word 'alembic' is also from the Arabic, 'al ambig', a still. The word 'carboy' is of Persian origin meaning a large vessel.

The ideas of alchemy as practised in Europe from the 12th Century onwards, were rooted in the "four element" theory. If all substances are compounded of earth, air, fire and water, it should be possible to alter, by experiment, the proportion of the elements present and thus convert one substance to something completely different, even to transmute base metals, like lead, to the king of metals - gold, became considered a possibility. This possibility seemed more apparent because it was thought that the properties of substances - e.g. the colour - were separate and distinct entities, as important as the matter itself. So, if by experiment, lead could be changed to a yellow substance, one vital step towards the ultimate goal of transmuting lead to gold had been accomplished. Mercury, because of its unique properties - it is volatile - dissolves gold and is readily converted to an orange/red powder (the oxide) by heating in air, became one of the common starting metals for the "great work".

Human nature being what it is, small wonder that the idea of transmutation besides attracting the true and honest seekers after knowledge and enlightenment, attracted, too, the charlatans, the tricksters, rogues and thieves who swindled the gullible. The Canon Yeoman's Tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (c. 1390) is an excellent description, showing an intimate knowledge of alchemical practise. The alchemists from the 3rd to the 15th Centuries evolved a most complex climate of pseudo-scientific thought incorporating ideas of the 'four elements' theory, of astrology, theology, medicine, mysticism. Because transmutation promised untold wealth, reports of experiments, the writings of the alchemists, were intentionally obscure, so obscure that, today, many are still not deciphered.

The instrument of change, the sought after culmination of the "Work", the grand finale of this whole system of thought, was the Philosophers' Stone, a supposedly self-reproducing substance of incalculable beauty of colour and odour. This instrument of transmutation would change lead into gold. As a further consequence of the idea of the unity of Structure of all things, alchemists came to regard the Philosophers' Stone as the Elixir of Life, a panacea of all human ills, restoring youth and prolonging life. The word 'elixir' is derived from Arabic 'al eksir', a dry powdered medicine.

Although the Alchemists made no advances in theoretical science, they were very familiar with many of the experimental practises in common use today, distillation, solution, sublimation and crystallization. They knew that pure alcohol does not occur in nature, but can be produced by the distillation of wine. The Alchemists, in their futile searches for the Philosopher's Stone produced and found the properties of many compounds which, to us, are commonplace. Their apparatus was varied and ingenious. The kitchen utensil, a 'bain Marie', a double steamer still in use, started its history in an alchemical laboratory, the invention of an unusual alchemist, Mary the Jewess. She is often, in alchemical writings, confused with Miriam, the sister of Moses. The alchemists had no qualms about false attribution of authorship, past or contemporary, human or divine, plagiarism was common. The writings of one, Philipus Theophrastus von Hohenheim, rightly nicknamed Bombastes, the renowned Paracelsus, were so scurrilous and scandalous, that many were unprintable. Many of the alchemical writings, to obtain better attention, were falsely attributed to the better known Greek philosophers.

The contemporary pictures of alchemical laboratories show an amazing variety of glass vessels, alembics of all sizes, retorts and stills (all "mouth" blown, no mass production), a furnace usually attended by a "puffer", an alchemical handyman, almost always depicted using bellows. The alchemist himself, the theorist, is usually shown in the background consulting a massive tome. Some of the alchemical works depict, in allegory, the stages in the Great Work, in symbolic pictures often astrological in origin. Many of these are magnificent works of art, comparable with some of the finest medieval decorated church manuscripts.

The tiny ancient houses of the "gold makers" are still preserved in Prague, in Zlatá Ulička, the Golden Alley, the street occupied by alchemists in the 16th and early 17th Centuries. Rabelais must have been familiar with alchemical ideas.

The centuries-long reign of alchemy came to an end when their philosophies were proved false; the four element theory was proved untenable. Robert Boyle (1627-1691) showed by experiment that air was a mixture of gases, not a separate element. Henry Cavendish (1731-1810) discovered the composition of water, a compound of two gases; Antoine Lavoisier (1743-1794) proposed a tenable theory of combustion and proved

at by experiment. The complex, confused ideas of Paracelsus, Avicenna, Geber, Boul Valentine and Roger Bacon gave way to the theories of Dalton, Gay Lussac and Bergehus, theories provable by experiment. The foundations of modern chemical theory and practise were laid.

Only since the discovery of radium (1900) have we known of the changes in nature of some elements transmuting to others. Only in the last half century have we known how to control and to bring about a small number of special transmutations. We still are not able to transmute lead to gold. The alchemists' Philosopher's Stone and Elixir of Life are still unobtainable. However, our knowledge of transmutation enables us to convert a very small amount of matter into a vast amount of energy, energy to be used for destruction or for good. Einstein's $E = mc^2$ is a very long way from the ideas of alchemy and the Philosopher's Stone. Chaucer, in the Canon Yeoman's Tale, writes:-

"Go where they may, a man can always tell
Such people by their pungent brimstone smell.
For all the world, they stink as will a goat
A hot and rain-like smell that seems to float about them".
(trans. Neville Coghill)

Following our usual calendar of events, the final event of the year is on MONDAY 9TH NOVEMBER and is entitled CHAPITRE DE RABELAIS. Chef de Cuisine, Norman Billington, in association with Chevalier John Brooks, is making our illustrious Founder the theme for this year's Induction Ceremony and Dinner. They are planning that the Ballroom at the Dorchester shall, as nearly as possible, resemble the great banquets held during Rabelais' own times. They look to members and their guests to help create the authentic atmosphere by coming attired in costumes of the period. The Booking Form for this Chapitre is enclosed with this Newsletter and includes places where appropriate costumes can be hired. It is realised that travelling by rail or road dressed, for example, as a Plantagenet King or Queen or a Duc d'Anjou, could be embarrassing so changing rooms will be available at the Dorchester for those who would prefer to change on arrival. The organisers very much hope that members and their guests will enter into the spirit of the Chapitre de Rabelais and attend dressed in clothes of the times but it is stressed this is purely optional. Those who prefer to dress as usual - 'black tie' - need not feel under any pressure to go back in time - the Grand Commandeur will give an equal welcome to those of the present as well as the past!

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