

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

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Twelfth Night is long past and still the rain it raineth every day. It is with even greater nostalgia, therefore, that the pleasant early Autumn sunshine enjoyed by participants at last year's Biennial Visit to Anjou is again recalled by Chef de Protocole, George Wilks:-

Visit to Anjou - 21st-27th September 1987

A thankful Nick Kyriakides checked the final member of the party assembled in the departure lounge and, seemingly "at the crack of dawn", the group started the comfortable flight to Nantes. Here we were met by our coach driver who, remembering our previous visit, treated us like long separated friends. In a few minutes, we were travelling through the outskirts of Nantes and into the pleasant Muscadet vineyards of Vallet, to our first vineyard visit to Chateau de la Galissonniere. The vendange had just started and we were able to see both mechanised and manual harvesting. Despite the work being done, we were well looked after and our visit ended with a tasting of some of the best Muscadets the vineyard produces. We are grateful to M. P. Lusscaud for making our visit possible. Lunch, an impromptu arrangement, was taken in a typical village restaurant in a converted barn, the horse troughs and hay racks still used as ornamental features of an attractive dining room. Needless to say, the occasion was somewhat hilarious. The afternoon saw us safely esconced in the Hotel d'Anjou in Angers.

Thursday, despite a little rain, proved to be one of the highlights of the whole week. The countryside around Saumur is beautiful and the journey to Gennes to visit the Ackerman-Laurance cellars was made through verdant, wooded country. We were greeted very cordially by M. Claude Brunel who described in a most interesting way the history of Ackerman-Laurance and then took us on a tour of the cellars, through part of the ten miles of natural caves and passages in the limestone rufa which house about eight million bottles of the famous sparkling wine of Saumur. After a complete and comprehensive exposition of the methode champenoise used for the production of Ackerman's sparkling wine, M. Brunel invited the group to a generous tasting of the various sparkling wines, all appellation controlée, which bear the famous name of Ackerman-Laurance. M Brunel proved to be a distant relative of the famous Isambard Brunel.

Our friend the chauffeur invited the group to take wine with his wife and himself at their home in Montreuil-Bellay. Jean-Marie drove the coach up to his door and we were all introduced to Mme. Lorière and their

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small son. Madame had provided ample wine with trays of canapés in the most congenial atmosphere of their own dining room. After this pleasant interlude, Jean-Marie drove us, for lunch, to the restaurant 'Splendide' in the shadow of Montreuil-Bellay Castle. We were joined at lunch by Jean-Marie and his wife and by M. Loiseaux, the proprietor of the coach company. The lunch was noisy, vinous, lengthy and extremely enjoyable, typically Rabelaisian. We returned to Angers to enjoy the rest of the afternoon before doing ample justice to the Hotel d'Anjou's dinner.

Wednesday morning was a typical autumn morning, cool and with a slight mist obscuring the view across the Loire. We drove to the ancient property of Coulée de Serrant and the Chateau of Roche-aux-Moines. Here we were received by an old friend, Mme. Joly, who had arranged for her son Nicholas to show us some of the vineyard. He spoke informally and entertainingly on the state of oenology in Serrant and Savennières generally, with especial reference to the use of organic materials as opposed to artificial; artificial fertilisers and sprays were now being abandoned, and the vineyards were showing a reversal to complete vigour of growth and quality. M. Joly's exposition was afterwards illustrated by tastings of Coulée de Serrant of various vintages, using especially the comparison of 1985 and 1975 wines. A most rewarding visit.

The afternoon was spent in the distillery of the world famous Cointreau liqueur. In the unavoidable absence of our good friend and past Grand Maitre, Robert Cointreau, we were guided through the intricacies of the modern distillery by a charming young lady, Mlle Charon, who seemed completely knowledgeable on every aspect of the great world-wide organisation. The only occasion during the week when rain interfered with our plans was here, when a sudden torrential downpour made us wait in the reception hall before we could proceed at the end of our visit to our tasting.

The following day, Thursday, was fine and clear, giving us splendid conditions for our longest journey, to Chinon. The countryside was beautifully wooded and we had good views of the troglodyte dwellings in the cliffs overlooking the Loire. The river was very low in contrast to other occasions in previous years when it has been in violent spate. Passing through Chinon with its many Rabelaisian associations, we reached the Clos de l'Echo, a vineyard once worked by Rabelais' parents, producing the wine which Rabelais once called "that good September soup". A deluge overnight had made the chalky, clay soil of the thirty-five acre vineyard extremely muddy but a few of the group braved the conditions to reach the brow of the slope, to overlook the vineyard with the vintage still a fortnight away, and to be rewarded by a view of the great castle of Chinon. Returning, we were met by M. J Couly who is the present Grand Maitre of the Confrerie des Bons Entonneurs Rabelaisiens. He took us through the cellars where many bottles were maturing, to a large natural cave in the limestone lit by a brilliant stained glass portrait of Rabelais. Here, a splendid tasting was conducted by M. Couly himself, contrasting the vintages of 1986, '85 and '76, the latter a splendid, mature, full bodied red wine with "la gueule de paon dans la bouche". Our thanks to M. Couly for an interesting and informative visit. The tasting was Rabelaisian, the lunch in a small village a few kilometres from Chinon was equally alcoholic, equally noisy and equally enjoyable.

In the early afternoon, in the brilliant sunshine, we journeyed the few kilometres to Devinière, to the house where Rabelais was born. The Confrérie des Bons Entonneurs Rabelaisiens have paid for the restoration of the buildings which are situated in a pleasant estate with some fine

old walnut trees bearing plenty of fruit. The principal building has been converted to an interesting Rabelais museum with furniture, pictures, portraits, etc. Leaving Devinière we returned to Saumur in time to climb to the Chateau and, for the young and energetic members of the party, to take a quick look at Saumur.

Throughout our stay, our French hosts talked of 'le temps Anglais' and Friday was a typical, fine, English Autumn day. Our morning visit was to Avrillé, a suburb of Angers, to Liqueurs Giffard, a distillery making a great variety of liqueurs, using the same distillation principles as liqueur Cointreau, but housed in much less sophisticated premises. M. Giffard unfortunately could not be present, but we were guided through the distillery by a charming and very knowledgable young lady. We saw a fine assortment of products being prepared; forty tone of black-currants macerated in marc for liqueurs de cassis, cherries being preserved in wine, peppermint liqueur, liqueurs of strawberries, raspberries, peaches, almonds, pears, a wide variety. After an interesting and informative tour, we were taken for tasting of various products and on our departure received a gift of miniatures.

In the afternoon we drove to Rochefort-sur-Loire, a few miles south west of Angers, to le Domaine de la Motte. The vigneron is M. André Sorin, a chevaliers du Sacavin, and wearing the distinctive collarette he ran enthusiastically to meet the party dismounting from the coach. The weather prevented us from taking more than a fleeting look at the vineyards, one of which, from ancient times, has been called 'Mother-in-law's Vineyard'. The tasting in the cellar compensated for the rainy weather. M. Sorin produces a variety of wines and we were privileged to taste (from handsome hanaps) some excellent dry Anjou whites, some Côte du Layon de Loire, some cabernet rosé and a good full-bodied Anjou red. M. Sorin is a 'one man' concern; he sells direct and has no négociant.

Saturday was a "free" day, fortunately fine and sunny. Most of the party spent it exploring Angers; visiting the fine market where one could buy anything from beautiful flowers, fruit, vegetables, cheese (one stall boasted 200 varieties) and fish (live crabs and lobsters); visiting the Chateau; visiting the hairdressers or even the couturie.

The week ended with the whole group attend the Chapitre de Vendanges of the Confrérie, held in the ancient Hospice St Jean, followed by the banquet in the famous tapestry room. Messieurs Sorgniard and Cariou had worked hard to ensure that English and French should be well mixed at the tables and the resulting mélange proved to be most enjoyable. The French-English, English-French efforts occasionally produced some hilarious exchanges - can you visualise explaining "Auld Lang Syne" (played by an accompanying heavy brass band) in its entirety, Scotch to English, English to French, through the interpreting of a Greek who speaks fluent French, or trying, through the same medium, to explain Cockney rhyming slang to French people who have no English! A good time was had by all! Needless to say, the food and the wines were excellent and the ambiance enhanced the enjoyment of a splendid occasion.

The whole Visit was, by general opinion, a great success, enjoyable and instructive. Especial thanks are due to our Chef de Voyage, Nicky Kyriakides, for arranging all the travel, the flight, the coach and the stay at the excellent Hotel d'Anjou; to our Chef de Protocole George Wilks who arranged visits to vineyards and distilleries; to the Grand Maitre and the Chevaliers of the Confrérie for making us so welcome on the great occasion of their Chapitre; to our driver Jean-Marie Lorière

for his expertise, his patience and his knowledge of the area; finally, thanks to every member of the group for "fitting-in" so readily to all the arrangements made, thus ensuring the success of the whole visit.

Francois Rabelais 1483-1553

Rabelais is the Founder and Inspiration of our Order. His portrait and his philosophy of wine-drinking are an important part of our Induction Ceremony. This is, perhaps, an opportune moment to recall some brief details about his life and his writing.

Rabelais was an eminent physician and humanist. He sought to liberate the late Middle Ages from the shams and superstitions that imprisoned the natural man. Few facts exist concerning his early life. He studied law and then became a Franciscan novice. By 1521 he had become a priest and began to make a reputation as a Greek scholar. He left the Franciscans to join the Benedictines. He then studied medicine (to fulfill which ambition he had begun to study Greek) at Paris and Montpellier.

In 1532 Rabelais became a physician in the hospital at Lyons. In 1537 he became personal doctor to Cardinal Jean du Bellay, whom he accompanied to Italy.

His novels appeared at irregular intervals, spaced over a long period. Indeed, eleven years elapsed between "Gargantua" and "Teirs Livre". This Book proved to be his most profound work and was condemned for its mockery of penance.

For the Sacavin, however, Rabelais is not esteemed so much for the profundity of his thought as for his enthusiastic support for good living so well exemplified in "Gargantua". Our Sacavin Historian, Marie-Marie-Térèse Baird, has now become our Translator, turning her attention to "Juicy Morsels out of Rabelais", the First Course of which is:-

Gargantua - Prologue to Book One:

Most noble boozers, and you, my very esteemed and poxy friends, to you alone are my writings dedicated. I speak, of course, not in my own words but in those of our friend and mentor François Rabelais. To be called a good companion and fellow-boozers, says he, is to me pure honour and glory.

Consider the good Gargantua:

Gargantua arranged his time in such a way that he generally woke between eight and nine, whether it was light or not. Then he turned and stretched and wallowed in his bed for some time, the better to rouse his animal spirits. He dressed according to the season and then combed his hair in the handsome fashion, that is to say with four fingers and a thumb; for his tutors said that to comb and wash and clean oneself in any other way was to lose time.

Then he took his early morning soup, which is the drink of monks and not altogether free of alcohol. The health of the human race, he said, consisted in not gulping it down like ducks, but rather in drinking good and steady and early.

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Early to rise brings little wealth,
But early to drink's good for the health.

Then he went to church and heard twenty-six or thirty masses and while he mumbled his litanies, he kept himself healthy by consuming plenty of vine-syrup. Then he studied for a miserable half-hour or so while his soul dwelt in the kitchens in anticipation of the hams, tongues, sausages, fried oysters, small lampreys, soused pike, bucketfuls of mustard and other niceties to be helped down by monstrous gulps of white wine. For the practice of drinking he had neither rule nor end for he said the limits of drinking were reached when the cork-soles of his shoes swelled up half a foot.

One day, a certain monk said to Gargantua "Since it seems to you, my Lord, that I have done you great service in some way, you could repay me by giving me leave to found my own abbey, that is, after my own devices."

This request pleased Gargantua and he offered the monk all of his land of Thélème by the River Loire. They decided straight away that there would be no walls around their abbey because it is behind walls that fester murmurs, envy and conspiracies. "And no bells" added Gargantua "because the greatest nonsense in the world is to regulate one's life by the sound of a bell instead of by the promptings of one's stomach and good sense".

Item: because no women were allowed in monasteries unless they were one-eyed, lame, hunchbacked, malformed, bewitched or blemished, and, as pointed out by the monk, if a woman is neither fair nor good, what can one do with her? Make her a nun and a sempstress of shirts. Therefore, it was decreed that no woman should be admitted to the Abbey of Thélème unless she was beautiful, well-built and sweet-natured, as indeed no man was to become a monk there unless he was handsome, well-built and pleasant of nature.

Item: because it was the general rule that monks and nuns should wear sackcloth or unpleasantly dun-coloured hessian, the ladies of Thélème would dress according to their own taste and pleasure, with pink or scarlet stockings which they drew exactly six centimetres above the knee; their shoes were of crimson velvet; their farthingales of white or red or blue taffeta embroidered with gold or silver,.

The men wore stockings of light pink or scarlet; their trunkhose were of velvet embroidered to their own designs; their mantles or cloaks were of gold or silver tissue and each wore a fine sword at his side.

Item: because ordinary monks and nuns made three vows, that is of chastity, poverty and obedience, it was decreed that at Thélème they could become stinkingly rich and would obey only their own grave and judicious counsel. For the building and furnishings of the Abbey of Thélème, Gargantua had counted out in ready money two million seven hundred thousand eight hundred and thirty-one gold crowns. It was easy to see how the money was spent. In the middle of the first court there was a magnificent fountain of fine alabaster on the top of which were the three graces with horns of abundance in their hands and spouting water from their breasts, mouths, ears, eyes and other physical orifices.

Beside the River Loire, in the pleasure-gardens of the abbey, was a swimming-bath on three levels, well provided with a store of pure myrrh-water. No provision whatever was made for water to enter the drinking vessels used by the happy community.

Finally, well pleased with the work done, Gargantua sat down to compose

the Rules without which no abbey is complete. Gargantua gave this matter a lot of thought and finally it came down to this: DO WHAT YOU WILL, because, he argued, people who are free and well-born and well-bred have a natural spur and instinct which drives them to virtuous deeds and deflects them from vice.

The monk nodded sagely and said "That's shitten-well sung".

We complete the First Course with the Rabelais Maxim for the day: Keep running after a dog and he will never bite you. Drink always before a thirst and it will never catch up with you.

Chapitre de Rabelais - Monday 9th November 1987

We paid tribute to our Founder Rabelais in a typically Rabelaisian manner when we commemorated his influence upon us with the Chapitre de Rabelais held in the Ballroom of the Dorchester Hotel. A Medieval atmosphere was enhanced by those guests coming in costume including Friar Norman Billington and Friar Frank Coe who were obviously of the same monastic order as Rabelais himself. Our Grand Commandeur Hector Mackenzie conducted the Induction Ceremony in true Rabelaisian fashion, ably assisted by Chef de Protocole George Wilks, a magnificent figure in doublet and hose. We welcomed to our Order:-

Robin Boyle - a distinguished music publisher whose interest in notes includes those found in the wines of Anjou

Newton Grant - for whom figures are important but not so they prevent Anjou wines to figure as a high priority

David Robinson - whose career is in wine with a special interest in those of Anjou

After the Ceremony, guests enjoyed a Dinner with courses inspired by the feasts Rabelais knew and enjoyed - and accompanied by minstrels delighting the ear with melodies reminiscent of the troubadours. During the Dinner, the Grand Commandeur promoted Geoffrey Phillips - a past Delegee-General - to Officier in recognition of his dedicated service to the Commanderie.

The variety of costumes and the very warm feeling of conviviality in very pleasant company was an extremely enjoyable feature of the Chapitre de Rabelais and for this, the Commanderie's especial thanks are due to Chef de Cuisine Norman Billington and Chevalier John Brooks for organising this outstanding event.

From Rabelais we progress back in time to our Plantagenet forbears and the last of Marie-Térèse Baird's Trilogy of "Obnoxious French Queens of England":-

Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI (1422-1461)

Henry VI holds the record for the longest minority of a King of England. Son of Henry V and Catherine de Valois, he was not quite one year old when he came to the throne. Just a few weeks later, at the death of Charles VI of France, he became, technically, King of France as well. In 1420, the Duke of Burgundy and Queen Isabeau of France, wife of the mad King Charles V, had signed the infamous Treaty of Troyes, to the

effect that, on the death of the demented king, his throne would revert to the King of England. Charles V, nutty as a fruitcake, was easily persuaded to add his signature to the treaty. That's why, in 1422, the baby king of England was taken to France in his swaddling clothes and crowned King of France, at Notre-Dame de Paris, thus reviving an old Plantagenet dream. At least, that's how it had been arranged, but things did not work out quite as planned. Yet again, it was a woman who was to upset the applecart.

In 1420, or thereabout, a young illiterate girl, watching her sheep in a quiet French field, suddenly decided that the King of England should be booted out of France and the rightful heir take his place on his father's throne. How did this peasant, ignorant girl come to this startling decision? In the simplest possible way: Saint Michael came down and told her.

Incredibly, within a year of this visitation, Jeanne Darc (yes, that's right, the apostrophe came later) had folded away her woollen dress and penned up her sheep and was leading an army of between 7000 and 8000 men. The rest of this story is well-known and not in any need of re-telling, except for a few piquant details that might not be generally known. Fiction has idealised the Maid of Orléans beyond all recognition. Luckily, a contemporary chronicler has described her for us. The Maid, according to him, was very tall and statuesque, very powerfully built, had masses of black hair and a very ruddy complexion, as well as a most imposing and heavy bosom. He also tells us that she was quite unhampered by any feelings of maidenly modesty, used to change her clothes in the presence of her soldiers and when catching one of them sniggering, would fetch him an almighty wallop with a large and heavy stick she kept about her for that purpose. To put the finishing touch on this engagin portrait, he adds that she was given to swearing like a trooper. Oh, well go back to sleep, G.B.S.

Anyway, she did put Charles VII back on the throne of France. One could ask oneself what she'd have thought of her protégé, had she lived to see him grow greedy, slothful and squaffing immoderate liters of his favourite Anjou wines in the company of his mistress, Agnès Sorel who, in return for her share of the booze, gave him four daughters before dying at 28, possibly of liver trouble.

But back to our Henry VI. While he was a little boy, his uncles acted as Regents, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester in England, and John, Duke of Bedford in France. This worked pretty well as long as they kept the Channel between them.

When Henry was fifteen, Suffolk set about to arrange a marriage between him and Margaret of Anjou. The King of France hummed and hawed and said he could'nt spare her unless Suffolk signed a secret treaty surrendering Anjou and Maine, in exchange for the young princess who was, already then, known to be 'enchanting but formidable'. The betrothal took place on 24th May 1443 but there were considerable delays and Margaret was finally escorted to England by Suffolk in November, in one of the most appalling gales in history. Her ship, dismasted, foundered near Porchester and the gallant Suffolk carried the bride-to-be through the surf. She had been dreadfully ill during the crossing and, as soon as she touched land, she took to her bed and stayed there for quite a time. The marriage was finally celebrated on 23rd April 1445, in the Abbey at Titchfield. There is an extraordinary picture of that wedding.

Henry, dressed in very plain clothes, sports a short, unkempt and ragged hairstyle. He looks thoroughly bored. Margaret, in a long red and gold gown, with her hair streaming right down to her royal bottom, still looks distinctly seasick. The bishop who is marrying them is casting a very doubtful, out-of-the-corner-of-the-eye look at the apathetic young king. A lady of honour looks completely the other way; another is staring above everyone's head and a third is stifling a yawn. Nobody in the picture is looking at the royal pair. Most peculiar.

Henry didn't know it then, but by acquiring this bossy heifer, he had just started his hen-pecking days.

Henry was virtuous, scholarly, dull and totally ineffectual as a ruler. Very chaste and devout, he was known to go to church several times a day. Shades of some of the old PlantagenetsOne Christmas, a well-meaning lord brought him a troupe of topless young ladies to dance for him. He "averted his eyes and left the room saying 'Fie, fie, for shame', not giving the comely white bobbies a look" a chronicler tells us.

Another oddity attributed to this young king was that, though an ardent hunter, he would not 'allow the presence of hawks in church'. One wonders how and when the presence of hawks in church had called for such a rule?

Good old Willy Shakespeare will have it that Margaret 'the gentle princess' as he calls her, had fallen in love and submitted to Suffolk's charms during the terrible Channel crossing. In the throes of acute sea-sickness? You try it.

After the marriage, the French, always quick on the mark, sent an Embassy with the news that, now that Henry had taken delivery of Margaret, he was expected to surrender Maine, as promised. Totally unaware of such a promise, Henry refused. Margaret then wrote to Charles VII to ask him to be patient because she could and would persuade Henry, all in good time. In the end, it was only when the French troops gathered around Le Mans that Henry capitulated and the take-over took place. Since Suffolk had arranged the marriage, naturally Gloucester opposed it, thus providing the new Queen with ready-made enemies before she had even reached London.

Henry's devotion to his wife is a touching and endearing facet of his character. She was the first and the only woman in his 'chaste' life. It didn't take her long to find that he was putty in her hands, and, being bossy and ambitious by nature, this fitted in very well for her.

Before long, Gloucester started spreading rumours about the Queen and Suffolk. Summoned to a confrontation in the King's presence, Suffolk accused Gloucester of slandering the Queen's honour. The King remained silent, but Margaret took it upon herself to dismiss the slanderer from the Presence and to have him arrested as he was leaving the palace. A few days later he was found dead. The physicians suggested 'a seizure' but the news that Suffolk and Margaret had had him murdered spread like wildfire. Thus were sown the seeds of the war between the house of Lancaster (the Earl of Suffolk) and the house of York (the new young Duke of Gloucester).

In France, Charles VII invaded Normandy. To the dismay of Margaret and Suffolk, it was reported that Margaret's own father had ridden at the side of the French King. The 'Yorkists' jumped in with the declaration

that their saintly King was 'fitter for a cloister than a throne' and was leaving all his affairs in the hands of his scheming consort.

In 1453, the Hundred Years War with France came to an end and the civil war in England started, with a King entirely incapable of doing anything to prevent it. In 1451 Suffolk, accused of treason, was sent to the Tower, then banished from England for five years, but the ship taking him abroad was boarded by a Yorkist ship, the 'Nicholas of the Tower' and Suffolk was subjected to a mock trial and condemned to death. A very rusty sword was used to decapitate him and it took six strokes to do the job.

When Margaret heard the news, she fainted, then she gave way to despair. For three days she refused food. When she re-emerged, it was with the deadly determination to revenge her lover.

Henry VI gained a son and heir and lost his mind in the same year, 1454, but the strange first bout of insanity didn't last long. By January 1455 he was receiving ministers and 'as waking from a long sleep, he spake to them as well as ever did, and when they come out, they wept for joy'.

The name 'War of the Roses' is a relatively modern invention. There is absolutely no contemporary justification for it. Anyway, it was, as many historians will agree, a very boring war, so we'll skip it.

The King, alas, slipped into insanity again. When the Duke of York, after going into battle against the Lancastrians, rushed to the King with the news: 'God be praised, Sire, the traitor Somerset is dead', the King is said to have muttered something to the effect that he wished all that silly bickering would stop. Once again, he was declared unfit to rule and, once again, a furious Margaret was refused the Regency which went to the Duke of York instead. But lo and behold, the King's mind, once again, miraculously cleared and on 24th February 1456, he appeared at Westminster declaring himself 'by the blessing of God, in good health'. On the whole, the saintly man was having himself a nice, quiet and hazy reign. Quite peaceful, really.

Margaret was a different kettle of fish. In December 1460 her troops defeated the Yorkists at Wakefield. York was killed, his head was cut off and taken to the Queen who playfully patted its cheek and ordered the head to be placed on a pike above Micklegate Bar in York. Quite unbelievable atrocities were perpetrated, all inspired by the ingenious woman (the gentle sex). Margaret fought like a soldier while the King was seen standing quietly under a tree and 'smiling gently'. Margaret's pretty little boy, who was then 8 years old, was knighted by her and then asked to pass judgement, on the spot, on two prisoners. He promptly ordered them to be beheaded. His mother was very, very proud of her little son.

But Margaret did make one grave mistake. She overlooked Edward, the son of the slain Duke of York. On March 5th, he entered London, bent on revenging his father. First, he proclaimed himself King, no less, then sent his army to slay the Lancastrians. Thirty thousand died in the massacre of Towton. Margaret fled to France with her son. King Louis XI was now King of France. At his coronation in 1461, 'fountains ran with wine and hippocras'. To celebrate the occasion, he had sent 300 cartloads of his best wines to the King and Queen of England. When the English visited him in France, the King ordered large tables to be set at the gates of the town. Dainty dishes and the richest wines were displayed and the King chose a few jolly companions at each table to