

**WHAT IS WINE?  
AN INQUIRY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649260447

What is wine? An Inquiry by James L. Denman

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**JAMES L. DENMAN**

**WHAT IS WINE?  
AN INQUIRY**



# WHAT IS WINE?

## AN INQUIRY

SUGGESTED BY THE RECENT CORRESPONDENCE IN

"THE TIMES,"

ON THE ALLEGED

## ADULTERATION OF SHERRY.

"Take this," he said, and held aloft  
A vine-stock branching fair,  
"Heaven's noblest gift to human kind  
Entrusted to thy care.

"Go, plant it on the sunny hills,  
For health and length of days,  
And press its fruits for joyous drink,  
And the Creator's praise.

"It bears no taint of pain or death,  
And falls not to impart  
Strength to the body and the mind,  
And gladness to the heart."—C. MACKAY.

BY JAMES L. DENMAN.



London:

ROBERT HARDWICKE,

192, PICCADILLY, (w.)

1874.

193 . 2 . 61

# CONTENTS.

---

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	page 3
<b>CHAPTER I.</b>	
The Constituents of Wine—Acidity of two kinds, the Good and the Bad—Dr. AITKEN on Alcohol, Sugar, and Acidity—Dr. DRUITT on Acidity—Why Sweet Wines produce it shown by Dr. Lankester . . . . .	5
<b>CHAPTER II.</b>	
Fermentation: what it does with the Sugar in the Grape—The strongest Wine not the sweetest—Dry Wines the result of complete Fermentation—Effervescence in Wine caused by incomplete Fermentation—Strength of Natural Wine caused by the quantity of Sugar in the Grape—How to know Pure Wine. . . . .	9
<b>CHAPTER III.</b>	
Natural Wine—Imperfectly fermented Wine unwholesome—Its evil Effect described by Dr. DRUITT—Injurious Nature of fortified Wine explained by Drs. ALFRED B. GARROD, LANKESTER, MACULOCKE, and BRINTON—The Benefit to be derived from pure Wine . . . . .	11
<b>CHAPTER IV.</b>	
WINES OF SPAIN.	
Spanish Sherry: Its natural Quality, Character, and Strength—English-Spanish Sherry a "Liqueur Wine."—Spanish Wine as natural more expensive than when fortified—Cost of Spanish Wine and Spirit compared—Imported Strength of Sherry—Dr. TRUDICUM on the Manufacture of Sherry—Dr. POSTGATE, F.R.C.S., on its Effects—Dr. HARRY on the Value of the natural Tartrates: his Opinion confirmed by EDWARD SMITH, M.D., F.R.S. . . . .	15
<b>CHAPTER V.</b>	
WINES OF PORTUGAL.	
MR. BECKWITH'S State of Mind—CONSUL CRAWFORD'S own Port—BARON FORRESTER'S "black, strong, and sweet"—HON. ROBERT LYTTON'S Description—denied by Mr. ELLIS, but established as correct—MR. DENMAN'S Letter to <i>The Times</i> —New Port instead of British Spirit—Strength, or rather Weakness, of Port before Spirit is added to it—Old Port,—at best a Brandy-wine,—possesses at least no Grape-flavour . . . . .	24
<b>CHAPTER VI.</b>	
WINES OF GREECE.	
M. LENOIR on the Value of Greek Wines—EDMOND ABOUT on their Quality—Dr. DRUITT on their Improvement with age.—Dr. EDWARD SMITH, F.R.S., on their Merits and general Superiority to other Wines. . . . .	28
RÉSUMÉ . . . . .	34
SUPPLEMENT . . . . .	36
VINTAGE REPORT FOR 1873 . . . . .	38



## WHAT IS WINE ?

" Good wine needs no bush \* \* \*  
Yet for good wine they do use good bushes."  
*As you Like it.*

THE controversy recently carried on in *The Times* and other papers from day to day over the question, "What is Sherry?" is of course singularly gratifying to those who, like myself, have in other places and under less fortunate circumstances been waging for many years, a war against wine adulterations. That which twelve years ago was only discussed in quiet scientific circles has at last become a great public question, debated in open court with a full sense of its importance by a sufficiently skilled corps of advocates on either side, and the result, it is to be hoped, will be a satisfactory verdict by all intelligent persons,—a verdict totally condemnatory of unwholesome adulterations, such as those proved to be characteristic of the Sherry manufacture. At all events it will be impossible henceforth, one would suppose, for any of those who have read the correspondence I refer to, to speak of Sherry as people did a dozen years ago, as the standard white wine, by which all others should be measured. In so far as Hock, or Chablis, or Sauterne and the rest fell short of the strength of Sherry, they were pronounced to be thin, poor, and deficient in true wine quality; whereas now it is at last proved, as I have all along been asserting to comparatively few listeners, that the true Sherry of Spain, unflavoured, and unfortified, is scarcely stronger than the white wines of France or Germany, and that what Englishmen drink under that name is a be-plastered, unfermented, and alcoholized compound, unwholesome, and unworthy of a people of taste. The full tide of wine criticism has now almost reached the height in the public journals to which the advanced wave of thought, represented by the articles of Dr. DAVITT and others, attained in the medical papers of five or six years back. Sherry and Port, once esteemed to be the only wines worth naming, have been degraded from the high rank which in this country, only, they have so long usurped, and are now admitted, by every one who has investigated into their merits and demerits, to be so altered, by the mixing and compounding processes to which they

have been subjected, that they have lost their natural flavours and qualities, and acquired others so different from any to be found in true wine, as to sink them to the level of cordials and liqueurs, adapted only for sipping, not for drinking, as all wine is and ought to be.

Now, if it be asked why I think it so necessary to classify these liquids, and why it should be so all-important in this matter "*to call a spade a spade,*" I answer at once that the practice of dram-drinking, under the guise of wine, is directly prejudicial to health, and destructive of the national taste; and that I believe that the nation will not, so long as it worships these false gods of its idolatry, be able to appreciate and honour the pure and the true. To set up a false standard of taste is wrong morally and intellectually, and inflicts injury upon ourselves and those who are dependent on our judgment. What wise and educated parent would give a dram to a child? and yet how many thoughtlessly give so-called wine, almost as strong as a dram, without the least hesitation or scruple! Let us, then, satisfy ourselves of the meaning of the word "*wine,*" and apply it only where it is deserved; even as we refuse to recognise milk-and-water as milk, or tea-leaves and iron-filings as tea, or chicory and coffee as coffee, we shall then no longer mistake wine and added sugar and alcohol for wine, but treat the compound as a liqueur, and drink it cautiously, if at all, at wide intervals, and but in small quantities. This is the reasoning which must account for my being years ago, as a wine-merchant, dissatisfied with selling as wine that which was not wine. This it was that made me try to discover where the true wines of the world were to be found, with a view to driving out the false by the real, the impure by the pure. It surely could not have been so very strange a notion for me to entertain, that a wine-merchant should be a seller of wine; and yet it has obliged me to become more than a wine seller, for in giving reasons for the faith within me, I have been forced into taking up my pen, and thus becoming a sort of advocate, so far as my powers permit, of the advantages of pure wine.

I could not but suppose that when pure wine was fairly introduced into this country it would be infinitely preferred to Port and Sherry, particularly when it was shown that these were unwholesome, and that their strength was not their own, but was derived from British or German spirit, the first cost of which at wine strength, without the Excise or Custom's duty, would be but 2d. a bottle. But I have never had the slightest personal feeling against the shippers of these wines, for I sell Port and Sherry myself to those who prefer them, for there is really no competition between pure, and fortified wines, those who prefer the one cannot enjoy the other; the only credit in the matter which I claim for myself is that of giving particulars which relieve me from responsibility, and which enable my customers to judge for themselves. Even the large majority of wine-



merchants, I can but suppose, have until recently been to a great extent unacquainted with the facts I have herein collected, when they have maintained that Port and Sherry were pure wines.

In the following pages I have preferred to insert the opinions of eminent writers, on the wine question, in their own words to re-stating or attempting to re-produce their arguments. In their original form they carry the weight of the highest authority, and protect me from the imputation of portraying merely my own prejudices.

---

## CHAPTER I.

The Constituents of Wine—Acidity of two kinds, the Good and the Bad—Dr. ATKINS on Alcohol, Sugar, and Acidity—Dr. DAVY on Acidity—Why Sweet Wines produce it shown by Dr. LANKESHER.

**B**EFORE describing in detail the merits of Natural Wines, it may be worth while to say a word respecting the acids therein generated; namely, the tartaric and acetic acids. The latter, or vinegar acid, is unquestionably bad, its presence being a proof that the wine is decayed or spoilt; this kind of acid is generally caused by the wine being of poor quality, or from its having been brought in contact with the air. The former, tartaric acid, is inseparable from wine; in fact, there could not be wine without it. With age it crystallizes in the bottle and on the sides of the cask, while the wine becomes virtually sweeter, as it disengages itself from this acid,—the presence of which is, as I have said, absolutely necessary for the improvement of the wine.

As regards the seeming acidity and thinness of natural wine, I would say a few words only. I would not attempt to argue that sound Vin ordinaire is as full-bodied as Vinsanto; but it is nevertheless true, that although the Vinsanto is the sweetest wine produced, and Vin ordinaire the most tart, yet their alcoholic strength is about equal. The simple fact is, (and the one upon which the whole theory and practice of the Port and Sherry mixings and messings are based,) that if wine made from undried grapes be perfectly fermented, the product must be *acid*, or at least have an acid taste, as all the sugar in the grape has been turned to alcohol, and if the wine be made from thoroughly ripe grapes, it will possess an alcoholic strength, greater or less according to the latitude in which the grape was grown. On the other hand, if the grapes have been more or less dried, the wine will be more or less sweet and full bodied, as it will contain unfermented sugar. The product of both dried and undried grapes is still (if from the same vines, as in St. Elie and Vinsanto,) the same as regards the acid, though tasting so differently; but the sweeter wine has this disadvantage, that it contains unfermented sugar, which may cause acidity of the stomach.

In instances where it is thought desirable to sweeten the acid or fully fermented wine, large quantities of spirit must also be added to prevent secondary fermentation. To combine the two qualities of sweetness and strength, and to mask the natural and proper acidity of fully fermented young wine, has been the object of the Port and Sherry makers. Thus Dr. Aitken, in his *Science and Practice of Medicine*, in speaking of the acidity in wine, says,—

“Alcohol to a variable amount ought to exist in wines as a *natural product* of the fermentation of the grape, and the conditions of its existence in the wine are then very different from those which obtain when alcohol (distilled even from wine) has been added to wine. It is highly desirable, therefore, to avoid adventitious alcohol, but it is impossible to prove that spirit has been added to a wine unless the amount is absurdly excessive.

“Acidity.—Free acid in wine is a necessary result of its fermentation. Its presence is likewise necessary for the evolution of the *bouquet*, for the agreeableness of the wine, and for its wholesomeness. It is, therefore, a popular error to denounce absolutely the existence of acidity in wine. Much error prevails respecting the relative amount of acidity in different wines, and an excessive amount of free acid is very easily disguised by the relative sweetness of the wine.

“Sugar is characteristic of all the *sweet* wines, and of many wines in their immature condition. Its amount tends to diminish with age, so that old wines of the sweet sort may be less pernicious, as regards sugar, than the new. *Sweet* wines, or wines which contain a large per-centage of sugar, are to be avoided by those who are disposed to corpulence; and they are extremely injurious to those who are disposed to the formation of oxalic acid, or to the discharge of sugar in the urine. . . . All gradation lists given in books as to the amount of sugar in wines are purely empirical, and apply only to the particular sample of wine examined. In stating the sweetness of Champagne, for example, nobody seems to notice that it is a manufactured article; and that the quantity of syrup added to it actually varies from *four to twenty per cent.* The Champagne known as ‘*still*,’ has no sugar. Some sorts of Madeira are also nearly free from sugar; and some sorts of Sherry are much sweeter than well-fermented Ports. The co-relation of sweetness with acidity and with alcohol are most important points to be determined with reference to the easy digestion of wines; and hence they are important to be known.

“The principal analyst of the Inland Revenue Department reports that he found illicit ingredients in no less than 20 out of 26 samples of Beer tested last year; and he believes that, owing to the difficulty of detection, the practice of adulterating beer with poisonous ingredients is much more prevalent than might be inferred from the small number of discoveries made; and these samples were all from the stores of licensed brewers. . . . As to wines, the following advertisement, frequently appearing in the *Times*, shows that there is a trade openly carried on in this country in the treatment or *cure* of bad or spurious wines:—

‘WINE MERCHANTS, having Wines turned acid, may have them restored to their original wholesome perfection in two or three days, by applying to ———’ &c. &c.

"It is well known that the same practices prevail abroad, so that wine, pure, as imported, is now no guarantee for purity of production. Hambro' wine has been shipped from London to Cadiz and back. The Custom-house officers in 1865 stopped a large quantity of stuff imported as 'Sherry,' which had not a drop of grape-juice in its composition, and it cannot be doubted that the increasing competition for low prices has greatly added to the temptations to adulterate. Such liquors, for any medicinal purposes, must be worse than useless; and whenever wine, brandy, or beer is prescribed medicinally, they ought to be obtained from the most reliable sources.

"The blindly empirical and routine mode in which alcoholic beverages are generally prescribed in absolute ignorance of their constitution and genuineness, and the importance of them in the treatment of disease or of ill-health, renders it advisable in a text-book to insist on these topics, believing that the physician cannot cope successfully with diseases, and especially with CONSTITUTIONAL DISEASES, and the ill-health with which they are associated, unless he learns judiciously to use the immense power at his disposal in the influence of *diet, water, and alcoholic beverages* as agents in the management of the system during the intervals between the paroxysms of these diseases."

Dr. Aitken concludes with a reference to, and commendation of, Dr. Druitt's book *On Cheap Wines*, which describes acidity in similar fashion thus:—

"Those things are called acid which redden litmus paper, or which neutralize an alkali, or which give a certain impression to the tongue known as *sour*. Acids may be inorganic or organic. Amongst the former the sulphuric, hydrochloric, nitric, and phosphoric are articles of diet or medicine; amongst the latter, the citric from lemons, tartaric from grapes, oxalic from sorrel, the acetic a product of sugar, the malic, racemic, &c., which exist in fruits, the tannic or astringent, and the lactic, in sour milk.

"Acids of the wholesome kinds above mentioned are greedily sought for by many persons, and avoided by others. The persons who seek them are usually the young, strong, active, and hearty, with free, open pores of the skin, and good appetites. Acids do to the palate and stomach what soap and towels do to the skin; *i. e.*, they strip off its coating, make it redder, more active, and ready to secrete. Hence the love for lemon-juice, vinegar, and pickles at dinner, and the charm of acids to persons in certain kinds of bad health, torpid liver, coated tongue, &c. The secretions of sore throats are alkaline, and an acid liquor wipes this off, and leaves the surface clean. The persons who avoid acids are usually the torpid, and those with red tongues, or skins locked up.

"In good wine the acidity is due to tartaric and volatile acids, each wholesome *per se*. If too acid, the fault may be excess *simpliciter*, or more probably defect of *body*, which should veil the acid. The only test of *quantity* of acid is the chemical one; and this shows that very first-class wines of the Rhine and Moselle contain most acid; Port and Sherry least. But it must be remembered, that one-fifth or more of Port and