

Studying Agricultural Europe

Henry A. Wallace in Wallace's Farmer.

One of the most beautiful palaces in all the world is at Versailles, twelve miles from Paris. Here Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI lived. It is said that over two hundred million dollars was spent in building the palace and laying out the grounds. For more than a hundred years the French nation has owned the palace and the grounds, and have made of it a beautiful museum and park where people of all nations may come. The palace is an immense affair, containing gallery after gallery of big paintings, sculpture work, tapestry, mirrors, etc. Nearly every room has its history. In this one Marie Antoinette lived; in that one the queen's guards stayed when the revolutionists invaded the palace; in another Louis XVI dined in State; while in still another the King of Prussia was proclaimed Emperor of Germany at the time of the Franco-Prussian War.

In their way the grounds are just as wonderful as the palace. There are thousands of trimmed trees set in rows; there are fountains, and statuary, and beautiful avenues. In out-of-the-way spots you happen on little temples or columns or statuary set in the midst of the green forest, or perhaps on an island in a quiet pond. Then there is the small palace of Marie Antoinette, known as the Petit Trianon, and a bit farther on are some old farm houses where Marie and her court ladies used to pretend that they were dairy-maids. It is all very beautiful and unusual, and the man who knows French history must enjoy himself thoroughly in a place like this. For my part, I didn't remember as much about the different kings and their various queens and mistresses as I might have, and as a result, I tired after two or three hours, and began to think of the horrible waste of such a place. No wonder the French people at last became tired of supporting a king and revolted. Then I thought: "Would we in the United States allow any one to take from us millions of dollars every year to build pleasure places and art galleries which no one but himself and his favorites could see?" Of course not, and then I thought again and wondered if some of our millionaires were not doing that very thing. At the present time the Versailles palace and grounds may be worth while. They make every Frenchman proud of his nation, and they draw thousands of tourists from abroad every year to see them. Who knows?

There is a fine horticultural school near Versailles, which we must visit. It is built on the spot where Louis XIV had his gardens. Here we see pears, apples and peaches trained against the wall like grapes. In another place they are spread out like a vase. And again we see pear trees trained somewhat after the manner of the prongs of a pitchfork. There are beautiful tree roses with a straight trunk about three feet long before they spread out and commence to bloom. Everything is on straight lines. There are straight walks, straight borders, straight walls and straight rows of trees. The branches of the trees are straight, and come out in just the proper place. Every plant looks as though hours of study and work had been put on it by the gardener. Much of the fruit is tied up in bags, and the professor who is showing us around says that in this way the value will be increased two or three times over. One man can put on a thousand paper bags in a day. He can do such fast work because he uses a special kind of lead wire that needs not tying. We ask

about the students, and find that there are one hundred and twenty taking the three-year course. Most of them are sons of gardeners and will become gardeners themselves. Each day they spend four hours studying the theoretical side of gardening, and six hours actually working in the garden. The school and the grounds were very fine, indeed, but it made me laugh when I tried to think of what practical benefit such a school would be to an Iowa farm boy. Then I thought again that it would be a fine thing if there were a little more of the fine horticultural work done on the farms of Iowa. It would make the farm so much more attractive if we only had the time to train a pear tree against the south walls and grow some pretty roses and dahlias, and keep things generally straight and neat and clean.

North and west of Paris are four big farms, containing altogether 12,000 acres, which are watered and fertilized by the sewage from the city. We visited the sewage plant, where we saw a big canal filled with the filthy refuse of the city. Corks by the million were bobbing about in it. The water goes through a sort of sieve, and the old rags and other solid matter are taken out. The rest is raised fifteen feet by means of electrically driven pumps, and sent by underground canals to the different farms. We visited the nearest farm, which was 2,300 acres in extent. Here we saw the sewage water being spread over in much the same way as it is on an irrigated farm in Colorado. The principal crop grown was pears. For some reason the trees did not look as healthy as they might. But we were assured that they returned a profit of sixty dollars per acre each year. About 18,000 cubic yards of the sewage water is spread on each acre of land every year. In another place we saw some fine potatoes being grown with the sewage water for fertilizer, and were told that such potatoes yielded on the average about 460 bushels per acre, which is about six times as much as the average acre yield in Iowa. After the potatoes are taken off, they put in some other crop, such as cabbage, turnips, or head lettuce.

I was not sorry when we left Paris and went east to visit the grape-growing districts around Epernay. For many miles the farming country appeared to be much the same as in western France. No fences were to be seen anywhere, and the houses were all in villages. Also, the typical farm-house and barns were shaped like a hollow square, with a paved courtyard and a manure pile in the center. The cultivated land was mostly in wheat and oats, which seemed to look a little but not very much better than the small grain of Iowa. There were some sugar beets, and here and there some timber. All in all, the farming country between Paris and Epernay did not look quite so good as that in western France around Chartres.

Suddenly on looking out of the car window we noticed that the country had become rougher, and the hillsides were covered with grapes. Then we came to the town of Epernay, where we were dated to visit the champagne firm of Moët & Chandon. Back in 1743 this firm was founded, and ever since they have been storing bubbly wine away in their cellars. Twenty miles of cellars have been carved out of the chalk rock. It was interesting to visit these vast cellars and have the process of manufacture explained to you while you looked at the rows on rows of bottles along the

wall. It seems that the grape juice is corked up in the bottles and put in the cellars, to ferment for three years. Each year it is given a thorough shaking, and then during the last year it is turned upside down so that the impurities will settle near the mouth. Then the mouth of the bottle is frozen, so that the impurities may be taken out. The bottles are re-corked and after being labeled are ready for sale any time during the next fifty years. Champagne is said to improve each year until it becomes fifteen years old. We saw hundreds of men and women working with champagne bottles, wheeling them around, washing them, bottling them, labeling them and packing them away to send to the United States or England, where hundreds of thousands of bottles are drunk each year at an expense of \$5 a bottle. We were told that altogether about 5,000 men were employed by the Moët & Chandon people. After we had been through the cellars, which, by the way, the great Napoleon visited in 1807, we were taken to a sort of banquet room, and the fizzy stuff was poured out before us. Each had two bottles—one of extra dry and one of ordinary White Seal. Extra dry means that no sugar has been added to the grape juice. The connoisseurs of the party claimed to prefer the extra dry, but really I don't think any of them had ever drunk very much champagne. Several of us merely pretended to sip the stuff out of courtesy to our hosts. They told us it was their practice when preparing for Americans to provide one-half a bottle, but when for Belgians to furnish two bottles. While we were drinking, our hosts told us how many bottles of champagne there were in the cellars. Afterwards we had a discussion as to what number had been given. One of the elderly members of the party, who had perhaps been slightly too enthusiastic in his appreciation of the extra dry, declared in favor of twelve hundred million bottles. As I myself remember it, the number was 1,200,000, while others say that twelve million is correct. As we left, a present of a cigarette case and a knife shaped like a champagne bottle, and provided with a corkscrew, was given each of us.

As we sat down to lunch at the Epernay railway station, we found twelve bottles of White Seal champagne provided for us. Even our most experienced wine tasters gave up at this point and declared in favor of water. At American prices, fully \$100 worth of champagne must have been given us by the firm of Moët & Chandon. We appreciated their kindly attitude, but some of us couldn't help thinking of the horrible waste of labor, money, and health occasioned by the big firm. Thousands of people no doubt enjoy champagne thoroughly, and are very little harmed by it, but there are others who wake up with horrible headaches the morning after, and are not able to do good work for several days. More than 10,000 people and 30,000 acres of land around Epernay are devoted to the production of grapes and champagne. What is the net result to the world? A temporary and expensive good time, followed by headaches for certain brainless fools, and untold grief to their relatives.

We visited an Epernay vineyard, where the Government and the firm of Moët & Chandon are co-operating in their experiments. The vines were in rows, running up and down the hillside, and about two and a half feet apart each way. All the cultivation is of course by hand. Every spring the vines are cut back to one bud. Every third year a fertilizer made of manure rotted in layers with sand is worked in around the plants. Some of the grapes were trained on stakes, while others were trained on

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wires. The soil which is supposed to be especially adapted to grapes, is something like the wind-blown loess soil along the Missouri River in Western Iowa. But it is different in one respect, for here the chalk often comes within two or three feet of the surface. One of the main things with which they were experimenting was the phyloxera. This is a plant louse which is death to the roots of French grapes, but, strange to say, American grapes are not bothered. For this reason, the French Government is experimenting with different ways of grafting French tops on American roots.

From the top of the hill, where the experimental vineyard is planted, we got a very good view. For miles and miles about us we could see the hillsides covered with grapes, and tucked in the valleys we could count twelve distinct villages.