



Ambassador's Activities

2012

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the "Chapitre olympique"
of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin

London, 29 June 2012

Grand Maître, cher Vincent

Cher Grand Connétable

Mesdames messieurs les Chevaliers du Tastevin

Ladies and gentlemen,

In a poem called “la Dive Bouteille” – a calligram where the words on the page form the shape of a bottle – François Rabelais sang the praises of a divine bottle “whose mysterious deep does ten thousand secrets keep”, full of “Wine that mounts us to the skies”.

The mysterious rituals we’ve just witnessed this evening are not the least of wine’s ten thousand secrets.

So I thank you for inviting me. It’s a great pleasure for me to share with you this convivial evening devoted to Burgundy wine, especially on British soil.

But on reflexion, I’m not surprised to see so many Burgundians and Britons seated at table together today, given the alliance sealed long ago between the Duchy of Burgundy and the Kingdom of England to capture the Kingdom of France in a pincer movement!

So here I am tonight, the French Ambassador, in the lion’s den!

Dear friends,

I’m very happy to be presiding, in London in 2012, over this Chapitre, aptly named “olympique”. Indeed, we lovers of fine wines have our great sporting fixtures, and we don’t need to wait four years: I’m talking, of course, about our famous wine marathons!

These marathons enable us to combine two marvellous activities: the discovery of our beautiful French regions and the even more pleasant discovery of their excellent wines, of which you, ladies and gentlemen, are connoisseurs.

Dear friends, to be welcomed into the illustrious Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin – and what’s more, with the rank of *Commandeur* – is a sign of friendship that honours and moves me.

Your gathering – I should now say “our” gathering – of Chevaliers du Tastevin, devoted to the precious nectar – the “monarch of liquids”, as the famous French gourmet Brillat-Savarin put it – is unique in the UK. Indeed, I’m not aware of any other such elite club or brotherhood of distinguished Burgundy connoisseurs anywhere else.

Cher Grand Maître, I therefore pay tribute to the many initiatives of your order, which is the successor to the Bacchic brotherhoods of the Middle Ages. I’ve just had the honour of swearing a solemn oath to keep its three promises.

In 1934 the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin gave itself the noble mission of promoting Burgundy’s produce: its wines – Nuits-Saint-Georges, Chassagne-Montrachet, Beaune etc. – but also its regional cuisine: *jambon persillé*, mustard and, of course, the snails our British friends so envy us!

The Confrérie also works to maintain and revive the festivals, customs and traditions of Burgundian folklore, like the famous “Saint-Vincent Tournante”, to which our *cher Grand Maître* owes his first name – unless it’s the other way round!

Dear friends, some of you wine professionals,

I can tell you that, as France’s representative in the United Kingdom, I’m very keen to support and promote all those involved in the sector, which symbolizes our agriculture and epitomizes the good taste of our *terroirs*. It’s always a pleasure for me to meet men and women engaged in this noble activity in the UK. For example, I recently awarded the insignia of *Chevalier* in the *Ordre du Mérite agricole* to some great British specialist journalists and wine experts but also traders who import our wines. The Ubifrance agency regularly organizes promotional events in London focusing on wine – recently, for example, in partnership with independent wine-growers. I’ve also hosted at the French Residence a competition for promising young wine-lovers – if truth be told, there’s no minimum age for appreciating wine! – belonging to the wine societies of your prestigious universities, Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews.

Those students certainly won't complete their training until they've mastered the inner workings and secrets of the wine world! Let me add this brief quotation from Charles Baudelaire, which I think perfectly sums up the passion for wine: "Boire du vin, c'est boire du génie" – "Drinking wine is drinking genius".

I deliberately forgot to mention that the competition in question related to the wines of France's other wine-growing region. What's its name? Oh yes, Bordeaux!

Finally, I'd like to add a few words about this evening's setting: the crypts of the Guildhall, which for a long time was London's city hall.

From one splendid place to another! From the Château du Clos de Vougeot to the magical spot where we're gathered this evening. I'm sure this centuries-old building would have pleased both Bacchus and Epicurus, who taught us how to think and drink, if not how to live. These crypts, steeped in history, were the meeting-place of the medieval guilds; this evening they'll be our "Epicurean garden". From these vaults still echo the joyous cries of your London ancestors. And this evening, we drink the precious nectar in their memory.

Ladies and gentlemen, John Lennon once came up with this unfair yet funny maxim: "French rock music is like British wine." Well, to paraphrase the Liverpudlian giant, allow me to say that "French wine is like British rock music" – an inextricable part of our country's identity and a gift from us to the whole world.

And now, dear friends, as the traditional song – from Burgundy, where else? – puts it so well, "*Chevaliers de la Table ronde, goûtons voir si le vin est bon!*"