



In actual fact, I must confess, the compensations were about everything to me. Snip! would go the scissors, and a nice, heavy, well-formed bunch would settle comfortably into my hand. Carefully, critically, lovingly, I would examine it, turning it from side to side. There would be the smaller grapes at the bottom of the bunch, and the greener ones at the top. But half-way down was the place. Just there would protrude the best of them all, two or three large, rotund, perfectly ripe, bulging with nectar. Then comes the glorious moment. A quick, practised bite—they are gone, and the luscious fruits go pop! in my mouth, and flood it with sweetness, while with a quick toss I lob the newly ravished bunch into the basket. The flavour lies full and satisfying on my tongue, the juice slips easily down my throat, and is followed a moment later by the seeds and skin.

All this is the accepted thing while picking grapes. Everywhere are to be seen harvesters following the same routine. Snip, inspect, bite, swallow, and toss the bunch in the basket. Not even the children spit out the pips and skins—that is what the amateurs and townspeople do.

But, of course, it is not always as pleasant as that. With types like the

Barese Sultanas, there is little but snipping and tossing. Such kinds have little appeal to the palate of the expert. They are grown primarily for making the common, everyday wines; not for them the honour of being eaten at table or being made into the prize Vermouth for the rich man's cellar.

The people of Italy drink wine almost as we drink tea, and this huge supply is prepared by peasants in countless little farms all over the country, and by broadly the same methods. First off, the grapes are collected and dumped into huge wooden vats about the size of an average country water-tank. When this is full the bottom is carefully plugged, and the crushing commences. Two men, with trousers rolled up above the knees, jump on top of the pile and commence to tread out the juice with their bare feet. Mention of this last fact invariably provokes the query, "Do they wash their feet first?" I am afraid I must disappoint the reader: the answer is, "Yes." But I should add that the water-tap is usually some distance away and they do not as a rule put their boots on for the return trip!

To tell the truth, I was very anxious to settle this vexed question for myself, and watched the preliminaries to the operation with keen interest. I so far forgot my manners, too, as to observe on one occasion, "I suppose the wine would



*The juice is trodden out in large wooden vats.*