

their role is not over yet. They, too, help the fermentation. In due course, therefore, they are evenly spread over the top of the "mosto," which a few hours earlier formed a part of them, and which now reposes lidless in a vat in a dark corner of the cellar.

The following day I draw off some of the "mosto." It is not so dull or dirty now, it has a purer colour, and it has a "bite" to the taste, a slight fizzy feel to the tongue. I am becoming quite intrigued with this stuff. I decide I will follow its development, so a day later still I try another sample. The "bite" is still more pronounced, the fizzy feel more marked. In some ways it resembles a first-grade apple cider. I feel I could go for it in a big way. But perhaps tomorrow will be better still.

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It is. To me it is perfect. Less cloying, a real tang about it, rather like a sweet champagne. I try a somewhat larger sample, and then another. Yes, it is the goods all right. That kick is the kick of alcohol. I could put up with this in large quantities. I wonder if one could stop the process at this stage. This brew just *cannot* be bettered.

Unfortunately the fermentation cannot be halted. Every day from now on the "mosto" becomes less and less sweet, less and less fizzy, more and more alcoholic. And then comes the time, approximately a week from the beginning, when the "padrone" in charge says, "Right, it's wine now."

Wine in a week! It can't be. Why, wine takes years to mature, even the old Agriculture Department stuff back home. There must be some mistake. But there is not. It is wine now, the "padrone" says so.

So that is how it is in Italy. I had always thought their stuff was world-famous because it was so old, so mature. The "padrone" explains: "It is wine now because the fermentation is finished.



It will certainly improve with age, if it gets a chance. But it will not get that chance. These thirsty men of mine will clean it all up before the next grape harvest. . . . And now here is some wine from the same vines, but this is ten years old. Do you notice a difference? "

I do. It is more mellow, less sharp, and yet drier somehow. There is a suggestion of the same flavour, and it is milder, more palatable. But to me it still does not touch that three-day-old "mosto," that "liquid perfection."

"That's because your taste isn't educated," he says. "I see you don't smoke, therefore you will prefer the sweeter things. Smokers like their drinks more on the savoury side. But when once you are accustomed to wine as we are, you, too, will never look at 'mosto.' "

"I doubt it," I reply. That taste lingers with me, somehow. I rather imagine three-day "mosto" must be one of the high-ranking drinks in Paradise.

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Now I am home in New Zealand, and I have been back about a year. We three ex-prisoners of war are having a drink before dinner in front of a fire.

"Yes," says Frank, who feels he is an expert, "Vermouth is the stuff, you can't beat it. There's not a nicer wine to be had."

"I'm for Chianti myself," says Bill. "Now, there's a drink for you. Nice and dry, and plenty of kick. Where can you find a better drink than that? "

They turn to me. "What do you think? "they ask. "Vermouth, or Chianti, or what? "

I ponder a moment. Thoughts and tastes of that three-day "mosto" pass through my mind . . . But some-

how, somehow . . .

"There is no question about it," I reply. "Not a shadow of doubt. The best of them all, anywhere, anytime, is—BEER."