



Postcard sent by Theodore to his mother in 1903
(Courtesy Louise de Bruin)

Wine & T.F. Powys

We may be sure that while in France with Bernard O'Neill, Theodore celebrated Rabelais' memory with a good Chinon wine...

Mr Grobe lifted the flagon. It was already uncorked. He forgot to wonder where his Bible had gone to, but suddenly he thought of it.

'Perhaps,' he said, speaking aloud, 'Mr Weston has taken my Bible and left his wine — a very good exchange!'

Mr Grobe took a wine-glass out of his cupboard. This glass he dusted carefully, for he had no wish to let any dust mingle with Mr Weston's Good Wine. Although London gin was Mr Grobe's favourite drink, he was certainly no despiser of wine. He had indeed often mentioned wine in his sermons, long after he had ceased to mention God.

The juice of the grape was a favourite subject of his to take in the pulpit, and it did the hearts of his hearers good to hear him upon it. The very word 'wine' pleased the people and awoke the churchwardens, Mr Bunce and Squire Mumby, from their slumbers, as often as they heard it spoken. Mr Grobe would extol in moving terms the delights of the grape, and bless the vine for yielding so good a gift to man.

He had often taken the trouble to explain how, from the very earliest days, the vine, the richest and the most valued of all the plants of the field, had been cultivated by man. From the first page to the last of the Bible, the juice of the grape was drunk most heartily, and, 'indeed,' Mr Grobe would say, with a sigh, 'sometimes, as was the case with Noah and Lot, a little too well.'

Mr Grobe would tell his hearers how the Son of Man, from the beginning to the end of His short stay upon the earth, had praised this good liquor, and was called a drunkard for delighting in it. He told them how Jesus could distinguish between a good and a bad vintage, and that the wine He gave so freely to the company at Cana must have been Tokay.

‘Our blessed Saviour,’ he said, ‘was no niggard, no crafty one in His giving. He gave lavishly, and it is perhaps well that the gospel does not inform us how the guests of that evening reached their homes.’

Mr Grobe held out the flagon and poured out a glass. A rich odour, pleasant and vinous, filled his room. He raised the glass and held it level with the globe of the lamp. The deep colour of the wine was wonderful and rare: he leant over the wine, and the scent of it was ravishing.

‘How beautiful,’ he thought, ‘must have been the fair hill-side where the grape from which the wine had been pressed was grown. Was it Spanish wine or Burgundy? Or wine from Gascony that so pleased Michael de Montaigne in his tower? Was it Italian wine, so fine and so heady, that makes all men polite?’

Mr Grobe went to the window; he opened it widely. All was silent, but as he looked into the darkness the wind rose suddenly, whirling the leaves in the Folly Down lanes, and then again there was silence.¹

¹ *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, Chatto & Windus, 1927. With thanks to Mr. John Powys for permission to reproduce this passage.