

He was none the less pleased, however, when his ransom of 8,000 dollars in specie arrived and he was permitted to bid his courteous captors an affectionate adieu.

On quitting the Cerro de Obregon we proceeded on foot to the adjacent vineyards of San Julian, comprising some 350 acres of excellent chalky soil, planted principally with the palomino variety of vine, the mostos of which have long been highly esteemed in the locality. From here we drove to the neighbouring vineyards of León and Las Cañas, in the Upper Balbaina district. The sun at this moment being at its fiercest, such "caballeros" as we encountered astride mule and donkey sought to shield themselves from its scorching rays by throwing their white linen jackets over their broad sombreros, while all mule or bullock drivers who were not sound asleep on their carts invariably halted at the ventorillos, or wayside drinking-places run up especially for the vintage, to drink some more reviving beverage than water. The soil of the León vineyard resembles that of the Carrascal district, and its mostos are held in the same esteem. Its little casa is after the Moorish style—blank walls, with here and there a loophole to serve as window, a low flat roof, and a solid square tower rising at one end. At Las Cañas we were received by a trio of howling dogs, who sprang at us in company the full length of their chains, and it was only when they had been removed to a distance that we succeeded in gaining access to the courtyard of the casa. The vintage here was already over, and with the exception of a few butts of vino dulce from the Pedro Jimenez grape, it was all dry white wine which had been made. Las Cañas, like all the more valuable vineyards of the Jerez district, is planted principally with the palomino vine, and produces a vino fino of great delicacy and character. We had already tasted various choice samples of it, free, of course, from added spirit, of different ages, including some of the amontillado type, in the bodega of the proprietor, Señor de Agreda, at Jerez. We gave the preference to a wine of twelve years old, of great delicacy and freshness of flavour, the older wines being in our judgment too pungent for ordinary drinking.

The casa de la viña of Las Cañas boasts a good-sized bodega of its own, where the mosto used formerly to ferment until racked from the lees the following spring. The proprietor, however, considers that the wine develops better if sent at once to Jerez to ferment in a larger bodega, and for several years past he has adopted this course. Like many of the casas hereabouts, that of Las Cañas has been designed as a summer residence for its owner. The ground floor, where the various processes of vinification are carried on, resembles a series of rude cloisters, with an occasional stone cross or niche for a statue of the Virgin above the arches, while the panels of the doors of the upper apartments are decorated with paintings of saints. The casa, moreover, has its abandoned little oratory. For years past only the workpeople have lived there, and now the vintage was over merely a single guard remained in charge.

There being neither mosto in the cellar, valuables in the house, nor well-to-do residents to protect, we were curious to know why three savage dogs were kept for the defence of the place. The reason given by the guard was this:—A few months ago a couple of red-sashed, black-bearded ruffians favoured him with a call, ostensibly to beg a draught of water. But, suddenly unsheathing their long knives, they threatened him with death if he did not surrender his watch and all the money he possessed. They had made a descent from the Sierra, and the guard being too insignificant a personage to carry off, they were willing to accept what he possessed, which amounted to 900 reals, or about nine guineas. The guard had no alternative but to comply, for, as the familiar proverb says, "Entre la espada y la pared"—meaning when between the sword and the wall refusal is out of the question. Having secured their booty, the robbers took their departure, vowing vengeance if the smallest alarm were given—a threat which the guard contemptuously disregarded, and luckily they were captured.

We now drove along solitary by-roads through the entire of the Balbaina district, between steep banks planted as often with canes and aloes as with the prickly pear. A succession of large