

FACTS ABOUT SHERRY,

GLEANED IN THE VINEYARDS AND BODEGAS

OF THE

JEREZ, SEVILLE, MOGUER, & MONTILLA DISTRICTS

DURING THE AUTUMN OF 1875.

BY

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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND SKETCHES.



"And all drinks stand with cap in hand,
In presence of old Sherry;
Then let us drinke old Sacke, old Sacke, boyes,
Which makes us blithe and merry."

Pasquil's Palinode, 1619.

LONDON:
WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER, WARWICK HOUSE,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1876.

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III.—JEREZ VINEYARDS NORTH OF THE TOWN.

The Amoroso, Romano, la Paz, and Ducha Vineyards of Señor Gonzalez—The Abandoned Oratory—Potluck with the Vintagers—The Vineyard of Señor José Pemartin in the Cerro de Santiago—Proceedings of a Jerez Mob in 1871—Señor Domecq's Majuelo at High Macharnudo—The "Alumbra"—Señor Domecq's System of Vinification—View from the Tower at High Macharnudo—The Press-house, Bodega, and Casa de la Gente—The Almocaden and A. B. Vineyards.

THE Jerez vineyards—upwards of fifteen thousand acres in extent—are distributed over a tract of undulating country some twelve and a half miles long by less than ten miles broad, the town standing nearly in the centre. The first vineyards we visited belonged to Señor Gonzalez, and were distant from one to two leagues of Jerez in a northerly direction. In the outskirts of the town we passed the deserted palatial château, surrounded by large and beautiful gardens, the construction of which some dozen years ago simply ruined one of the richest sherry shippers of Jerez. A grove of olive-trees occupied the slope on our left hand; and this passed, our vehicle went ploughing a foot deep through a primitive sandy road, skirted by tall banks and hedges of prickly pear—dark cypress-trees in couples flanking the large gateways which conduct along shady avenues to pleasant villas among the vines. Soon we came into an open plain covered with scanty stubble, which, after having been eaten almost bare by oxen, was considerably given up to herds of goats. The Gíbalbin mountain rose up some leagues ahead of us, and the more distant ranges of the Sierra de Jerez, including the loftier peaks of the Peñon de San Cristobal, las Cabras, and el Algibe, bounded the horizon on the right hand, while undulating hills, planted with vines and with handsome country-houses crowning their summits, shut in the view upon the left. After a time we dipped down into a hollow and followed a level road, skirted on one side by vineyards dotted over with groups of men gathering grapes or marching in gangs with their piled-up tinetas deftly balanced on their heads, to spread out the bunches to dry in the

neighbouring almijar. An occasional inscription on some gateway or along the façade of a casa de viña intimated that one or the other patch of vines was named after our Lady of Consolation, our Lady of the Angels, or a favourite patron saint. Sweeping sharply round to the left and ascending a low hill, we arrived at the casa of the Amoroso vineyard, surmounted by a fantastical weathercock formed of the painted figure of a vintager plucking grapes. Here we found several of the primitive mule-carts common to the south of Spain being laden with butts of mosto for Jerez. The casks, after having their hoops tightened by the cooper, were mounted on to the carts, when the bungs were withdrawn and zigzag-shaped metal tubes were inserted in their place, to allow the carbonic acid generated in the fermenting mosto to escape, and prevent the mosto itself running over from the excessive jolting of the butts along rough country roads, or the violence of the fermentation induced by exposure to a temperature only a little below 100 deg. Fahrenheit.

The Amoroso vineyard, in the famous viticultural district of Carrascal, is about sixty acres in extent, and contains principally vines of the prized palomino species, planted only a little more than four feet apart. Most of the vines range from fifty to sixty years old, which conduces materially to the high quality of the wine, fine wine, as a rule, being rarely produced from vines which have not attained or passed their prime. The aspect of the Amoroso vineyard is westerly, so that it enjoys the advantage of escaping the scorching blasts of the dreaded Levanter. In the press-house, containing half-a-dozen lagares, furnished with the old-fashioned wooden screw, the grapes were being trodden and pressed in the manner we have already described, and which is universal throughout the sherry district. Owing to the excessive dryness of the season, the same small quantity of gypsum was being used as we saw employed at San Lucar.

From the Amoroso vineyard it is only a short drive to that of Romano, some sixty-five acres in extent, and occupying a neighbouring slope in the same district of Carrascal. Here we found nearly a dozen different species of vines intermingled,

including black as well as white varieties. The vintage here, as in all the vineyards around Jerez, would last scarcely two-thirds of the ordinary time, owing to a general deficiency in the crop, which in many vineyards fell short of even half of an average one.

On leaving Romano the horses' heads were turned northwards, and onward we went for several miles in a straight line, across lightly-ploughed uninclosed fields, to the most distant of the Jerez vineyards. On the neighbouring hills numerous brood mares and their foals were huddled together to obtain all the shade they could from the fierce rays of the noonday sun. We noticed that they invariably posted themselves on the brow of the hill, and on the side facing the wind, so as to secure the full benefit of the faintest breeze. There were olives to the right and olives to the left of us, with a large farm on the skirts of the plain. Presently we struck a narrow road, and five minutes afterwards were driving through the *Viña de la Paz*—the Vineyard of Peace—and up to its little white-walled casa, set off with bright green shutters and balconies. Near the large old-fashioned well in front, some vintagers, in the midst of a plague of wasps, were spreading out newly-gathered grapes, principally of the palomino and mantuo varieties, on round mats of esparto, there to dry in the full blaze of a southern sun. The roof of the adjacent press-house, where the pisadores, or treaders, and the tiradores, or pressers, were steadily at work, was much loftier than usual, and a full current of air swept through the building, one great advantage of which was the retarding of any too hasty fermentation of the must.

A walk through the vines, kept according to custom scrupulously free from weeds, brought us to the neighbouring vineyard of Ducha, upwards of eighty acres in extent. Here, although the crop was small, the grapes were remarkably fine. They were being trodden in a lagar by three men abreast—all with their eyes steadily fixed upon their work as though determined that not a grape should escape their heavy tread. The must yielded by them was clearer than usual, and remarkably sweet. The daughter of the capataz of the vineyard, a charming little

house owns a vineyard some considerable distance north-east of Jerez, in the district known as the Cuartillos, which, although not of pure albariza soil, is nevertheless principally chalk, and yields a good type of fino wine. The vines cultivated are the palomino, castellano, and Pedro Jimenez varieties, and the usual annual production amounts to 200 butts. For several years past no yeso has been used in making wine at this vineyard.

To reach Señor Ysasi's bodegas one has to pass through some of the more curious among the old streets of Jerez, where elaborate escutcheons figure above the ornamental doorways of the principal houses, and stone pillars with richly-carved capitals decorate many of their corners. The Ysasi bodegas, being somewhat old-fashioned, are in keeping with these picturesque surroundings, and Señor Ysasi's wines, notably his finos and amontillados, if not of a like remote antiquity, are thoroughly well matured and of high quality.

The bodegas of Messrs. Cramp and Suter are entered through a small but picturesque courtyard roofed in with trellis-work overgrown with vines. On either side are the two principal bodegas with some smaller cellars in their immediate vicinity. The firm have several excellent fino soleras, which, contrary to the general practice, are reared by them in a small and dark bodega; also a few rare old wines, one of which dates back to 1812, the period of the retreat of the French from Moscow, while others scarcely less old had made the voyage to Manilla and back. These wines were highly aromatic, but generally too pungent and too potent for ordinary drinking.

Among the half-dozen establishments of Jerez almacenistas which we visited, the principal and by far the most interesting was that of Señor Sanchez Romate. Here all the wines offered us to taste were of admirable quality, more especially those from high-class vineyards owned by the house, among which are La Soledad, some 110 acres in extent, and Los Cuadrados, both in the Balbaina district, with the vineyards of La Carrina in the Macharnudo and San Blas in the Carrascal districts. The sample from La Carrina, which had passed through three criaderas