BLASCO IBÁÑEZ VICENTE

MARE NOSTRUM (OUR SEA)

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez

Mare Nostrum (Our Sea)

Blasco Ibáñez V.

Mare Nostrum (Our Sea) / V. Blasco Ibáñez — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez
Mare Nostrum (Our Sea): A Novel

CHAPTER I
CAPTAIN ULYSSES FERRAGUT

His first gallantries were with an empress. He was ten years old, and the empress six hundred.

His father, Don Esteban Ferragut—third quota of the College of Notaries—had always had a great admiration for the things of the past. He lived near the cathedral, and on Sundays and holy days, instead of following the faithful to witness the pompous ceremonials presided over by the cardinal-archbishop, used to betake himself with his wife and son to hear mass in *San Juan del Hospital*,—a little church sparsely attended the rest of the week.

The notary, who had read Walter Scott in his youth, used to gaze on the old and turreted walls surrounding the church, and feel something of the bard's thrills about his own, his native land. The Middle Ages was the period in which he would have liked to have lived. And as he trod the flagging of the *Hospitolarios*, good Don Esteban, little, chubby, and near-sighted, used to feel within him the soul of a hero born too late. The other churches, huge and rich, appeared to him with their blaze of gleaming gold, their alabaster convolutions and their jasper columns, mere monuments of insipid vulgarity. This one had been erected by the Knights of Saint John, who, united with the Templars, had aided King James in the conquest of Valencia.

Upon crossing the covered passageway leading from the street to the inner court, he was accustomed to salute the Virgin of the Conquest, an image of rough stone in faded colors and dull gold, seated on a bench, brought thither by the knights of the military order. Some sour orange trees spread their branching verdure over the walls of the church,—a blackened, rough stone edifice perforated with long, narrow, window-like niches now closed with mud plaster. From the salient buttresses of its reinforcements jutted forth, in the highest parts, great fabled monsters of weather-beaten, crumbling stone.

In its only nave was now left very little of this romantic exterior. The baroque taste of the seventeenth century had hidden the Gothic arch under another semi-circular one, besides covering the walls with a coat of whitewash. But the medieval reredos, the nobiliary coats of arms, and the tombs of the Knights of Saint John with their Gothic inscriptions still survived the profane restoration, and that in itself was enough to keep up the notary's enthusiasm.

Moreover the quality of the faithful who attended its services had to be taken into consideration. They were few but select, always the same. Some of them would drop into their places, gouty and relaxed, supported by an old servant wearing a shabby lace mantilla as though she were the housekeeper. Others would remain standing during the service holding up proudly their emaciated heads that presented the profile of a fighting cock, and crossing upon the breast their gloved hands,—always in black wool in the winter and in thread in the summer time. Ferragut knew all their names, having read them in the *Trovas* of Mosen Febrer, a metrical composition in Provençal, about the warriors that came to the neighborhood of Valencia from Aragon, Catalunia, the South of France, England and remote Germany.

At the conclusion of the mass, the imposing personages would nod their heads, saluting the faithful nearest them. "Good day!" To these, it was as if the sun had just arisen: the hours before did not count. And the notary with meek voice would enlarge his response: "Good day, Señor Marquis!" "Good day, Señor Baron!" Although his relations never went beyond this salutation, Ferragut used to feel toward these noble personages the sympathy that the customers have for an establishment,

looking upon them with affectionate eyes for many years without presuming to exchange more than a greeting with them.

His son Ulysses was exceedingly bored as he followed the monotonous incidents of the chanted mass in the darkened, almost deserted, church. The rays of the sun, oblique beams of gold that filtered in from above, illuminating the spirals of dust, flies and moths, made him think in a homesick way of the lush green of the orchard, the white spots of the hamlets, the black smoke columns of the harbor filled with steamships, and the triple file of bluish convexities crowned with froth that were discharging their contents with a sonorous surge upon the bronze-colored beach.

When the embroidered mantles of the three priests ceased to gleam before the high altar, and another priest in black and white appeared in the pulpit, Ulysses would turn his glance toward a side chapel. The sermon always represented for him a half hour of somnolence, peopled with his own lively imaginings. The first thing that his eyes used to see in the chapel of Santa Barbara was a chest nailed to the wall high above him, a sepulcher of painted wood with no other adornment than the inscription: "*Aqui yace Doña Constansa Augusta, Emperatriz de Grecia*,"—Here lies Constance Augusta, Empress of Greece.

The name of Greece always had the power of exciting the little fellow's imagination. His godfather, the lawyer Labarta, poet-laureate, could not repeat this name without a lively thrill passing across his grizzled beard and a new light in his eyes. Sometimes the mysterious power of such a name evoked a new mystery and a more intense interest,—Byzantium. How could that august lady, sovereign of remote countries of magnificence and vision, have come to leave her remains in a murky chapel of Valencia within a great chest like those that treasured the remnants of old trumpery in the garrets of the notary?…

One day after mass Don Esteban had rapidly recounted her history to his little son. She was the daughter of Frederick the Second of Suabia, a Hohenstaufen, an emperor of Germany who esteemed still more his crown of Sicily. In the palaces of Palermo,—veritable enchanted bowers of Oriental gardens,—he had led the life both of pagan and savant, surrounded by poets and men of science (Jews, Mahometans and Christians), by Oriental dancers, alchemists, and ferocious Saracen Guards. He legislated as did the jurisconsults of ancient Rome, at the same time writing the first verses in Italian. His life was one continual combat with the Popes who hurled upon him excommunication upon excommunication. For the sake of peace he had become a crusader and set forth upon the conquest of Jerusalem. But Saladin, another philosopher of the same class, had soon come to an agreement with his Christian colleague. The position of a little city surrounded with untilled land and an empty sepulcher was really not worth the trouble of decapitating mankind through the centuries. The Saracen monarch, therefore, graciously delivered Jerusalem over to him, and the Pope again excommunicated Frederick for having conquered the Holy Land without bloodshed.

"He was a great man," Don Esteban used to murmur. "It must be admitted that he was a great man…."

He would say this timidly, regretting that his enthusiasm for that remote epoch should oblige him to make this concession to an enemy of the Church. He shuddered to think of those sacrilegious books that nobody had seen, but whose paternity Rome was accustomed to attribute to this Sicilian Emperor—especially *Los Tres Impostores* (The Three Imposters), in which Frederick measured Moses, Jesus and Mahomet, by the same standard. This royal author was, moreover, the most ancient journalist of history, the first that in the full thirteenth century had dared to appeal to the judgment of public opinion in his manifestoes against Rome.

His daughter had married an Emperor of Byzantium, Juan Dukas Vatatzés, the famous "Vatacio," when he was fifty and she fourteen. She was a natural daughter soon legitimized like almost all his progeny,—a product of his free harem, in which were mingled Saracen beauties and Italian marchionesses. And the poor young girl married to "Vatacio the heretic," by a father in need of political alliances had lived long years in the Orient as a *basilisa* or empress, arrayed in garments

of stiff embroidery representing scenes from the holy books, shod with buskins laced with purple which bore on their soles eagles of gold,—the highest symbol of the majesty of Rome.

At first she had reigned in Nicaea, refuge of the Greek Emperors while Constantinople was in the power of the Crusaders, founders of a Latin dynasty; then, when Vatacio died, the audacious Miguel Paleólogo reconquered Constantinople, and the imperial widow found herself courted by this victorious adventurer. For many years she resisted his pretensions, finally maneuvering that her brother Manfred should return her to her own country, where she arrived just in time to receive news of her brother's death in battle, and to follow the flight of her sister-in-law and nephews. They all took refuge in a castle defended by Saracens in the service of Frederick, the only ones faithful to his memory.

The castle fell into the power of the warriors of the Church, and Manfred's wife was conducted to a prison where her life was shortly after extinguished. Obscurity swallowed up the last remnants of the family accursed by Rome. Death was always hovering around the *basilisa*. They all perished —her brother Manfred, her half-brother, the poetic and lamented Encio, hero of so many songs, and her nephew, the knightly Coradino, who was to die later on under the axe of the executioner upon attempting the defense of his rights. As the Oriental empress did not represent any danger for the dynasty of Anjou, the conqueror let her follow out her destiny, as lonely and forsaken as a Shakespearian Princess.

As the widow of the late Emperor she was supposed to have a rental of three thousand *besantes* of fine gold. But this remote rental never arrived, and almost as a pauper she embarked with her niece, Constanza, in a ship going toward the perfumed shores of the Gulf of Valencia, where she entered the convent of Santa Barbara. In the poverty of this recently founded convent, the poor Empress lived until the following century, recalling the adventures of her melancholy destiny and seeing in imagination the palace of golden mosaics on Lake Nicaea, the gardens where "Vatacio" had wished to die under a purple tent, the gigantic walls of Constantinople, and the arches of Saint Sophia, with its hieratic galaxies of saints and crowned monarchs.

From all her journeys and glittering fortunes she had preserved but one thing—a stone—the sole baggage that accompanied her upon disembarking on the shore of Valencia. It was a fragment from Nicodemia that had miraculously sent forth water for the baptism of Santa Barbara.

The notary used to point out this rough, sacred stone inlaid in a baptismal font of Holy Water. Without ceasing to admire these historic bits of knowledge, Ulysses, nevertheless, used to receive them with a certain ingratitude.

"My godfather could explain things to me in a better way…. My godfather knows more."

When surveying the chapel of Santa Barbara during the Mass, he used always to turn his eyes away from the funeral chest. The thought of those bones turned to dust filled him with repugnance. That Doña Constanza did not exist for him. The one who was interesting to him was the other one, a little further on who was painted in a small picture. Doña Constanza had had leprosy—an infirmity that in those days was not permitted to Empresses—so Santa Barbara had miraculously cured her devotee. In order to perpetuate this event, Santa Barbara was depicted on the canvas as a lady dressed in a full skirt and slashed sleeves, and at her feet was the *basilisa* in the dress of a Valencian peasant arrayed in great jewels. In vain Don Esteban affirmed that this picture had been painted centuries after the death of the Empress. The child's imagination vaulted disdainfully over such difficulties. Just as she appeared on the canvas, Doña Constanza must have been—flaxen-haired, with great black eyes, exceedingly handsome and a little inclined to stoutness, perhaps, as was becoming to a woman accustomed to trailing robes of state and who had consented to disguise herself as a country-woman, merely because of her piety.

The image of the Empress obsessed his childish thoughts. At night when he felt afraid in bed, impressed by the enormousness of the room that served as his sleeping chamber, it was enough for him to recall the sovereign of Byzantium to make him forget immediately his disquietude and

the thousand queer noises in the old building. "Doña Constanza!"… And he would go off to sleep cuddling the pillow, as though it were the head of the *basilisa*, his closed eyes continuing to see the black eyes of the regal Señora, maternal and affectionate.

All womankind, on coming near him, took on something of that other one who had been sleeping for the past six centuries in the upper part of the chapel wall. When his mother, sweet and pallid Doña Cristina, would stop her fancy work for an instant to give him a kiss, he always saw in her smile something of the Empress. When Visenteta, a maid from the country—a brunette, with eyes like blackberries, rosy-cheeked and soft-skinned—would help him to undress, or awaken him to take him to school, Ulysses would always throw his arms around her as though enchanted by the perfume of her vigorous and chaste vitality. "Visenteta!… Oh, Visenteta!…" And he was thinking of Doña Constanza; Empresses must be just that fragrant…. Just like that must be the texture of their skin!… And mysterious and incomprehensible thrills would pass over his body like light exhalations, bubbling up from the slime that is sleeping in the depths of all infancy and coming to the surface during adolescence.

His father guessed in part this imaginary life upon seeing his pet plays and readings.

"Ah, comedian!… Ah, play-actor!… You are like your godfather."

He used to say this with an ambiguous smile in which were equally mingled his contempt for useless idealism and his respect for the artist—a respect similar to the veneration that the Arabs feel for the demented, believing their insanity to be a gift from God.

Doña Cristina was very anxious that this only son, as spoiled and coddled as though he were a Crown Prince, should become a priest. To see him intone his first Mass!… Then a canon; then a prelate! Who knew if perhaps when she was no longer living, other women might not admire him when preceded by a cross of gold, trailing the red state robe of a cardinal-archbishop, and surrounded by a robed staff—envying the mother who had given birth to this ecclesiastical magnate!…

In order to guide the inclinations of her son she had installed a chapel in one of the empty rooms of the great old house. Ulysses' school companions on free afternoons would hasten thither, doubly attracted by the enchantment, of "playing priest" and by the generous refreshment that Doña Cristina used to prepare for all the parish clergy.

This solemnity would begin with the furious pealing of some bells hanging over the parlor door, causing the notary's clients, seated in the vestibule waiting for the papers that the clerks were just scribbling off at full speed, to raise their heads in astonishment. The metallic uproar rocked the edifice whose corners had seemed so full of silence, and even disturbed the calm of the street through which a carriage only occasionally passed.

While some of his chums were lighting the candles on the shrines and unfolding the sacred altar cloths of beautiful lace work made by Doña Cristina, the son and his more intimate friends were arraying themselves before the faithful, covering themselves with surplices and gold-worked vestments and putting wonderful caps on their heads. The mother, who was peeping from behind one of the doors, had to make a great effort not to rush in and devour Ulysses with kisses. With what grace he was imitating the mannerisms and genuflections of the chief priest!…

Up to this point all went perfectly. The three officiating near the pyramid of lights were singing at the top of their lungs, and the chorus of the faithful were responding from the end of the room with tremors of impatience. Suddenly surged forth Protest, Schism and Heresy. Those at the altar had already done more than enough. They must now give up their chasubles to those who were looking on in order that they, in their turn, might exercise the sacred ministry. That was what they had agreed upon. But the clergy resisted with the haughtiness and majesty of acquired right, and impious hands began pulling off the garb of the saints, profaning them and even tearing them. Yells, kicks, images and wax candles on the floor!… Scandal and abominations as though the Anti-Christ were already born!… The prudence of Ulysses put an end to the struggle: "What if we should go up in the *pòrche* to play?…"

The *pòrche* was the immense garret of the great old house, so all accepted the plan with enthusiasm. Church was over! And like a flock of birds they went flying up the stairs over the landings of multi-colored tiles with their chipped glaze, disclosing the red brick underneath. The Valencian potters of the eighteenth century had adorned these tiles with Berber and Christian galleys, birds from nearby Albufera, white-wigged hunters offering flowers to a peasant girl, fruits of all kinds, and spirited horsemen on steeds that were half the size of their bodies parading before houses and trees that scarcely reached to the knees of their prancing coursers.

The noisy group spread themselves over the upper floor as in the most terrible invasions of history. Cats and mice fled together to the far-away corners. The terrified birds sped like arrows through the skylights of the roof.

The poor notary!… He had never returned empty-handed when called outside of the city by the confidence of the rich farmers, incapable of believing in any other legal science than his. That was the time when the antique dealers had not yet discovered rich Valencia, where the common people dressed in silks for centuries, and furniture, clothing and pottery seemed always to be impregnated with the light of steady sunshine and with the blue of an always clear atmosphere.

Don Esteban, who believed himself obliged to be an antiquarian by virtue of his membership in various local societies, was continually filling up his house with mementoes of the past picked up in the villages, or that his clients freely gave him. He was not able to find wall space enough for the pictures, nor room in his salons for the furniture. Therefore, the latest acquisitions were provisionally taking their way to the *pòrche* to await definite installation. Years afterward, when he should retire from his profession, he might be able to construct a medieval castle—the most medieval possible on the coasts of the *Marina*; near to the village where he had been born, he would put each object in a place appropriate to its importance.

Whatever the notary deposited in the rooms of the first floor would soon make its appearance in the garret as mysteriously as though it had acquired feet; for Doña Cristina and her servants, obliged to live in a continual struggle with the dust and cobwebs of an edifice that was slowly dropping to pieces, were beginning to feel a ferocious hatred of everything old.

Up here on the top floor, discords and battles because of lack of things to dress up in, were not possible among the boys. They had only to sink their hands into any one of the great old chests, pulsing with the dull gnawing of the wood-borers, whose iron fretwork, pierced like lace, was dropping away from its supports. Some of the youngsters, brandishing short, small swords with hilts of mother-of-pearl, or long blades such as the Cid carried, would then wrap themselves in mantles of crimson silk darkened by ages. Others would throw over their shoulders damask counterpanes of priceless old brocade, peasant skirts with great flowers of gold, farthingales of richly woven texture that crackled like paper.

When they grew tired of imitating comedians with noisy clashing of spades and death-blows, Ulysses and the other active lads would propose the game of "Bandits and Bailiffs." But thieves could not go clad in such rich cloths; their attire ought to be inconspicuous. And so they overturned some mountains of dull-colored stuffs that appeared like mere sacking in whose dull woven designs could be dimly discerned legs, arms, heads, and branching sprays of metallic green.

Don Esteban had found these fragments already torn by the farmers into covers for their large earthen jars of oil or into blankets for the work-mules. They were bits of tapestry copied from cartoons of Titian and Rubens which the notary was keeping only out of historic respect. Tapestry then, like all things that are plentiful, had no special merit. The old-clothes dealers of Valencia had in their storehouses dozens of the same kind of remnants and when the festival of *Corpus Christi* approached they used them to cover the natural barricades formed by the ground, instead of building new ones in the street followed by the processions.

At other times, Ulysses repeated the same game under the name of "Indians and Conquerors." He had found in the mountains of books stored away by his father, a volume that related in double

columns, with abundant wood cuts, the navigations of Columbus, the wars of Hernando Cortez, and the exploits of Pizarro.

This book cast a glamor over the rest of his existence. Many times afterwards, when a man, he found this image latent in the background of his likes and desires. He really had read few of its paragraphs, but what interested him most were the engravings—in his estimation more worthy of admiration than all the pictures in the garret.

With the point of his long sword he would trace on the ground, just as Pizarro had done before his discouraged companions, ready on the Island of Gallo to desist from the conquest: "Let every good Castilian pass this line…." And the good Castilians—a dozen little scamps with long capes and ancient swords whose hilts reached up to their mouths—would hasten to group themselves around their chief, who was imitating the heroic gestures of the conqueror. Then was heard the war-cry: "At them! Down with the Indians!"

It was agreed that the Indians should flee and on that account they were modestly clad in scraps of tapestry and cock feathers on their head. But they fled treacherously, and upon finding themselves upon *varguеños*, tables and pyramids of chairs, they began to shy books at their persecutors. Venerable leather volumes decorated with dull gold, and folios of white parchment fell face downward on the floor, their fastenings breaking apart and spreading abroad a rain of printed or manuscript pages and yellowing engravings—as though tired of living, they were letting their life-blood flow from their bodies.

The uproar of these wars of conquest brought Doña Cristina to the rescue. She no longer cared to harbor little imps who preferred the adventurous whoops of the garret to the mystic delights of the abandoned chapel. The Indians were most worthy of execration. In order to make splendor of attire counterbalance the humility of their role, they had slashed their sinful scissors into entire tapestries, mutilating vestments so as to arrange upon their breasts the head of a hero or goddess.

Finding himself without playfellows, Ulysses discovered a new enchantment in the garret life. The silence haunted by the creaking of wood and the scampering of invisible animals, the inexplicable fall of a picture or of some piled-up books, used to make him thrill with a sensation of fear and nocturnal mystery, despite the rays of sunlight that came filtering in through the skylights; but he began to enjoy this solitude when he found that he could people it to his fancy. Real beings soon annoyed him like the inopportune sounds that sometimes awoke him from beautiful dreams. The garret was a world several centuries old that now belonged entirely to him and adjusted itself to all his fancies.

Seated in a trunk without a lid, he made it balance itself, imitating with his mouth the roarings of the tempest. It was a caravel, a galleon, a ship such as he had seen in the old books, its sails painted with lions and crucifixes, a castle on the poop and a figure-head carved on the prow that dipped down into the waves, only to reappear dripping with foam.

The trunk, by dint of vigorous pushing, could be made to reach the rugged coast at the corner of the old chest, the triangular gulf made of two chests of drawers, and the smooth beach formed by some bundles of clothes. And the navigator, followed by a crew as numerous as it was imaginary, would leap ashore, sword in hand, scaling some mountains of books that were the Andes, and piercing various volumes with the tip of an old lance in order to plant his standard there. Oh, why had he not been one of the conquerors?…

Fragments of a conversation between his godfather and his father, who believed everything was already known regarding the surface of the earth, left him unconvinced. Something must still be left for him to discover! He was the meeting point of two families of sailors. His mother's brothers had ships on the coast of Catalunia. His father's ancestors had been valorous and obscure navigators, and there in the *Marina* was his uncle, the doctor, a genuine man of the sea.

When he grew tired of these imaginative orgies, he used to examine the portraits of different epochs stowed away in the garret. He preferred those of the women—noble dames with short-

cropped, curled hair bound by a knot of ribbon on the temple, like those that Velazquez loved to paint, and long faces of the century following, with cherry-colored mouth, two patches on the cheeks, and a tower of white hair. The memory of the Grecian *basilisa* appeared to emanate from these paintings. All the high-born dames seemed to have something in common with her.

Among the portraits of the men there was one of a bishop that irritated him by its absurd childishness. He appeared almost his own age, an adolescent bishop, with imperious and aggressive eyes. These eyes used to inspire the sensitive lad with a certain terror, and he therefore decided to have done with them. "Take that!" and he ran his sword through the old chipped picture, making two gashes replace the challenging eyes. Then he added a few gashes more for good measure…. That same evening, his godfather having been invited to supper, the notary spoke of a certain portrait acquired a few months before in the neighborhood of Játiva, a city that he had always regarded with interest on account of the Borgias having been born in one of its suburbs. The two men were of the same opinion. That almost infantile prelate could have been no other than Caesar Borgia, made Archbishop of Valencia when sixteen years old by his father, the Pope. On their first free day they would examine the portrait with particular attention…. And Ulysses, hanging his head, felt every mouthful sticking in his throat.

For the fanciful lad, a pleasure even more intense and substantial than his lonely games in the garret was a visit to his godfather's home; to his childish eyes, this godparent, the lawyer, Don Carmelo Labarta, was the personification of the ideal life, of glory, of poesy. The notary was wont to speak of him with enthusiasm, yet pitying him at the same time.

"That poor Don Carmelo!… The leading authority of the age in civilian matters! By applying himself he might earn some money, but verses attracted him more than lawsuits."

Ulysses used to enter his office with keen emotion. Above rows of multicolored and gilded books that covered the walls, he saw some great plaster heads with towering foreheads and vacant eyes that seemed always to be contemplating an immense nothingness.

The child could repeat their names like a fragment from a choir book, from Homer to Victor Hugo. Then his glance would seek another head equally glorious although less white, with blonde and grizzled beard, rubicund nose and bilious cheeks that in certain moments scattered bits of scale. The sweet eyes of his godfather—yellowish eyes spotted with black dots—used to receive Ulysses with the doting affection of an aging, old bachelor who needs to invent a family. He it was who had given him at the baptismal font the name which had awakened so much admiration and ridicule among his school companions; with the patience of an old grand-sire narrating saintly stories to his descendants, he would tell Ulysses over and over the adventures of the navigating King of Ithaca for whom he had been named.

With no less devotion did the lad regard all the souvenirs of glory that adorned his house—wreaths of golden leaves, silver cups, nude marble statuettes, placques of different metals upon plush backgrounds on which glistened imperishably the name of the poet Labarta. All this booty the tireless Knight of Letters had conquered by means of his verse.

When the Floral Games were announced, the competitors used to tremble lest it might occur to the great Don Carmelo to hanker after some of the premiums. With astonishing facility he used to carry off the natural flower awarded for the heroic ode, the cup of gold for the amorous romance, the pair of statues dedicated to the most complete historical study, the marble bust for the best legend in prose, and even the "art bronze" reward of philological study. The other aspirants might try for the left-overs.

Fortunately he had confined himself to local literature, and his inspiration would not admit any other drapery than that of Valencian verse. Next to Valencia and its past glories, Greece claimed his admiration. Once a year Ulysses beheld him arrayed in his frock coat, his chest starred with decorations and in his lapel the golden cicada, badge of the poets of Provence.

He it was who was going to be celebrated in the fiesta of Provençal literature, in which he always played the principal role; he was the prize bard, lecturer, or simple idol to whom other poets were dedicating their eulogies—clerics given to rhyming, personifiers of religious images, silk-weavers who felt the vulgarity of their existence perturbed by the itchings of inspiration—all the brotherhood of popular bards of the ingenuous and domestic brand who recalled the *Meistersingers* of the old German cities.

His godson always imagined him with a crown of laurel on his brows just like those mysterious blind poets whose portraits and busts ornamented the library. In real life he saw perfectly well that his head had no such adornment, but reality lost its value before the firmness of his conceptions. His godfather certainly must wear a wreath when he was not present. Undoubtedly he was accustomed to wear it as a house cap when by himself.

Another thing which he greatly admired about the grand man was his extensive travels. He had lived in distant Madrid—the scene of almost all the novels read by Ulysses—and once upon a time he had crossed the frontier, going courageously into a remote country called the south of France, in order to visit another poet whom he was accustomed to call "My friend, Mistral." And the lad's imagination, hasty and illogical in its decisions, used to envelop his godfather in a halo of historic interest, similar to that of the conquerors.

At the stroke of the twelve o'clock chimes Labarta, who never permitted any informality in table matters, would become very impatient, cutting short the account of his journeys and triumphs.

"Doña Pepa!… We have a guest here."

Doña Pepa was the housekeeper, the great man's companion who for the past fifteen years had been chained to the chariot of his glory. The portières would part and through them would advance a huge bosom protruding above an abdomen cruelly corseted. Afterwards, long afterwards, would appear a white and radiant countenance, a face like a full moon, and while her smile like a night star was greeting the little Ulysses, the dorsal complement of her body kept on coming in—forty carnal years, fresh, exuberant, tremendous.

The notary and his wife always spoke of Doña Pepa as of a familiar person, but the child never had seen her in their home. Doña Cristina used to eulogize her care of the poet—but distantly and with no desire to make her acquaintance—while Don Esteban would make excuses for the great man.

"What can you expect!… He is an artist, and artists are not able to live as God commands. All of them, however dignified they may appear, are rather carnal at heart. What a pity! such an eminent lawyer!… The money that he could make…!"

His father's lamentations opened up new horizons to the little fellow's suspicions. Suddenly he grasped the prime motive force of our existence, hitherto only conjectured and enveloped in mystery. His godfather had relations with a woman; he was enamored like the heroes of the novels! And the boy recalled many of his Valencian poems, all rhapsodizing a lady—sometimes singing of her great beauty with the rapture and noble lassitude of a recent possession; at others complaining of her coldness, begging of her that disposition of her soul without which the gift of the body is as naught.

Ulysses imagined to himself a grand señora as beautiful as Doña Constanza. At the very least, she must be a Marchioness. His godfather certainly deserved that much! And he also imagined to himself that their rendezvous must be in the morning, in one of the strawberry gardens near the city, where his parents were accustomed to take him for his breakfast chocolate after hearing the first dawn service on the Sundays of April and May.

Much later, when seated at his godfather's table, he surprised the poet exchanging glances over his head with the housekeeper, and began to suspect that possibly Doña Pepa might be the inspiration of so much lachrymose and enthusiastic verse. But his great loyalty rebelled before such a supposition. No, no, it could not be possible; assuredly there must be another!

The notary, who for long years had been friendly with Labarta, kept trying to direct him with his practical spirit, like the boy who guides a blind man. A modest income inherited from his parents was

enough for the poet to live upon. In vain his friend brought him cases that represented enormous fees. The voluminous documents would become covered with dust on his table and Don Esteban would have to saddle himself with the dates in order that the end of the legal procedures should not slip by.

His son, Ulysses would be a very different sort of man, thought the notary. In his mind's eye he could see the lad as a great civilian jurist like his godfather, but with a positive activity inherited from his father. Fortune would enter through his doors on waves of stamped paper.

Furthermore, he would also possess the notarial studio—the dusty office with its ancient furniture and great wardrobes, with its screen doors and green curtains, behind which reposed the volumes of the protocol, covered with yellowing calfskin with initials and numbers on their backs. Don Esteban realized fully all that his study represented.

"There is no orange grove," he would say in his expansive moments; "there are no rice plantations that can produce what this estate does. Here there are no frosts, nor strong sea winds, nor inundations."

The clientele was certain—people from the church, who had the devotees back of them and considered Don Esteban as one of their class, and farmers, many rich farmers. The families of the country folk, whenever they heard any talk about smart men, always thought immediately of the notary from Valencia. With religious veneration they saw him adjust his spectacles in order to read as an expert the bill of sale or dowry contract that his amanuenses had just drawn up. It was written in Castilian and for the better understanding of his listeners he would read it, without the slightest hesitation, in Valencian. What a man!…

Afterwards, while the contracting parties were signing it, the notary raising the little glass window at the front, would entertain the assembly with some local legends, always decent, without any illusions to the sins of the flesh, but always those in which the digestive organs figured with every degree of license. The clients would roar with laughter, captivated by this funny eschatalogy, and would haggle less in the matter of fees. Famous Don Esteban!… Just for the pleasure of hearing his yarns they would have liked a legal paper drawn up every month.

The future destiny of the notarial crown prince was the object of many after-dinner conversations on the special days when the poet was an invited guest.

"What do you want to be?" Labarta asked his godson.

His mother's supplicating glance seemed desperately to implore the little fellow: "Say Archbishop, my king." For the good señora, her son could not make his début in any other way than in a church career. The notary always used to speak very positively from his own viewpoint, without consulting the interested party. He would be an eminent jurisconsult; thousands of dollars were going to roll toward him as though they were pennies; he was going to figure in university solemnities in a cloak of crimson satin and an academic cap announcing from its multiple sides the tasseled glory of the doctorate. The students in his lecture-room would listen to him most respectfully. Who knew what the government of his country might not have in store for him!…

Ulysses interrupted these images of future grandeur:

"I want to be a captain."

The poet approved. He felt the unreflective enthusiasm which all pacific and sedentary beings have for the plume and the sword. At the mere sight of a uniform his soul always thrilled with the amorous tenderness of a child's nurse when she finds herself courted by a soldier.

"Fine!" said Labarta. "Captain of what?… Of artillery?… Of the staff?…"

A pause.

"No; captain of a ship."

Don Esteban looked up at the roof, raising his hands in horror. He well knew who was guilty of this ridiculous idea, the one who had put such absurd longings in his son's head!

And he was thinking of his brother, the retired doctor, who was living in the paternal home over there in the *Marina:*—an excellent man, but a little crazy, whom the people on the coast called the *Dotor*, and the poet Labarta had nicknamed the *Triton*.

CHAPTER II
MATER AMPHITRITE

When the *Triton* occasionally appeared in Valencia, thrifty Doña Cristina was obliged to modify the dietary of her family. This man ate nothing but fish, and her soul of an economical housewife worried greatly at the thought of the extraordinarily high price that fish brings in a port of exportation.

Life in that house, where everything always jogged along so uniformly, was greatly upset by the presence of the doctor. A little after daybreak, just when its inhabitants were usually enjoying the dessert of their night's sleep, hearing drowsily the rumble of the early morning carts and the bell-ringing of the first Masses, the house would reëcho to the rude banging of doors and heavy footsteps making the stairway creak. It was the *Triton* rushing out on the street, incapable of remaining between four walls after the first streak of light. Following the currents of the early morning life, he would reach the market, stopping before the flower stands where were the most numerous gatherings of women.

The eyes of the women turned toward him instinctively with an expression of interest and fear. Some blushed as he passed by, imagining against their will what an embrace from this hideous and restless Colossus must be.

"He is capable of crushing a flea on his arm," the sailors of his village used to boast when trying to emphasize the hardness of his biceps. His body lacked fat, and under his swarthy skin bulged great, rigid and protruding muscles—an Herculean texture from which had been eliminated every element incapable of producing strength. Labarta found in him a great resemblance to the marine divinities. He was Neptune before his head had silvered, or Poseidon as the primitive Greek poets had seen him with hair black and curly, features tanned by the salt air, and with a ringleted beard whose two spiral ends seemed formed by the dripping of the water of the sea. The nose somewhat flattened by a blow received in his youth, and the little eyes, oblique and tenacious, gave to his countenance an expression of Asiatic ferocity, but this impression melted away when his mouth parted in a smile, showing his even, glistening teeth, the teeth of a man of the sea accustomed to live upon salt food.

During the first few days of his visit he would wander through the streets wavering and bewildered. He was afraid of the carriages; the patter of the passers-by on the pavements annoyed him; he, who had seen the most important ports of both hemispheres, complained of the bustle in the capital of a province. Finally he would instinctively take the road from the harbor in search of the sea, his eternal friend, the first to salute him every morning upon opening the door of his own home down there on the *Marina*.

On these excursions he would oftentimes be accompanied by his little nephew. The bustle on the docks,—(the creaking of the cranes, the dull rumble of the carts, the deafening cries of the freighters),—always had for him a certain music reminiscent of his youth when he was traveling as a doctor on a transatlantic steamer.

His eyes also received a caress from the past upon taking in the panorama of the port—steamers smoking, sailboats with their canvas spread out in the sunlight, bulwarks of orange crates, pyramids of onions, walls of sacks of rice and compact rows of wine casks paunch to paunch. And coming to meet the outgoing cargo were long lines of unloaded goods being lined up as they arrived—hills of coal coming from England, sacks of cereal from the Black Sea, dried codfish from Newfoundland sounding like parchment skins as they thudded down on the dock, impregnating the atmosphere with their salty dust, and yellow lumber from Norway that still held a perfume of the pine woods.

Oranges and onions fallen from the crates were rotting in the sun, scattering their sweet and acrid juices. The sparrows were hopping around the mountains of wheat, flitting timidly away when

hearing approaching footsteps. Over the blue surface of the harbor waters the sea gulls of the Mediterranean, small, fine and white as doves, twined in and out in their interminable contra-dances.

The *Triton* went on enumerating to his nephew the class and specialty of every kind of vessel; and upon discovering that Ulysses was capable of confusing a brigantine with a frigate, he would roar in scandalized amazement.

"Heavens! Then what in the devil do they teach your in school?…"

Upon passing near the citizens of Valencia seated on the wharves, fishing rod in hand, he would shoot a glance of commiseration toward their empty baskets. Over there by his house on the coast, before the sun would be up, he would already have covered the bottom of his boat with enough to eat for a week. The misery of the cities!

Standing on the last points of the rocky ledge, his glance would sweep the immense plain, describing to his nephew the mysteries hidden beyond the horizon. At their left, beyond the blue mountains of Oropesa, which bound the Valencian gulf, he could see in imagination Barcelona, where he had numerous friends, Marseilles, that prolongation of the Orient fastened on the European coast, and Genoa with its terraced palaces on hills covered with gardens. Then his vision would lose itself on the horizon stretching out in front of him. That was the road of his happy youth.

Straight ahead in a direct line was Naples with its smoking mountain, its music and its swarthy dancing girls with hoop earrings; further on, the Isles of Greece; at the foot of an Aquatic Street, Constantinople; and still beyond, bordering the great liquid court of the Black Sea, a series of ports where the Argonauts—sunk in a seething mass of races, fondled by the felinism of slaves, the voluptuosity of the Orientals, and the avarice of the Jews—were fast forgetting their origin.

At their right was Africa; the Egyptian ports with their traditional corruption that at sunset was beginning to tremble and steam like a fetid morass; Alexandria in whose low coffee houses were imitation Oriental dancers with no more clothes than a pocket handkerchief, every woman of a different nation and shrieking in chorus all the languages of the earth….

The doctor withdrew his eyes from the sea in order to observe his flattened nose. He was recalling a night of Egyptian heat increased by the fumes of whiskey; the familiarity of the half-clad public women, the scuffle with some ruddy Northern sailors, the encounter in the dark which obliged him to flee with bleeding face to the ship that, fortunately, was weighing anchor at dawn. Like all Mediterranean men, he never went ashore without wearing a dagger hidden on his person, and he had to "sting" with it in order to make way for himself.

"What times those were!" said the *Triton* with more regret and homesickness than remorse; and then he would add by way of excuse, "Ay, but then I was only twenty-four years old!"

These memories made him turn his eyes toward a huge bluish bulk extending out into the sea and looking to the casual spectator like a great barren island. It was the promontory crowned by the Mongó, the great Ferrarian promontory of the ancient geographers, the furthest-reaching point of the peninsula in the lower Mediterranean that closes the Gulf of Valencia on the south.

It had the form of a hand whose digits were mountains, but lacked the thumb. The other four fingers extended out into the waves, forming the capes of San Antonio, San Martin, La Nao and Almoraira. In one of their coves was the *Triton's* native village, and the home of the Ferraguts—hunters of black pirates in other days, contrabandists at times in modern days, sailors in all ages, appearing originally, perhaps, from those first wooden horses that came leaping over the foam seething around the promontory.

In that home in the *Marina* he wished to live and die, with no further desire of seeing more lands, with that sudden immovability that attacks the vagabonds of the waves and makes them fix themselves upon a ledge of the coast like a mollusk or bunch of seaweed.

Soon the *Triton* grew tired of these strolls to the harbor. The sea of Valencia was not a real sea for him. The waters of the river and of the irrigation canals disturbed him. When it rained in the mountains of Aragon, an earthy liquid always discharged itself into the Gulf, tinting the waves

with flesh color and the foam with yellow. Besides, it was impossible to indulge in his daily sport of swimming. One winter morning, when he began to undress himself on the beach, the crowd gathered around him as though attracted by a phenomenon. Even the fish of the Gulf had to him an insufferable slimy taste.

"I'm going back home," he would finally say to the notary and his wife.

"I can't understand how in the world you are able to live here!"

In one of these retreats to the *Marina* he insisted upon taking Ulysses home with him. The summer season was beginning, the boy would be free from school for three months, and the notary, who was not able to go far away from the city, was going to pass the summer with his family on the beach at Cabañal checkered by bad-smelling irrigation canals near a forlorn sea. The little fellow was looking very pale and weak on account of his studies and hectoring. His uncle would make him as strong and agile as a dolphin. And in spite of some very lively disputes, he succeeded in snatching the child away from Doña Cristina.

The first things that Ulysses admired upon entering the doctor's home were the three frigates adorning the ceiling of the dining-room—three marvelous vessels in which there was not lacking a single sail nor pulley rope, nor anchor, and which might be made to sail over the sea at a moment's notice.

They were the work of his grandfather Ferragut. Wishing to release his two sons from the marine service which had weighed upon the family for many centuries, he had sent them to the University of Valencia in order that they might become inland gentlemen. The older, Esteban, had scarcely terminated his career before he obtained a notaryship in Catalunia. The younger one, Antonio, became a doctor so as not to thwart the old man's wishes, but as soon as he acquired his degree he offered his services to a transatlantic steamer. His father had closed the door of the sea against him and he had entered by the window.

And so, as Ferragut Senior began to grow old, he lived completely alone. He used to look after his property—a few vineyards scattered along the coast in sight of his home—and was in frequent correspondence with his son, the notary. From time to time there came a letter from the younger one, his favorite, posted in remote countries that the old Mediterranean seaman knew only by hearsay. And during his long, dull hours in the shade of his arbor facing the blue and luminous sea, he used to entertain himself constructing these little models of boats. They were all frigates of great tonnage and fearless sail. Thus the old skipper would console himself for having commanded during his lifetime only heavy and clumsy merchant vessels like the ships of other centuries, in which he used to carry wine from Cette or cargo prohibited in Gibraltar and the coast of Africa.

Ulysses was not long in recognizing the rare popularity enjoyed by his uncle, the doctor—a popularity composed of the most antagonistic elements. The people used to smile in speaking of him as though he were a little touched, yet they dared to indulge in these smiles only when at a safe distance, for he inspired a certain terror in all of them. At the same time they used to admire him as a local celebrity, for he had traversed all seas, and possessed, besides, a violent and tempestuous strength which was the terror and pride of his neighbors. The husky youths when testing the vigor of their fists, boxing with crews of the English vessels that came there for cargoes of raisins, used to evoke the doctor's name as a consolation in case of defeat. "If only the *Dotor* could have been here! … Half a dozen Englishmen are nothing to him!"

There was no vigorous undertaking, however absurd it might be, that they would not believe him capable of. He used to inspire the faith of the miracle-working saints and audacious highway captains. On calm, sunshiny winter mornings the people would often go running down to the beach, looking anxiously over the lonely sea. The veterans who were toasting themselves in the sun near the overturned boats, on scanning the broad horizon, would finally discern an almost imperceptible point, a grain of sand dancing capriciously on the waves.

They would all break into shouts and conjectures. It was a buoy, a piece of masthead, the drift from a distant shipwreck. For the women it was somebody drowned, so bloated that it was floating like a leather bottle, after having been many days in the water.

Suddenly the same supposition would arise in every perplexed mind. "I wonder if it could be the *Dotor!*" A long silence…. The bit of wood was taking the form of a head; the corpse was moving. Many could now perceive the bubble of foam around his chest that was advancing like the prow of a ship, and the vigorous strokes of his arms…. "Yes, it surely was the *Dotor!*"… The old sea dogs loaned their telescopes to one another in order to recognize his beard sunk in the water and his face, contracted by his efforts or expanded by his snortings.

And the *Dotor* was soon treading the dry beach, naked and as serenely unashamed as a god, giving his hand to the men, while the women shrieked, lifting their aprons in front of one eye—terrified, yet admiring the dripping vision.

All the capes of the promontory challenged him to double them, swimming like a dolphin; he felt impelled to measure all the bays and coves with his arms, like a proprietor who distrusts another's measurements and rectifies them in order to affirm his right of possession. He was a human bark who, with the keel of his breast, cut the foam, whirling through the sunken rocks and the pacific waters in whose depths sparkled fishes among mother-of-pearl twigs and stars moving like flowers.

He used to seat himself to rest on the black rocks with overskirts of seaweed that raised or lowered their fringe at the caprice of the wave, awaiting the night and the chance vessel that might come to dash against them like a piece of bark. Like a marine reptile he had even penetrated certain caves of the coast, drowsy and glacial lakes illuminated by mysterious openings where the atmosphere is black and the water transparent, where the swimmer has a bust of ebony and legs of crystal. In the course of these swimming expeditions he ate all the living beings he encountered fastened to the rocks by antennas and arms. The friction of the great, terrified fish that fled, bumping against him with the violence of a projectile, used to make him laugh.

In the night hours passed before his grandfather's little ships, Ulysses used to hear the *Triton* speak of the *Peje Nicolao*, a man-fish of the Straits of Messina mentioned by Cervantes and other authors, who lived in the water maintaining himself by the donations from the ships. His uncle must be some relative of this *Peje Nicolao*. At other times this uncle would mention a certain Greek who in order to see his lady-love swam the Hellespont every night. And he, who used to know the Dardanelles, was longing to return there as a simple passenger merely that a poet named Lord Byron might not be the only one to imitate the legendary crossing.

The books that he kept in his home, the nautical charts fastened to the walls, the flasks and jars filled with the animal and vegetable life of the sea, and more than all this, his tastes which were so at variance with the customs of his neighbors, had given the *Triton* the reputation of a mysterious sage, the fame of a wizard.

All those who were well and strong considered him crazy, but the moment that there was the slightest break in their health they would share the same faith as the poor women who oftentimes passed long hours in the home of the *Dotor*, seeing his bark afar off and patiently awaiting his return from the sea, in order to show him the sick children they carried in their arms. He had an advantage over all other doctors, as he made no charge for his services; better still, many sick people came away from his house with money in their hands.

The *Dotor* was rich—the richest man in the countryside; a man who really did not know what to do with his money. His maid-servant—an old woman who had known his father and served his mother—used daily to receive from his hands the fish provided for the two with a regal generosity. The *Triton*, who had hoisted sail at daybreak, used to disembark before eleven, and soon the purpling lobster was crackling on the red coals, sending forth delicious odors; the stew pot was bubbling away, thickening its broth with the succulent fat of the sea-scorpion; the oil in the frying pan was singing, browning the flame-colored skin of the salmonettes; and the sea urchins and the mussels opened

hissing under his knife, were emptying their still living pulp into the boiling stew pan. Furthermore, a cow with full udders was mooing in the yard, and dozens of chickens with innumerable broods were cackling incessantly.

The flour kneaded and baked by his servant, and the coffee thick as mud, was all that the *Triton* purchased with his money. If he hunted for a bottle of brandy on his return from a swim, it was only to use it in rubbing himself down.

Money entered through his doors once a year, when the girls of the vintage lined up among the trellises of his vineyards, cutting the bunches of little, close fruit and spreading them out to dry in some small sheds called *riurraus*. Thus was produced the small raisin preferred by the English for the making of their puddings. The sale was a sure thing, the boats always coming from the north to get the fruit. And the *Triton*, upon finding five or six thousand pesetas in his hand, would be greatly perplexed, inwardly asking himself what a man was ever going to do with so much money.

"All this is yours," he said, showing the house to his nephew.

His also the boat, the books and the antique furniture in whose drawers the money was so openly hid that it invited attention.

In spite of seeing himself lord of all that surrounded him, a rough and affectionate despotism, kept nevertheless, weighing the child down. He was very far from his mother, that good lady who was always closing the windows near him and never letting him go out without tying his neckscarf around him with an accompaniment of kisses.

Just when he was sleeping soundest, believing that the night would still be many hours longer, he would feel himself awakened by a violent tugging at his leg. His uncle could not touch him in any other way. "Get up, cabin boy!" In vain he would protest with the profound sleepiness of youth…. Was he, or was he not the "ship's cat" of the bark of which his uncle was the captain and only crew?…

His uncle's paws bared him to the blasts of salt air that were entering through the windows. The sea was dark and veiled by a light fog. The last stars were sparkling with twinkles of surprise, ready to flee. A crack began to appear on the leaden horizon, growing redder and redder every minute, like a wound through which the blood is flowing. The ship's cat was loaded up with various empty baskets, the skipper marching before him like a warrior of the waves, carrying the oars on his shoulders, his feet rapidly making hollows on the sand. Behind him the village was beginning to awaken and, over the dark waters, the sails of the fishermen, fleeing the inner sea, were slipping past like ghostly shrouds.

Two vigorous strokes of the oar sent their boat out from the little wharf of stones, and soon he was untying the sails from the gunwales and preparing the ropes. The unfurled canvas whistled and swelled in bellying whiteness. "There we are! Now for a run!"

The water was beginning to sing, slipping past both sides of the prow. Between it and the edge of the sail could be seen a bit of black sea, and coming little by little over its line, a great red streak. The streak soon became a helmet, then a hemisphere, then an Arabian arch confined at the bottom, until finally it shot up out of the liquid mass as though it were a bomb sending forth flashes of flame. The ash-colored clouds became stained with blood and the large rocks of the coast began to sparkle like copper mirrors. As the last stars were extinguished, a swarm of fire-colored fishes came trailing along before the prow, forming a triangle with its point in the horizon. The mist on the mountain tops was taking on a rose color as though its whiteness were reflecting a submarine eruption. "*Bon dia!*" called the doctor to Ulysses, who was occupied in warming his hands stiffened by the wind.

And, moved with childlike joy by the dawn of a new day, the *Triton* sent his bass voice booming across the maritime silence, several times intoning sentimental melodies that in his youth he had heard sung by a vaudeville prima donna dressed as a ship's boy, at other times caroling in Valencian the chanteys of the coast—fishermen's songs invented as they drew in their nets, in which most shameless words were flung together on the chance of making them rhyme. In certain windings of the coast the sail would be lowered, leaving the boat with no other motion than a gentle rocking around its anchor rope.

Upon seeing the space which had been obscured by the shadow of the boat's hulk, Ulysses found the bottom of the sea so near that he almost believed that he could touch it with the point of his oar. The rocks were like glass. In their interstices and hollows the plants were moving like living creatures, and the little animals had the immovability of vegetables and stones. The boat appeared to be floating in the air and athwart the liquid atmosphere that wraps this abysmal world, the fish hooks were dangling, and a swarm of fishes was swimming and wriggling toward its encounter with death.

It was a sparkling effervescence of yellowing flames, of bluish backs and rosy fins. Some came out from the caves silvered and vibrant as lightning flashes of mercury; others swam slowly, big-bellied, almost circular, with a golden coat of mail. Along the slopes, the crustaceans came scrambling along on their double row of claws attracted by this novelty that was changing the mortal calm of the under-sea where all follow and devour, only to be devoured in turn. Near the surface floated the medusae, living parasols of an opaline whiteness with circular borders of lilac or red bronze. Under their gelatinous domes was the skein of filaments that served them for locomotion, nutrition and reproduction.

The fishermen had only to pull in their lines and a new prisoner would fall into their boat. Their baskets were filling up so fast that the *Triton* and his nephew grew tired of this easy fishing…. The sun was now near the height of its curve, and every wavelet was carrying away a bit of the golden band that divided the blue immensity. The wood of the boat appeared to be on fire.

"We've earned our day's pay," said the *Triton*, looking at the sky and then at the baskets. "Now let's clean up a little bit."

And stripping off his clothing, he threw himself into the sea. Ulysses saw him descend from the center of the ring of foam opened by his body, and could gauge by it the profundity of that fantastic world composed of glassy rocks, animal plants and stone animals. As it went down, the tawny body of the swimmer took on the transparency of porcelain. It appeared of bluish crystal—a statue made of a Venetian mirror composition that was going to break as soon as it touched the bottom.

Like a god he was passing through the deeps, snatching plants out by the roots, pursuing with his hands the flashes of vermilion and gold hidden in the cracks of the rocks. Minutes would pass by; he was going to stay down forever; he would never come up again. And the boy was beginning to think uneasily of the possibility of having to guide the bark back to the coast all alone. Suddenly the body of white crystal began taking on a greenish hue, growing larger and larger, becoming dark and coppery, until above the surface appeared the head of the swimmer, who, spouting and snorting, was holding up all his submarine plunder to the little fellow.

"Now then, your turn!" he ordered in an imperious tone.

All attempts at resistance were useless. His uncle either insulted him with the harshest kind of words or coaxed him with promises of safety. He never knew certainly whether he threw himself into the water or whether a tug from the doctor jerked him from the boat. The first surprise having passed, he had the impression of remembering some long forgotten thing. He was swimming instinctively, divining what he ought to do before his master told him. Within him was awakening the ancestral experience of a race of sailors who had struggled with the sea and, sometimes, had remained forever in its bosom.

Recollection of what was existing beyond his feet suddenly made him lose his serenity,—his lively imagination making him shriek,

"Uncle!… Uncle!"

And he clutched convulsively at the hard island of bearded and smiling muscles. His uncle came up immovable, as though his feet of stone were fastened to the bottom of the ocean. He was like the nearby promontory that was darkening and chilling the water with its ebony shadow.

Thus would slip by the mornings devoted to fishing and swimming; then in the afternoons there were tramps over the steep shores of the coast.

The *Dotor* knew the heights of the promontory as well as its depths. Up the pathways of the wild goat they clambered to its peaks in order to get a view of the Island of Ibiza. At sunset the distant Balearic Islands appeared like a rose-colored flame rising out of the waves. At other times the cronies made trips along the water's edge, and the *Triton* would show his nephew hidden caves into which the Mediterranean was working its way with slow undulations. These were like maritime roadsteads where boats might anchor completely concealed from view. There the galleys of the Berbers had often hidden, in order to fall unexpectedly upon a nearby village.

In one of these caves, on a rocky pedestal, Ulysses often saw a heap of bundles.

"Well, now, what of it!" expostulated the doctor. "Every man must gain his living as best he can."

When they stumbled upon a solitary custom house officer resting upon his gun and looking out toward the sea, the doctor would offer him a cigar and give him medical advice if he were sick. "Poor men! so badly paid!"… But his sympathies were always going out to the others—to the enemies of the law. He was the son of his sea, and in the make-up of all Mediterranean heroes and sailors there had always been something of the pirate or smuggler. The Phoenicians, who by their navigation spread abroad the first works of civilization, instituted this service, reaping their reward by filling their barks with stolen women, rich merchandise of easy transportation.

Piracy and smuggling had formed the historic past of all the villages that Ulysses was visiting, some huddled in the shelter of the promontory crowned with a lighthouse, others opening on the concavity of a bay dotted with barren islands girdled with foam. The old churches had turrets on their walls and loopholes in their doors for shooting with culverins and blunderbusses. The entire neighborhood used to take refuge in them when the smoke columns from their watchmen would warn them of the landing of pirates from Algiers. Following the curvings of the promontory there was a dotted line of reddish towers, each one accompanied by a smaller pair for lookouts. This line extended along the south toward the Straits of Gibraltar, and on its northern side reached to France.

The doctor had seen their counterpart in all the islands of the western Mediterranean, on the coasts of Naples and in Sicily. They were the fortifications of a thousand-year war, of a struggle ten centuries long between Moors and Christians for the domination of the blue sea, a struggle of piracy in which the Mediterranean men—differentiated by religion, but identical at heart—had prolonged the adventures of the Odyssey down to the beginnings of the nineteenth century.

Ferragut gradually became acquainted with many old men of the village who in their youth had been slaves in Algiers. On winter evenings the oldest of them were still singing romances of captivity and speaking with terror of the Berber brigantines. These thieves of the sea must have had a pact with the devil, who notified them of opportune occasions. If in a convent some beautiful novices had just made their profession, the doors would give away at midnight under the hatchet-blows of the bearded demons who were advancing inland from the galleys prepared to receive their cargo of feminine freight. If a girl of the coast, celebrated for her beauty, was going to be married, the infidels, lying in wait, would surround the door of the church, shooting their blunderbusses and knifing the unarmed men as they came out, in order to carry away the women in their festal robes.

On all the coast, the pirates stood in awe only of the navigators from the *Marina*, so fearless and warlike were they. If their villages were ever attacked, it was because their seafaring defenders were on the Mediterranean and, in their turn, had gone to sack and burn some village on the coast of Africa.

The *Triton* and his nephew used to eat their supper under the arbor in the long summer twilights. After the cloth was removed Ulysses would manipulate his grandfather's little frigates, learning the technical parts and names of the different apparatus, and the management of the sets of sails. Sometimes the two would stay out on the rustic porch until a late hour gazing out over the luminous sea sparkling under the splendor of the moon, or streaked with a slender wake of starry light in the murky nights.

All that mankind had ever written or dreamed about the Mediterranean, the doctor had in his library and could repeat to his eager little listener. In Ferragut's estimation the *mare nostrum* ["Mare Nostrum" (Our Sea), the classic name for the Mediterranean.] was a species of blue beast, powerful and of great intelligence—a sacred animal like the dragons and serpents that certain religions adored, believing them to be the source of life. The rivers that threw themselves impetuously into its bosom in order to renew it were few and scanty. The Rhone and the Nile appeared to be pitiful little rivulets compared with the river courses of other continents that empty into the oceans.

Losing by evaporation three times more liquid than the rivers bring to it, this sunburnt sea would soon have been converted into a great salt desert were not the Atlantic sending it a rapid current of renewal that was precipitated through the Straits of Gibraltar. Under this superficial current existed still another, flowing in an opposite direction, that returned a part of the Mediterranean to the ocean, because the Mediterranean waters were more salt and dense than those of the Atlantic. The tide scarcely made itself felt on its strands. Its basin was mined by subterranean fires that were always seeking extraordinary outlets through Vesuvius and Aetna and breathed continually through the mouth of Stromboli. Sometimes these Plutonic ebullitions would come to the surface, making new islands rise up upon the waters like tumors of lava.

In its bosom exist still double the quantity of animal species that abound in other seas, although less numerous. The tunny fish, playful lambs of the blue pasture lands, were gamboling over its surface or passing in schools under the furrows of the waves. Men were setting netted traps for them along the coasts of Spain and France, in Sardinia, the Straits of Messina and the waters of the Adriatic. But this wholesale slaughter scarcely lessened the compact, fishy squadrons. After wandering through the windings of the Grecian Archipelago, they passed the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, stirring the two narrow passageways with the violence of their invisible gallopade and making a turn at the bowl of the Black Sea, swimming back, decimated but impetuous, to the depths of the Mediterranean.

Red coral was forming immovable groves on the substrata of the Balearic Islands, and on the coasts of Naples and Africa. Ambergris was constantly being found on the steep shores of Sicily. Sponges were growing in the tranquil waters in the shadow of the great rocks of Mallorca and the Isles of Greece. Naked men without any equipment whatever, holding their breath, were still descending to the bottom as in primitive times, in order to snatch these treasures away.

The doctor gave up his geographic descriptions to discourse on the history of his sea, which had indeed been the history of civilization, and was more fascinating to him. At first miserable and scanty tribes had wandered along its coasts seeking their food from the crustaceans drawn from the waves —a life similar to that of the rudimentary people that Ferragut had seen in the islands of the Pacific. When stone saws had hollowed out the trunks of trees and human arms had ventured to spread the first rawhides to the forces of the atmosphere, the coasts became rapidly populated.

Temples were constructed on the promontories, and maritime cities—the first nuclei of modern civilization—came into existence. On this landlocked sea mankind had learned the art of navigation. Every one looked at the waves before looking at the sky. Over this blue highway had arrived the miracles of life, and out of its depths the gods were born. The Phoenicians—Jews, become navigators —abandoned their cities in the depths of the Mediterranean sack, in order to spread the mysterious knowledge of Egypt and the Asiatic monarchies all along the shores of the interior sea. Afterwards the Greeks of the maritime republics took their places.

In Ferragut's estimation the greatest honor to which Athens could lay claim was that she had been a democracy of sailors, her freemen serving their country as rowers and all her famous men as great marine officials.

"Themistocles and Pericles," he added, "were admirals of fleets, and after commanding ships, governed their country."

On that account Grecian civilization had spread itself everywhere and had become immortal instead of lessening and disappearing without fruit as in the interior lands. Then Rome, terrestrial

Rome, in order to hold its own against the superiority of the Semitic navigators of Carthage, had to teach the management of the oar and marine combat to the inhabitants of Latium, to their legionaries with faces hardened by the chin straps of their helmets, who did not know how to adjust their world-dominating iron-shod feet to the slippery planks of a vessel.

The divinities of *mare nostrum* always inspired a most loving devotion in the doctor. He knew that they had not existed, but he, nevertheless, believed in them as poetic phantasms of natural forces.

The ancient world only knew the immense ocean in hypothesis, giving it the form of an aquatic girdle around the earth. Oceanus was an old god with a long beard and horned head who lived in a maritime cavern with his wife, Tethys, and his three hundred daughters, the Oceanides. No Argonaut had ever dared to come in contact with these mysterious divinities. Only the grave Aeschylus had dared to portray the Oceanides—virgins fresh and demure, weeping around the rock to which Prometheus was bound.

Other more approachable deities were those of the eternal sea on whose borders were founded the opulent cities of the Syrian coast; the Egyptian cities that sent sparks of their ritual civilization to Greece; the Hellenic cities, hearths of clear fire that had fused all knowledge, giving it eternal form; Rome, mistress of the world; Carthage, famed for her audacious geographical discoveries, and Marseilles, which had made western Europe share in the civilization of the Greeks, scattering it along the lower coast from settlement to settlement, even to the Straits of Cadiz.

A brother of the Oceanides, the prudent Nereus, used to reign in the depths of the Mediterranean. This son of Oceanus had a blue beard, green eyes, and bunches of sea rushes on his eyebrows and breast. His fifty daughters, the Nereids, bore his orders across the waves or frolicked around the ships, splashing in the faces of the rowers the foam tossed up by their arms. But the sons of Father Time, on conquering the giant, had reapportioned the world, determining its rulers by lot. Zeus remained lord of the land, the obscure Hades, lord of the underworld, reigned in the Plutonic abysses, and Poseidon became master of the blue surfaces.

Nereus, the dispossessed monarch, fled to a cavern of the Hellenic sea in order to live the calm existence of the philosopher-counselor of mankind, and Poseidon installed himself in the mother-of-pearl palaces with his white steeds tossing helmets of bronze and manes of gold.

His amorous eyes were fixed on the fifty Mediterranean princesses, the Nereids, who took their names from the aspect of the waves—the Blue, the Green, the Swift, the Gentle…. "Nymphs of the green abysses with faces fresh as a rosebud, fragrant virgins that took the forms of all the monsters of the deep," sang the Orphic hymn on the Grecian shore. And Poseidon singled out among them all the Nereid of the Foam, the white Amphitrite who refused to accept his love.

She knew about this new god. The coasts were peopled with cyclops like Polyphemus, with frightful monsters born of the union of Olympian goddesses and simple mortals; but an obliging dolphin came and went, carrying messages between Poseidon and the Nereid, until, overwhelmed by the eloquence of this restless rover of the wave, Amphitrite agreed to become the wife of the god, and the Mediterranean appeared to take on still greater beauty.

She was the aurora that shows her rosy finger-tips through the immense cleft between sky and sea, the warm hour of midday that makes the waters drowsy under its robe of restless gold, the bifurcated tongue of foam that laps the two faces of the hissing prow, the aroma-laden breeze that like a virgin's breath swells the sail, the compassionate kiss that lulls the drowned to rest, without wrath and without resistance, before sinking forever into the fathomless abyss.

Her husband—Poseidon on the Greek coast and Neptune on the Latin—on mounting his chariot, used to awaken the tempest. The brazen-hoofed horses with their stamping would paw up the huge waves and swallow up the ships. The tritons of his cortege would send forth from their white shells the bellowing blasts that snap off the masts like reeds.

O, mater Amphitrite!… and Ferragut would describe her as though she were just passing before his eyes. Sometimes when swimming around the promontories, feeling himself enveloped like

primitive man in the blind forces of Nature, he used to believe that he saw the white goddess issuing forth from the rocks with all her smiling train after a rest in some marine cave.

A shell of pearl was her chariot and six dolphins harnessed with purpling coral used to draw it along. The tritons, her sons, handled the reins. The Naiads, their sisters, lashed the sea with their scaly tails, lifting their mermaid bodies wrapped in the magnificence of their sea-green tresses between whose ringlets might be seen their heaving bosoms. White seagulls, cooing like the doves of Aphrodite, fluttered around their nude sea-queen, serenely contemplating them from her movable throne, crowned with pearls and phosphorescent stars drawn from the depths of her dominion. White as the cloud, white as the sail, white as the foam, entirely, dazzlingly white was her fair majesty except where a rosy blush tinted the petal-like skin of her heels or her bosom.

The entire history of European man—forty centuries of wars, emigrations, and racial impact—was due, according to the doctor, to the desire of possessing this harmoniously framed sea, of enjoying the transparency of its atmosphere and the vivacity of its light.

The men from the North who needed the burning log and alcoholic drink in order to defend their life from the clutches of the cold, were always thinking of these Mediterranean shores. All their warlike or pacific movements were with intent to descend from the coasts of the glacial seas to the beaches of the warm *mare nostrum*. They were eager to gain possession of the country where the sacred olive alternates its stiff old age with the joyous vineyard; where the pine rears its cupola and the cypress erects its minaret. They longed to dream under the perfumed snow of the interminable orange groves; to be masters of the sheltered valleys where the myrtle and the jasmine spice the salty air; where the aloe and the cactus grow between the stones of extinct volcanoes; where the mountains of marble extend their white veins down even into the depths of the sea and refract the African heat emitted by the opposite coast.

The South had replied to the invasion from the North with defensive wars that had extended even into the center of Europe. And thus history had gone on repeating itself with the same flux and reflux of human waves—mankind struggling for thousands of years to gain or hold the blue vault of Amphitrite.

The Mediterranean peoples were to Ferragut the aristocracy of humanity. Its potent climate had tempered mankind as in no other part of the planet, giving him a dry and resilient power. Tanned and bronzed by the profound absorption of the sun and the energy of the atmosphere, its navigators were transmuted into pure metal. The men from the North were stronger, but less robust, less acclimitable than the Catalan sailor, the Provençal, the Genoese or the Greek. The sailors of the Mediterranean made themselves at home in all parts of the world. Upon their sea man had developed his highest energies. Ancient Greece had converted human flesh into spiritual steel.

Exactly the same landscapes and races bordered the two shores. The mountains and the flowers on both shores were identical. The Catalan, the Provençal and the South Italian were more like the inhabitants of the African coast than their kindred who lived inland back of them. This fraternity had shown itself instinctively in the thousand-year war. The Berber pirates, the Genoese sailors, the Spaniards, and the Knights of Malta used implacably to behead each other on the decks of their galleys and, upon becoming conquerors, would respect the life of their prisoners, treating them like gentlemen. The Admiral Barbarossa, eighty-four years of age, used to call Doria, his eternal rival nearly ninety years old, "my brother." The Grand Master of Malta clasped the hand of the terrible Dragut upon finding him his captive.

The Mediterranean man, fixed on the shores that gave him birth, was accustomed to accept all the changes of history, as the mollusks fastened to the rocks endure the tempests. For him the only important thing was not to lose sight of his blue sea. The Spaniard used to pull an oar on the Liburnian felucca, the Christian would join the crews of the Saracen ships of the Middle Ages; the subjects of Charles V would pass through the fortunes of war from the galleys of the Cross to those

of the Crescent, and would end by becoming rulers of Algiers, rich captains of the sea, or by making their names famous as renegades.

In the eighth century the inhabitants of the Valencian coast united with the Andalusian Moors to carry the war to the ends of the Mediterranean and to the island of Crete, taking possession of it and giving it the name of Candia. This nest of pirates was the terror of Byzantium, taking Salonica by assault and selling as slaves the patricians and most important ladies of the realm. Years afterwards, when dislodged from Candia, the Valencian adventurers returned to their native shores and there established a town in a fertile valley, giving it the name of the distant island which was changed to Gandia.

Every type of human vigor had sprung from the Mediterranean race,—fine, sharp and dry as flint, doing good and evil on a large scale with the exaggeration of an ardent character that discounts halfway measures and leaps from duplicity to the greatest extremes of generosity. Ulysses was the father of them all, a discreet and prudent hero, yet at the same time complex and malicious. So was old Cadmus with his Phoenician miter and curled beard, a great old sea-wolf, scattering by means of his various adventures the art of writing and the first notions of commerce.

In one of the Mediterranean islands Hannibal was born, and twenty centuries after, in another of them, the son of a lawyer without briefs embarked for France, with no other outfit than his cadet's uniform, in order to make famous his name of Napoleon.

Over the Mediterranean waves had sailed Roger de Lauria, knight-errant of vast tracts of sea, who wished to clothe even the fishes with the colors of Aragon. A visionary of obscure origin named Columbus had recognized as his country the republic of Genoa. A smuggler from the coasts of Laguria came to be Messina, the marshal beloved by Victory, and the last personage of this stock of Mediterranean heroes associated with the heroes of fabulous times was a sailor from Nice, simple and romantic, a warrior called Garibaldi, an heroic tenor of all seas and lands who cast over his century the reflection of his red shirt, repeating on the coast of Marseilles the remote epic of the Argonauts.

Then Ferragut summed up the various defects of his race. Some had been bandits and others saints, but none mediocre. Their most audacious undertakings had much about them that was prudent and practical. When they devoted themselves to business they were at the same time serving civilization. In them the hero and the trader were so intermingled that it was impossible to discern where one ended and the other began. They had been pirates and cruel men, but the navigators from the foggy seas when imitating the Mediterranean discoveries in other continents had not shown themselves any more gentle or loyal.

After these conversations, Ulysses felt greater esteem for the old pottery and the shabby little figures that adorned his uncle's bedroom.

They were objects vomited up by the sea, Grecian amphoras wrested from the shells of mollusks after a submarine interment centuries long. The deep waters had embossed these petrified ornaments with strange arabesques that made one think of the art of another planet, and, twined in with the pottery that had held the wine and water of a shipwrecked Liburnian felucca, were bits of rope hardened by limey deposit and flukes of anchors whose metal was disintegrating into reddish scales. Various little statues corroded by the salt sea inspired in the boy as much admiration as his grandfather's frigates. He laughed and trembled before these *Cabiri* coming from the Phoenician or Carthaginian biremes,—grotesque and terrible gods that contracted their faces with grimaces of lust and ferocity.

Some of these muscular and bearded marine divinities bore a remote resemblance to his uncle. Ulysses had overheard certain strange conversations among the fishermen and had noticed, besides, the precipitation of the women and their uneasy glances when they found the doctor near them in a solitary part of the coast. Only the presence of his nephew had made them recover tranquility and check their step.

At times the sea seemed to craze him with gusts of amorous fury. He was Poseidon rising up unexpectedly on the banks in order to surprise goddesses and mortals. The women of the *Marina* ran away as terrified as those Greek princesses on the painted vases when surprised, washing their robes, by the apparition of a passionate triton.

Some nights at the hour when the lighthouses were beginning to pierce the coming dusk with their fresh shafts of light, he would become melancholy and, forgetting the difference in their age, would talk with his nephew as though he were a sailor companion.

He regretted never having married…. He might have had a son by this time. He had known many women of all colors—white, red, yellow, and bronze—but only once had he really been in love, very far away on the other side of the planet, in the port of Valparaiso.

He could still see in imagination a certain graceful Chilean maiden, wrapped in her great black veil like the ladies of the Calderonian theater, showing only one of her dark and liquid eyes, pale and slender, speaking in a plaintive voice.

She enjoyed love-songs, always provided that they were sung "with great sadness"; and Ferragut would devour her with his eyes while she plucked the guitar, chanting the song of Malek-Adhel and other romances about "Roses, sighs and Moors of Granada," that from childhood the doctor had heard sung by the Berbers of his country. The simple attempt at taking one of her hands always provoked her modest resistance…. "That, then…." She was ready to marry him; she wished to see Spain…. And the doctor might have fulfilled her wishes had not a good soul informed him that in later hours of the night, others were accustomed to come in turns to hear her romantic solos…. Ah, these women! and then, on recalling the finale of his trans-oceanic idyl, Ferragut would become reconciled to his celibacy.

Late in the Fall the notary had to go in person to the *Marina* to make his brother give Ulysses up. The boy held the same opinion as did his uncle. The very idea of losing the winter fishing, the cold sunny morning, the spectacle of the great tempests, just for the silly reason that the Institute had commenced, and he must study for his bachelor's degree!…

The following year Doña Cristina tried to prevent the *Triton's* carrying off her son, since he could learn nothing but bad words and boastful bullying in the old home of the Ferraguts. And trumping up the necessity of seeing her own family, she left the notary alone in Valencia, going with her boy to spend the summer on the coast of Catalunia near the French frontier.

This was Ulysses' first important journey. In Barcelona he became acquainted with his uncle, the rich and talented financier of the Blanes family,—one of his mother's brothers, proprietor of a great hardware shop situated in one of the damp, narrow and crowded streets that ran into the Rambla. He soon came to know other maternal uncles in a village near the Cape of Creus. This promontory with its wild coasts reminded him of that other one where the *Triton* lived. The first Hellenic sailors had also founded a city here, and the sea had also cast up amphoras, little statues and petrified bits of iron.

The Blanes family had gone much to sea. They loved it as intensely as did the doctor, but with a cold and silent love, appreciating it less for its beauty than for the profits which it offered to the fortunate. Their trips had been to America, in their own sailing vessels, importing sugar from Havana and corn from Buenos Ayres. The Mediterranean was for them only a port that they crossed carelessly on departure and arrival. None of them knew the white Amphitrite even by name.

Moreover, they did not have the devil-may-care and romantic appearance of the bachelor of the *Marina*, ready to live in the water like an amphibian. They were gentlemen of the coast who, having retired from the sea, were entrusting their barks to captains who had been their pilots,—middle class citizens who never laid aside the cravat and silk cap that were the symbols of their high position in their natal town.

The gathering-place of the rich was the Athenæum,—a society that in spite of its title offered no other reading matter than two Catalunian periodicals. A large telescope mounted on a tripod before

the door used to fill the club members with pride. For the uncles of Ulysses, it was enough merely to put one eyebrow to the glass to be able to state immediately the class and nationality of the ship that was slipping along over the distant horizon line. These veterans of the sea were accustomed to speak only of the freight cargoes, of the thousands and thousands of dollars gained in other times with only one round trip, and of the terrible rivalry of the steamship.

Ulysses kept hoping in vain that sometimes they would allude to the Nereids and other poetic beings that the *Triton* had conjured around his promontory. The Blanes had never seen these extraordinary creatures. Their seas contained fish only. They were cold, economical men of few words, friends of order and social preferment. Their nephew suspected that they had the courage of men of the sea but without boasting or aggressiveness; their heroism was that of traders capable of suffering all kinds of adventures provided their stock ran no risks, but becoming wild beasts if any one attacked their riches.

The members of the Athenaeum were all old, the only masculine beings in the village. Besides them there were only the carbineers installed in the barracks and various calkers making their mallets resound on the hull of a schooner ordered by the Blanes brothers.

All the active men were on the sea. Some were sailing to America as crew of the brigs and barks of the Catalunian coast. The more timid and unfortunate ones were always fishing. Others, more valiant and anxious for ready money, had become smugglers on the French coast whose shores began on the other side of the promontory.

In the village there were only women, women of all kinds:—women seated before their doors, making lace on great cylindrical pillows on their knees, along whose length their bobbins wove strips of beautiful openwork, or grouped on the street corners in front of the lonely sea where their men were, or speaking with an electric nervousness that oftentimes would break out suddenly in noisy tempests.

Only the parish priest, whose fishing recreations and official existence were embittered by their constant quarrels, understood the feminine irritability which embroiled the village. Alone and having to live incessantly in such close contact, the women had come to hate each other as do passengers isolated on a boat for many months. Besides, their husbands had accustomed them to the use of coffee, the seaman's drink, and they tried to beguile their tedium with strong cups of the thick liquid.

A common interest, nevertheless, united these women miraculously when living alone. When the carbineers inspected the houses in search of contraband goods smuggled in by the men, the Amazons worked off their nervous energy in hiding the illegal merchandise, making it pass from one place of concealment to another with the cunning of savages.

Whenever the government officers began to suspect that certain packages had gone to hide themselves in the cemetery, they would find there only some empty graves, and in the bottom of them a few cigars between skulls that were mockingly stuck up in the ground. The chief of the barracks did not dare to inspect the church, but he looked contemptuously upon Mosen Jòrdi, the priest, as a simpleton quite capable of permitting tobacco to be hidden behind the altars in exchange for the privilege of fishing in peace.

The rich people lived with their backs turned on the village, contemplating the blue expanse upon which were erected the wooden houses that represented all their fortune. In the summer-time the sight of the smooth and brilliant Mediterranean made them recall the dangers of the winter. They spoke with religious terror of the land breeze, the wind from the Pyrenees, the *Tramontana* that oftentimes snatched edifices from their bases and had overturned entire trains in the nearby station. Furthermore, on the other side of the promontory began the terrible Gulf of Lyons. Upon its surface, not more than ninety yards in extent, the waters driven by the strong sea winds often became so rough, and raised up waves so high and so solid that upon clashing together and finding no intermediate space upon which to fall, they piled one upon another, forming regular towers.

This gulf was the most terrible of the Mediterranean. The transatlantic liners returning from a good voyage to the other hemisphere used here to tremble with a pre-monition of danger and sometimes even turned back. The captains who had just crossed the great Atlantic would here furrow their brows with uneasiness.

From the door of the Athenaeum the experts used to point out the Latin sailboats that were about to double the promontory. They were merchant vessels such as that elder Ferragut had commanded, embarkations from Valencia that were bringing wine to Cette and fruits to Marseilles. Upon seeing the blue surface of the Gulf on the other side of the Cape with no other roughness than that of a long and infinitely heavy swell, the Valencians would exclaim happily:

"Let us cross quickly, while the lion sleeps."

Ulysses had one friend, the secretary of the city-hall, and the only inhabitant that had any books in his house. Treated by the rich with a certain contempt, the official used to seek the boy's company because he was the only creature who would listen to him attentively.

He adored the *mare nostrum* as much as Doctor Ferragut, but his enthusiasm was not concerned with the Phoenician and Egyptian ships whose keels had first plowed these waves. He was equally indifferent to Grecian and Carthaginian Triremes, Roman warships, and the monstrous galleys of the Sicilian tyrants,—palaces moved by oars, with statues, fountains and gardens. That which most interested him was the Mediterranean of the Middle Ages, that of the kings of Aragon, the Catalunian Sea. And the poor secretary would give long daily dissertations about them in order to pique the local pride of his juvenile listener.

One day after dilating at length on Roger de Lauria and the Catalan navy, he wound up his tedious history by telling the little fellow how Alfonso V, his brother the King of Navarre, and all his cortege of magnates, had remained prisoners of the Republic of Genoa, which, terrified by the importance of its royal prey, had entrusted the captives to the guard of the Duke of Milan…. But the monarchs easily came to an understanding in order to deceive the democratic governments, and the Milanese sovereign released the King of Aragon with all his suite. Thereupon he immediately blockaded Genoa with an enormous fleet. The Provençal navy came promptly to the relief of its neighbors, and the Aragonese King forced the port of Marseilles, bearing away as trophy the chains that closed its entrance.

Ulysses nodded affirmatively. The sailor king had deposited these chains in the cathedral of Valencia. His godfather, the poet, had pointed them out to him in a Gothic chapel, forming a garland of iron over the black hewn stones.

The Catalan navy still continued to dominate the Mediterranean commercially, adding to its ancient vessels great galleons, lighter galleys, caravels, cattle boats, and other ships of the period.

"But Christopher Columbus," concluded the Catalan sadly, "discovered the Indies, thereby giving a death blow to the maritime riches of the Mediterranean. Besides, Aragon and Castile became united and their life and power were then concentrated in the center of the Peninsula, far from the sea."

Had Barcelona been the capital of Spain, Catalunia would have preserved the Mediterranean domination. Had Lisbon been the capital, the Spanish colonial realm would have developed into something organic and solid with a robust life. But what could you expect of a nation which had stuck its head into a pillow of yellow interior steppes, the furthest possible from the world's highways, showing only its feet to the waves!…

The Catalan would always end by speaking sadly of the decadence of the Mediterranean marine. Everything that was pleasing to his tastes made him hark back to the good old time of the domination of the Mediterranean by the Catalan marine. One day he offered Ulysses a sweet and perfumed wine.

"It is Malvasian, the first stock the Almogavars brought here from Greece."

Then he said in order to flatter the boy:

"It was a citizen of Valencia, Ramon Muntaner, who wrote of the expeditions of the Catalans and Aragonese against Constantinople."

The mere recollection of this novel-like adventure, the most unheard-of in history, used to fill him with enthusiasm, and, in passing, he paid highest tribute to the Almogavar chronicler, a rude Homer in song, Ulysses and Nestor in council, and Achilles in hard action.

Doña Cristina's impatience to rejoin her husband and to return to the comforts of her well-regulated household finally carried Ulysses away from this life by the coast.

For many years thereafter he saw no other sea than the Gulf of Valencia. The notary, under various pretexts, contrived to prevent the doctor's again carrying off his nephew; and the *Triton* made his trips to Valencia less frequently, rebelling against all the inconveniences and dangers of these terrestrial adventures.

And Labarta, when occupied with the future of Ulysses, used to take on a certain air of a good-natured regent charged with the guardianship of a little prince. The boy appeared to belong to them more than to his own father; his studies and his future destiny filled completely their after-dinner conversations when the doctor was in town.

Don Esteban felt a certain satisfaction in annoying his brother by eulogizing the sedentary and prosperous life.

Over there on the coasts of Catalunia lived his brothers-in-law, the Blanes, genuine wolves of the sea. The doctor would not be able to contradict that. Very well, then,—their sons were in Barcelona, some as business clerks, others making a name for themselves in the office of their rich uncle. They were all sailors' sons and yet they had completely freed themselves from the sea. Their business was entirely on *terra firma*. Only crazyheads could think of ships and adventures.

The *Triton* used to smile humbly before such pointed allusions, and exchange glances with his nephew.

A secret existed between the two. Ulysses, who was finishing his studies for a bachelor's degree, was at the same time taking the courses of pilotage at the institute. Two years would be sufficient for the completion of these latter studies. The uncle had provided the matriculation fees and the books, besides recommending the boy to a former sailor comrade.

CHAPTER III
PATER OCEANUS

When Don Esteban died very suddenly, his eighteen-year-old son was still studying in the university.

In his latter days the notary had begun to suspect that Ulysses was not going to be the celebrated jurist that he had dreamed. He had a way of cutting classes in order to pass the morning in the harbor, exercising with the oars. If he entered the university, the beadles were on their guard fearing his long-reaching hands: for he already fancied himself a sailor and liked to imitate the men of the sea who, accustomed to contend with the elements, considered a quarrel with a man as a very slight affair. Alternating violently between study and laziness, he was laboriously approaching the end of his course when neuralgia of the heart carried off the notary.

Upon coming out from the stupefaction of her grief, Doña Cristina looked around her with aversion. Why should she linger on in Valencia? Since she could no longer be with the man who had brought her to this country, she wanted to return to her own people. The poet Labarta would look after her properties that were not so valuable nor numerous as the income of the notary had led them to suppose. Don Esteban had suffered great losses in extravagant business speculations good-naturedly accepted, but there was still left a fortune sufficient to enable his wife to live as an independent widow among her relatives in Barcelona.

In arranging her new existence, the poor lady encountered no opposition except the rebelliousness of Ulysses. He refused to continue his college course and he wished to go to sea, saying that for that reason he had studied to become a pilot. In vain Doña Cristina entreated the aid of relatives and friends, excluding the *Triton*, whose response she could easily guess. The rich brother from Barcelona was brief and affirmative, "But wouldn't that bring him in the money?"… The Blanes of the coast showed a gloomy fatalism. It would be useless to oppose the lad if he felt that to be his vocation. The sea had a tight clutch upon those who followed it, and there was no power on earth that could dissuade him. On that account they who were already old were not listening to their sons who were trying to tempt them with the convenience of life in the capital. They needed to live near the coast in agreeable contact with the dark and ponderous monster which had rocked them so maternally when it might just as easily have dashed them to pieces.

The only one who protested was Labarta. A sailor?… that might be a very good thing, but a warlike sailor, an official of the Royal Armada. And in his mind's eye the poet could see his godson clad in all the splendors of naval elegance,—a blue jacket with gold buttons for every day, and for holiday attire a coat trimmed with galloon and red trappings, a pointed hat, a sword….

Ulysses shrugged his shoulders before such grandeur. He was too old now to enter the naval school. Besides he wanted to sail over all oceans, and the officers of the navy only had occasion to cruise from one port to another like the people of the coast trade, or even passed years seated in the cabinet of the naval executive. If he had to grow old in an office, he would rather take up his father's profession of notary.

After seeing Doña Cristina well established in Barcelona, surrounded with a cortège of nephews fawning upon the rich aunt from Valencia, her son embarked as apprentice on a transatlantic boat which was making regular trips to Cuba and the United States. Thus began the seafaring life of Ulysses Ferragut, which terminated only with his death.

The pride of the family placed him on a luxurious steamer, a mail-packet full of passengers, a floating hotel on which the officials were something like the managers of the Palace Hotel, while the real responsibility devolved upon the engineers, who were always going below, and upon returning

to the light, invariably remained modestly in a second place, according to a hieratical law anterior to the progress of mechanics.

He crossed the ocean several times, as do those making a land journey at the full speed of an express train. The august calm of the sea was lost in the throb of the screws and in the deafening roar of the machinery. However blue the sky might be, it was always darkened by the floating crepe band from the smokestacks. He envied the leisurely sailboats that the liner was always leaving behind. They were like reflective wayfarers who saturate themselves with the country atmosphere and commune deeply with its soul. The people of the steamer lived like terrestrial travelers who sleepily survey from the car-windows a succession of indefinite and dizzying views streaked by telegraph wires.

When his novitiate was ended he became second mate on a sailing vessel bound for Argentina for a cargo of wheat. The slow day's run with little wind and the long equatorial calms permitted him to penetrate a little into the mysteries of the oceanic immensity, severe and dark, that for ancient peoples had been "the night of the abyss," "the sea of utter darkness," "the blue dragon that daily swallows the sun."

He no longer regarded Father Ocean as the capricious and tyrannical god of the poets. Everything in his depths was working with a vital regularity, subject to the general laws of existence. Even the tempests roared within prescribed and charted quadrangles.

The fresh trade-winds pushed the bark toward the Southeast, maintaining a heavenly serenity in sky and sea. Before the prow hissed the silken wings of flying fish, spreading out in swarms, like little squadrons of diminutive aeroplanes.

Over the masts and yards covered with canvas, the albatross, eagles of the Atlantic desert, traced their long, sweeping circles, flashing across the purest blue their great, sail-like wings. From time to time the boat would meet floating prairies, great fields of seaweed dislodged from the Sargasso Sea. Enormous tortoises drowsed in the midst of these clumps of gulf-weed, serving as islands of repose to the seagulls perched on their shells. Some of the seaweeds were green, nourished by the luminous water of the surface; others had the reddish color of the deep where enters only the deadly chill of the last rays of the sun. Like fruits of the oceanic prairies, there floated past close bunches of dark grapes, leathery capsules filled with brackish water.

As they approached the equator, the breeze kept falling and falling, and the atmosphere became suffocating in the extreme. It was the zone of calms, the ocean of dark, oily waters, in which boats remained for entire weeks with sails limp, without the slightest breath rippling the atmosphere.

Clouds the color of pit coal reflected the ship's slow progress over the sea; showers of rain like whipcord occasionally lashed the deck, followed by a flaming sun that was soon blotted out by a new downpour. These clouds, pregnant with cataracts, this night descending upon the full daylight of the Atlantic, had been the terror of the ancients, and yet, thanks to just such phenomena, the sailors could pass from one hemisphere to another without the light wounding them to death, or the sea scorching them like a burning glass. The heat of the equator, raising up the water in steam, had formed a band of shade around the earth. From other worlds it must appear like a girdle of clouds almost similar to the sidereal rings.

In this gloomy, hot sea was the heart of the ocean, the center of the circulatory life of the planet. The sky was a regulator that, absorbing and returning, restored the evaporation to equilibrium. From this place were sent forth the rains and dews to all the rest of the earth, modifying its temperatures favorably for the development of animal and vegetable life. There were exchanged the exhalations of the two worlds; and, converted into clouds, the water of the southern hemisphere—the hemisphere of the great seas with no other points of relief than the triangular extremities of Africa and America, and the humps of the oceanic archipelagoes—was always reinforcing the rills and rivers of the northern hemisphere with its inhabited lands.

From this equatorial zone, the heart of the globe, come forth two rivers of tepid water that heat the coasts of the north. They are the two currents that issue from the Gulf of Mexico and the Java

Sea. Their enormous liquid masses, fleeing ceaselessly from the equator, govern a vast assemblage of water from the poles that comes to occupy their space, and these chilled and fresher currents are constantly precipitating themselves on the electric hearth of the equator that warms and salts them anew, renewing with its systole and diastole the life of the world. The ocean struggles vainly to condense these two warm currents without ever succeeding in mingling itself with them. They are torrents of a deep blue, almost black, that flow across the cold and green waters.

The Atlantic current, upon reaching Newfoundland, divides its arms, sending one of them to the North Pole. With the other, weak and exhausted by its long journey, it modifies the temperature of the British Isles, tempering refreshingly the coasts of Norway. The Indian current that the Japanese call, because of its color, "the black river," circulates between the islands, maintaining for a longer time than the other its prodigious powers of creation and agitation which enable it to trail over the planet an enormous tail of life.

Its center is the apogee of terrestrial energy in the vegetable and animal creations, in monsters and in fish. One of its arms, escaping toward the south, goes on forming the mysterious world of the coral sea. In a space as large as four continents, the polyps, strengthened by the lukewarm water, are building up thousands of atolls, ring-shaped islands, reefs and submarine pillars that, when united together by the work of a thousand years, are going to create a new land, an exchange continent in case the human species should lose its present base in some cataclysm of Nature.

The pulse of the blue god is the tides. The earth turns towards the moon and the stars with a sympathetic rotation like that of the flowers that turn towards the sun. Its most movable part—the fluid mass of the atmosphere—dilates twice daily, swelling its cavities; and this atmospheric suction, the work of universal attraction, is reflected in the tidal waters. Closed seas, like the Mediterranean, scarcely feel its effects, the tides stopping at their door. But on the oceanic coast the marine pulsation vexes the army of the waves, hurrying them daily to their assault of the steep cliffs, making them roar with fury among the islands, promontories and straits, and impelling them to swallow up extensive lands which they return hours afterward.

This salty sea, like our body, that has a heart, a pulse and a circulation of two different bloods incessantly renewed and transformed, becomes as furious as an organic creature when the horizontal currents of its interior come to unite themselves with the vertical currents descending from the atmosphere. The violent passage of the winds, the crises of evaporation, and the obscure electrical forces produce the tempests.

These are no more than cutaneous shudderings. The storms, so deadly for mankind, merely contract the marine epidermis while the profound mass of its waters remains in murky calm, fulfilling its great function of nourishing and renewing life. Father Ocean completely ignores the existence of the human insects that dare to slip across his surface in microscopic cockle-shells. He does not inform himself as to the incidents that may be taking place upon the roof of his dwelling. His life continues on,—balanced, calm, infinite, engendering millions upon millions of beings in the thousandth part of a second.

The majesty of the Atlantic on tropical nights made Ulysses forget the wrathful storms of its black days. In the moonlight it was an immense plane of vivid silver streaked with serpentine shadows. Its soft doughlike undulations, replete with microscopic life, illuminated the nights. The infusoria, a-tremble with love, glowed with a bluish phosphorescence. The sea was like luminous milk. The foam breaking against the prow sparkled like broken fragments of electric globes.

When it was absolutely tranquil and the ship remained immovable with drooping sail, the stars passing slowly from one side of the mast to the other, the delicate medusae, that the slightest wave was able to crush, would come to the surface floating on the waters, around the island of wood. There were thousands of these umbrellas filing slowly by, green, blue, rose, with a vague coloring similar to oil-lights,—a Japanese procession seen from above, that on one side was lost in the mystery of the black waters and incessantly reappeared on the other side.

The young pilot loved navigation in a sailing ship,—the struggle with the wind, the solitude of its calms. He was far nearer the ocean here than on the bridge of a transatlantic liner. The bark did not beat the sea into such rabid foam. It slipped discreetly along as in the maritime silence of the first millennium of the new-born earth. The oceanic inhabitants approached it confidently upon seeing it rolling like a mute and inoffensive whale.

In six years Ulysses changed his boat many times. He had learned English, the universal language of the blue dominions, and was refreshing himself with a study of Maury's charts—the sailors' Bible—the patient work of an obscure genius who first snatched from ocean and atmosphere the secret of their laws.

Desirous of exploring new seas and new lands, he did not stop in the usual travel zones or ports, and the British, Norwegian, and North American captains received cordially this good-mannered official so little exacting as to salary. So Ulysses wandered over the oceans as had the king of Ithaca over the Mediterranean, guided by a fatality which impelled him with a rude push far from his country every time that he proposed to return to it. The sight of a boat anchored near by and ready to set sail for some distant port was a temptation that invariably made him forget to return to Spain.

He traveled in filthy, old, happy-go-lucky sea-tramps, in which the crews used to spread all the sails to the tempest, get drunk and fall asleep, confident that the devil, friend of the brave, would awaken them on the following morning. He lived in white boats as silent and scrupulously clean as a Dutch home, whose captains were taking wife and children with them, and where white-aproned stewardesses took care of the galley and the cleaning of the floating hearthside, sharing the dangers of the ruddy and tranquil sailors exempt from the temptation that contact with women provokes. On Sundays, under the tropic sun or in the ash-colored light of the northern heavens, the boatswain would read the Bible. The men would listen thoughtfully with uncovered heads. The women had dressed themselves in black with lace headdress and mittened hands.

He went to Newfoundland to load codfish. There is where the warm current from the Gulf of Mexico meets that from the Poles. In the meeting of these two marine rivers the infinitesimal little beings that the gulf stream drags thither die, suddenly frozen to death, and a rain of minute corpses descends across the waters. The cod gather there to gorge themselves on this manna which is so abundant that a great part of it, freed from their greedy jaws, drops to the bottom like a snowstorm of lime.

In Iceland (the *Ultima Thule* of the ancients), they showed Ulysses bits of wood that the equatorial current had brought thither from the Antilles. On the coasts of Norway, as he watched the herring during the spawning season, he marveled at the formidable fertility of the sea.

From their refuge in the shadowy depths, these fish mount to the surface moved by the message of the spring, desirous of taking their part in the joy of the world. They swim one against another, close, compact, forming strata that subdivide and float out to sea. They look like an island just coming to the surface, or a continent beginning to sink. In the narrow passages the shoals are so numerous that the waters become solidified, making almost impossible the advance of a row boat. Their number is beyond the possibilities of calculation, like the sands and the stars.

Men and carnivorous fish fall upon them, opening great furrows of destruction in their midst: but the breaches are closed instantly and the living bank continues on its way, growing denser every moment, as though defying death. The more their enemies destroy them, the more numerous they become. The thick and close columns ceaselessly reproduce themselves *en route*. At sunrise the waves are greasy and viscous,—replete with life that is fermenting rapidly. For a space of hundreds of leagues the salt ocean around them is like milk.

The fecundity of these fishy masses was placing the world in danger. Each individual could produce up to seventy thousand eggs. In a few generations there would be enough to fill the ocean, to make it solid, to make it rot, extinguishing other beings, depopulating the globe…. But death was charged with saving universal life. The cetaceans bore down upon this living density and with their

insatiable mouths devoured the nourishment by ton loads. Infinitely little fish seconded the efforts of the marine giants, stuffing themselves with the eggs of the herring. The most gluttonous fish, the cod and the hake, pursued these prairies of meat, pushing them, toward the coasts and finally dispersing them.

The cod increases its species most prodigiously, surfeiting itself upon hake, until the world is again menaced. The ocean might be converted into a mass of cod, for each one can produce as many as nine million eggs…. Mankind might be overwhelmed under the onslaught of the more fertile fishes, and the cod might maintain immense fleets, creating, besides, colonies and cities. Human generations might become exhausted without succeeding in conquering this monstrous reproduction. The great marine devourers, therefore, are those that reëstablish equilibrium and order. The sturgeon, insatiable stomach, intervenes in the oceanic banquet, relishing in the cod the concentrated substance of armies of herring. But this oviparous devourer of such great reproductive power would, in turn, continue the world danger were it not that another monster as avid in appetite as it is weak in procreation, intervenes and cuts down with one blow the ever-increasing fecundity of the ocean.

The superior glutton is the shark,—that mouth with fins, that natatory intestine which swallows with equal indifference the dead and the living, flesh and wood, cleanses the waters of life and leaves a desert behind its wriggling tail; but this destroyer brings forth only one shark that is born armed and ferocious ready from the very first moment to continue the paternal exploits, like a feudal heir.

Ferragut's wandering life as a pilot abounded in dramatic adventures,—a few always standing out clearly from his many confused recollections of exotic lands and interminable seas.

In Glasgow he embarked as second mate on an old sailing tramp that was bound for Chile, to unload coal in Valparaiso and take on saltpeter in Iquique. The crossing of the Atlantic was good, but upon leaving the Malvina Islands the boat had to go out in the teeth of a torrid, furious blast that closed the passage to the Pacific. The Straits of Magellan are for ships that are able to avail themselves at will of a propelling force. The sailboat needs a wide sea and a favorable wind in order to double Cape Horn,—the utmost point of the earth, the place of interminable and gigantic tempests.

While summer was burning in the other hemisphere, the terrible southern winter came to meet the navigators. The boat had to turn its course to the west, just as the winds were blowing from the west, barring its route.

Eight weeks passed and it was still contending with sea and tempest. The wind carried off a complete set of sails. The wooden ship, somewhat strained by this interminable struggle, commenced to leak, and the crew had to work the hand-pumps night and day. Nobody was able to sleep for many hours running. All were sick from exhaustion. The rough voice and the oaths of the captain could hardly maintain discipline. Some of the seamen lay down wishing to die, and had to be roused by blows.

Ulysses knew for the first time what waves really were. He saw mountains of water, literally mountains, pouring over the hull of the boat, their very immensity making them form great slopes on both sides of it. When the crest of one broke upon the vessel Ferragut was able to realize the monstrous weight of salt water. Neither stone nor iron had the brutal blow of this liquid force that, upon breaking, fled in torrents or dashed up in spray. They had to make openings in the bulwarks in order to provide a vent for the crushing mass.

The southern day was a livid and foggy eclipse, repeating itself for weeks and weeks without the slightest streak of clearing, as though the sun had departed from the earth forever. Not a glimmer of white existed in this tempestuous outline; always gray,—the sky, the foam, the seagulls, the snows…. From time to time the leaden veils of the tempest were torn asunder, leaving visible a terrifying apparition. Once it was black mountains with glacial winding sheets from the Straits of Beagle. And the boat tacked, fleeing away from this narrow aquatic passageway full of perilous ledges. Another time the peaks of Diego Ramirez, the most extreme point of the cape, loomed up before the prow, and the bark again tacked, fleeing from this cemetery of ships. The wind shifting, then brought their

first icebergs into view and at the same time forced them to turn back on their course in order not to be lost in the deserts of the South Pole.

Ferragut came to believe that they would never double the Cape, remaining forever in full tempest, like the accursed ship of the legend of the Flying Dutchman. The captain, a regular savage of the sea, taciturn and superstitious, shook his fist at the promontory, cursing it as an infernal divinity. He was convinced that they would never succeed in doubling it until it should be propitiated with a human offering. This Englishman appeared to Ulysses like one of those Argonauts who used to placate the wrath of the marine deities with sacrifices.

One night one of the crew was washed overboard and lost; the following day a man fell from the topmast, that no one might think salvation impossible. And as though the Southern Demon had only been awaiting this tribute, the gale from the west ceased, the bark no longer had the impassable barrier of a hostile sea before its prow, and was able to enter the Pacific, anchoring twelve days later in Valparaiso.

Ulysses appreciated now the agreeable memory that this port always leaves in the memory of sailors. It was a resting-place after the struggle of doubling the cape; it was the joy of existence, after having felt the blast of death; it was life again in the cafés and in the pleasure houses, eating and drinking until surfeited, with the stomach still suffering from the salty food and the skin still smarting from boils due to the sea-life.

His admiring gaze followed the graceful step of the women veiled in black who reminded him of his uncle, the doctor. In the nights of the *remolienda*, [a popular gathering or festival in Chile] his glance was many times distracted from the dark-hued and youthful beauties dancing the *Zamacueca* [the national dance of Chile.] in the middle of the room, to the matrons swathed in black veils, who were playing the harp and piano, accompanying the dance with languishing songs which interested him greatly. Perhaps one of these sentimental, bearded ladies might have been his aunt.

While his ship finished loading its cargo in Iquique, he came in contact with the crowd of workers from the saltpeter works,—"broken-down" [originally a term of contempt is now a complimentary by-name] Chileans, laboring men from all countries, who did not know how to spend their day's wages in the monotony of these new settlements. Their intoxication diverted itself with most mistaken magnificence. Some would let the wine run from an entire cask just to fill a single glass. Others used the bottles of champagne lined up on the shelves of the cafés as a target for their revolvers, paying cash for all that they broke.

From this trip Ferragut gained a feeling of pride and confidence that made him scornful of every danger. Afterwards he encountered the tornadoes of the Asiatic seas, those horrible circular tempests that in the northern hemisphere revolve from right to left, and in the south from left to right —rapid incidents of a few hours or days at the most. He had doubled Cape Horn in mid-winter after a struggle against the elements that had lasted two months. He had been able to run all risks; the ocean had exhausted for him all its surprises…. And yet, nevertheless, the worst of his adventures occurred in a calm sea.

He had been at sea seven years and was thinking of returning once more to Spain when, in Hamburg, he accepted the post of first mate of a swift-sailing ship that was setting out for Cameroon and German East Africa. A Norwegian sailor tried to dissuade him from this trip. It was an old ship, and they had insured it for four times its value. The captain was in league with the proprietor, who had been bankrupt many times…. And just because this voyage was so irrational, Ulysses hastened to embark. For him, prudence was merely a vulgarity, and obstacles and dangers but tempted more irresistibly his reckless daring.

One evening in the latitude of Portugal, when they were far from the regular route of navigation, a column of smoke and flames suddenly swept the deck, breaking through the hatchways and devouring the sails. While Ferragut at the head of a band of negroes was trying to get control of the fire, the captain and the German crew were escaping from the ship in two prepared lifeboats.

Ferragut felt sure that the fugitives were laughing at seeing him run about the deck that was beginning to warp and send up fire through all its cracks.

Without ever knowing exactly how, he found himself in a boat with some negroes and different objects piled together with the precipitation of flight,—a half-empty barrel of biscuits and another that contained only water.

They rowed all one night, having behind them as their unlucky star the burning boat that was sending its blood-red gleams across the water. At daybreak they noted on the sun's disk some light, black, wavy lines. It was land … but so far away!

For two days they wandered over the moving crests and gloomy valleys of the blue desert. Several times Ferragut collapsed in mortal lethargy, with his feet in the water filling the bottom of the boat. The birds of the sea were tracing spirals around this floating hearse, following it with vigorous strokes of the wing, and uttering croakings of death. The waves raised themselves slowly and sluggishly over the boat's edge as though wishing to contemplate with their sea-green eyes this medley of white and dark bodies. The ship-wrecked men rowed with nervous desperation; then they lay down inert, recognizing the uselessness of their efforts, lost in the great immensity.

The mate, drowsing on the hard stern, finally smiled with closed eyes. It was all a bad dream. He was sure of awaking in his bed surrounded with the familiar comforts of his stateroom. And when he opened his eyes, the harsh reality made him break forth into desperate orders, which the Africans obeyed as mechanically as though they were still sleeping.

"I do not want to die!… I ought not to die!" asserted his inner monitor in a brazen tone.

They shouted and made unavailing signals to distant boats that disappeared from the great watery expanse without ever seeing them. Two negroes died of the cold. Their corpses floated many hours near the boat as if unable to separate themselves from it. Then they were drawn under by an invisible tugging, and some triangular fins passed over the water's surface, cutting it like knives at the same time that its depths were darkened by swift, ebony shadows.

When at last they approached land, Ferragut realized that death was nearer here than on the high sea. The coast rose up before them like an immense wall. Seen from the boat it appeared to cover half the sky. The long oceanic undulation became a ravenous wave upon encountering the outer bulwarks of these barren islands, breaking in the depths of their caves, and forming cascades of foam that rolled around them from top to bottom, raising up furious columns of spray with the report of a cannonade.

An irresistible hand grasped the keel, making the landing a vertical one. Ferragut shot out like a projectile, falling in the foaming whirlpools and having the impression, as he sank, that men and casks together were rolling and raining into the sea.

He saw bubbling streaks of white and black hulks. He felt himself impelled by contradictory forces. Some dragged at his head and others at his feet in different directions, making him revolve like the hands of a clock. Even his thoughts were working double. "It is useless to resist," Discouragement was murmuring in his brain, while his other half was affirming desperately, "I do not want to die! … I must not die!"

Thus he lived through a few seconds that seemed to him like hours. He felt the brute force of hidden friction, then a blow in the abdomen that arrested his course between the two waters, and grasping at the irregularities of a projecting rock, he raised his head and was able to breathe. The wave was retreating, but another again overwhelmed him, detaching him from the point with its foamy churning, making him leave in the stony crevices bits of the skin of his hands, his breast, and his knees.

The oceanic suction seemed dragging him down in spite of his desperate strokes. "It's no use! I'm going to die," half of his mind was saying and at the same time his other mental hemisphere was reviewing with lightning synthesis his entire life. He saw the bearded face of the *Triton* in this supreme instant. He saw the poet Labarta just as when he was recounting to his godson the adventures of the old Ulysses, and his shipwrecked struggle with the rocky peaks and waves.

Again the marine dilatation tossed him against a rock, and again he anchored himself to it with an instinctive clutch of his hands. But before this wave retired it hurled him desperately upon another ledge, the refluent water passing back below him. Thus he struggled a long time, clinging to the rocks when the sea overwhelmed him, and crawling along upon the jutting points whenever the retiring water permitted.

Finding himself upon a projecting point of the coast, free at last from the suction of the waves, his energy suddenly disappeared. The water that dripped from his body was red, each time more red, spreading itself in rivulets over the greenish irregularities of the rock. He felt intense pain as though all his organism had lost the protection of its covering,—his raw flesh remaining exposed to the air.

He wished to get somewhere, but over his head the coast was rearing its stark bulk,—a concave and inaccessible wall. It would be impossible to get away from this spot. He had saved himself from the sea only to die stationed in front of it. His corpse would never float to an inhabited shore. The only ones that were going to know of his death were the enormous crabs scrambling over the rocky points, seeking their nourishment in the surge; the sea gulls were letting themselves drop vertically with extended wings from the heights of the steep-sloped shore. Even the smallest crustaceans had the advantage of him.

Suddenly he felt all his weakness, all his misery, while his blood continued crimsoning the little lakes among the rocks. Closing his eyes to die, he saw in the darkness a pale face, hands that were deftly weaving delicate laces, and before night should descend forever upon his eyelids, he moaned a childish cry:

"*Mamá*!… *Mamá*!…"

Three months afterward upon arriving at Barcelona, he found his mother just as he had seen her during his death-agony on the Portuguese coast…. Some fishermen had picked him up just as his life was ebbing away. During his stay in the hospital he wrote many times in a light and confident tone to Doña Cristina, pretending that he was detained by important business in Lisbon.

Upon seeing him enter his home, the good lady dropped her eternal lace-work, turned pale and greeted him with tremulous hands and troubled eyes. She must have known the truth; and if she did not know it, her motherly instinct told her when she saw Ulysses convalescent, emaciated, hovering between courageous effort and physical breakdown, just like the brave who come out of the torture chamber.

"Oh, my son!… How much longer!…"

It was time that he should bring to an end his madness for adventure, his crazy desire for attempting the impossible, and encountering the most absurd dangers. If he wished to follow the sea, very well. But let it be in respectable vessels in the service of a great company, following a career of regular promotion, and not wandering capriciously over all seas, associated with the international lawlessness that the ports offer for the reinforcement of crews. Remaining quietly at home would be best of all. Oh, what happiness if he would but stay with his mother!…

And Ulysses, to the astonishment of Doña Cristina, decided to do so. The good señora was not alone. A niece was living with her as though she were her daughter. The sailor had only to go down in the depths of his memory to recall a little tot of a girl four years old, creeping and frolicking on the shore while he, with the gravity of a man, had been listening to the old secretary of the town, as he related the past grandeurs of the Catalunian navy.

She was the daughter of a Blanes (the only poor one in the family) who had commanded his relatives' ships, and had died of yellow fever in a Central American port. Ferragut had difficulty in reconciling the little creature crawling over the sand with this same slender, olive-colored girl wearing her mass of hair like a helmet of ebony, with two little spirals escaping over the ears. Her eyes appeared to have the changing tints of the sea, sometimes black and others blue, or green and deep where the light of the sun was reflected like a point of gold.

He was attracted by her simplicity and by the timid grace of her words and smile. She was an irresistible novelty for this world-rover who had only known coppery maidens with bestial roars of laughter, yellowish Asiatics with feline gestures, or Europeans from the great ports who, at the first words, beg for drink, and sing upon the knees of the one who is treating, wearing his cap as a testimony of love.

Cinta, that was her name, appeared to have known him all his life. He had been the object of her conversations with Doña Cristina when they spent monotonous hours together weaving lace, as was the village custom. Passing her room, Ulysses noticed there some of his own portraits at the time when he was a simple apprentice aboard a transatlantic liner. Cinta had doubtless taken them from her aunt's room, for she had been admiring this adventurous cousin long before knowing him. One evening the sailor told the two women how he had been rescued on the coast of Portugal. The mother listened with averted glance, and with trembling hands moving the bobbins of her lace. Suddenly there was an outcry. It was Cinta who could not listen any longer, and Ulysses felt flattered by her tears, her convulsive laments, her eyes widened with an expression of terror.

Ferragut's mother had been greatly concerned regarding the future of this poor niece. Her only salvation was matrimony, and the good señora had focused her glances upon a certain relative a little over forty who needed this young girl to enliven his life of mature bachelorhood. He was the wise one of the family. Doña Cristina used to admire him because he was not able to read without the aid of glasses, and because he interlarded his conversation with Latin, just like the clergy. He was teaching Latin and rhetoric in the Institute of Manresa and spoke of being transferred some day to Barcelona,—glorious end of an illustrious career. Every week he escaped to the capital in order to make long visits to the notary's widow.

"He doesn't come on my account," said the good señora, "who would bother about an old woman like me?… I tell you that he is in love with Cinta, and it will be good luck for the child to marry a man so wise, so serious…."

As he listened to his mother's matrimonial schemes, Ulysses began to wonder which of a professor of rhetoric's bones a sailor might break without incurring too much responsibility.

One day Cinta was looking all over the house for a dark, worn-out thimble that she had been using for many years. Suddenly she ceased her search, blushed and dropped her eyes. Her glance had met an evasive look on her cousin's face. He had it. In Ulysses' room might be seen ribbons, skeins of silk, an old fan—all deposited in books and papers by the same mysterious reflex that had drawn his portraits from his mother's to his cousin's room.

The sailor now liked to remain at home passing long hours meditating with his elbows on the table, but at the same time attentive to the rustling of light steps that could be heard from time to time in the near-by hallway. He knew about everything,—spherical and rectangular trigonometry, cosmography, the laws of the winds and the tempest, the latest oceanographic discoveries—but who could teach him the approved form of addressing a maiden without frightening her?… Where the deuce could a body learn the art of proposing to a shy girl?…

For him, doubts were never very long nor painful affairs. Forward march! Let every one get out of such matters as best he could. And one evening when Cinta was going from the parlor to her aunt's bedroom in order to bring her a devotional book, she collided with Ulysses in the passageway.

If she had not known him, she might have trembled for her existence. She felt herself grasped by a pair of powerful hands that lifted her up from the floor. Then an avid mouth stamped upon hers two aggressive kisses. "Take that and that!"… Ferragut repented on seeing his cousin trembling against the wall, as pale as death, her eyes filled with tears.

"I have hurt you. I am a brute … a brute!"

He almost fell on his knees, imploring her pardon; he clenched his fists as if he were going to strike himself, punishing himself for his audacity. But she would not let him continue…. "No, No! …" And while she was moaning this protest, her arms were forming a ring around Ulysses' neck. Her

head drooped toward his, seeking the shelter of his shoulder. A little mouth united itself modestly to that of the sailor, and at the same time his beard was moistened with a shower of tears.

And they said no more about it.

When, weeks afterward, Doña Cristina heard her son's petition, her first movement was one of protest. A mother listens with benevolent appreciation to any request for the hand of her daughter, but she is ambitious and exacting where her son is concerned. She had dreamed of something so much more brilliant; but her indecision was short. That timid girl was perhaps the best companion for Ulysses, after all. Furthermore the child was well suited to be the wife of a man of the sea, having seen its life from her infancy…. Good-by Professor!

They were married. Soon afterwards Ferragut, who was not able to lead an inactive life, returned to the sea, but as first officer of a transatlantic steamer that made regular trips to South America. To him this seemed like being employed in a floating office, visiting the same ports and invariably repeating the same duties. His mother was extremely proud to see him in uniform. Cinta fixed her gaze on the almanac as the wife of a clerk fixes it on the clock. She had the certainty that when three months should have passed by she would see him reappear, coming from the other side of the world laden down with exotic gifts, just as a husband who returns from the office with a bouquet bought in the street.

Upon his return from his first two voyages, she went to meet him on the wharf, her eager glance searching for his blue coat and his cap with its band of gold among the transatlantic passengers fluttering about the decks, rejoicing at their arrival in Europe.

On the following trip, Doña Cristina obliged her to remain at home, fearing that the excitement and the crowds at the harbor might affect her approaching maternity. After that on each of his return trips Ferragut saw a new son, although always the same one; first it was a bundle of batiste and lace carried by a showily-uniformed nurse; then by the time he was captain of the transatlantic liner, a little cherub in short skirts, chubby-cheeked, with a round head covered with a silky down, holding out its little arms to him; finally a boy who was beginning to go to school and at sight of his father would grasp his hard right hand, admiring him with his great eyes, as though he saw in his person the concentrated perfection of all the forces of the universe.

Don Pedro, the professor, continued visiting the house of Doña Cristina, although with less assiduity. He had the resigned and coldly wrathful attitude of the man who believes that he has arrived too late and is convinced that his bad luck was merely the result of his carelessness…. If he had only spoken before! His masculine self-importance never permitted him to doubt that the young girl would have accepted him jubilantly.

In spite of this conviction, he was not able to refrain at times from a certain ironical aggressiveness which expressed itself by inventing classic nicknames. The young wife of Ulysses, bending over her lace-making, was Penelope awaiting the return of her wandering husband.

Doña Cristina accepted this nickname because she knew vaguely that Penelope was a queen of good habits. But the day that the professor, by logical deduction, called Cinta's son Telemachus, the grandmother protested.

"He is named Esteban after his grandfather…. Telemachus is nothing but a theatrical name."

On one of his voyages Ulysses took advantage of a four-hour stop in the port of Valencia to see his godfather. From time to time he had been receiving letters from the poet,—each one shorter and sadder,—written in a trembling script that announced his age and increasing infirmity.

Upon entering the office Ferragut felt just like the legendary sleepers who believe themselves awaking after a few hours of sleep when they have really been dozing for dozens of years. Everything there was still just as it was in his infancy:—the busts of the great poets on the top of the book-cases, the wreaths in their glass cases, the jewels and statuettes, prizes for successful poems—were still in their crystal cabinets or resting on the same pedestals; the books in their resplendent bindings formed their customary close battalions the length of the bookcases. But the whiteness of the busts

had taken on the color of chocolate, the bronzes were reddened by oxidation, the gold had turned greenish, and the wreaths were losing their leaves. It seemed as though ashes might have rained down upon perpetuity.

The occupants of this spell-bound dwelling presented the same aspect of neglect and deterioration. Ulysses found the poet thin and yellow, with a long white beard, with one eye almost closed and the other very widely opened. Upon seeing the young officer, broad-chested, vigorous and bronzed, Labarta, who was huddled in a great arm chair, began to cry with a childish hiccough as though he were weeping over the misery of human illusions, over the brevity of a deceptive life that necessitates continual renovation.

Ferragut found even greater difficulty in recognizing the little and shrunken señora who was near the poet. Her flabby flesh was hanging from her skeleton like the ragged fringe of past splendor; her head was small; her face had the wrinkled surface of a winter apple or plum, or of all the fruits that shrink and wither when they lose their juices. "Doña Pepa!…" The two old people were thee-ing and thou-ing each other with the tranquil non-morality of those that realize that they are very near to death, and forget the tremors and scruples of a life crumbling behind them.

The sailor shrewdly suspected that all this physical misery was the sad finale of an absurd, happy-go-lucky and childish dietary,—sweets serving as the basis of nutrition, great heavy rice dishes as a daily course, watermelons and cantaloupes filling in the space between meals, topped with ices served in enormous glasses and sending out a perfume of honeyed snow.

The two told him, sighing, of their infirmities, which they thought incomprehensible, attributing them to the ignorance of the doctors. It was really the morbid wasting away that suddenly attacks people of the abundant, food-yielding countries. Their life was one continual stream of liquid sugar…. And yet Ferragut could easily guess the disobedience of the two old folks to the discipline of diet, their childish deceptions, their cunning in order to enjoy alone the fruits and syrups which were the enchantment of their existence.

The interview was a short one. The captain had to return to the port of Grao where his steamer was awaiting him, ready to weigh anchor for South America.

The poet wept again, kissing his god-son. He never would see again this Colossus who seemed to repel his weak embraces with the bellows of his respiration.

"Ulysses, my son!… Always think of Valencia…. Do for her all that you can…. Keep her ever in mind, always Valencia!"

He promised all that the poet wished without understanding exactly what it was that Valencia might expect from him, a simple sailor, wandering over all the seas. Labarta wished to accompany him to the door but he sank down in his seat, obedient to the affectionate despotism of his companion who was always fearing the greatest catastrophes for him.

Poor Doña Pepa!… Ferragut felt inclined to laugh and to weep at the same time upon receiving a kiss from, her withered mouth whose down had turned into pin points. It was the kiss of an old beauty who remembers the gallantry of a youthful lover, the kiss of a childless woman caressing the son she might have had.

"Poor unhappy Carmelo!… He no longer writes, he no longer reads….

Ay! what will ever become of me?…"

She always spoke of the poet's failing powers with the commiseration of a strong and healthy person, and she became terrified when thinking of the years in which she might survive her lord. Taken up with caring for him, she never even glanced at herself.

A year afterward, on returning from the Philippines, the captain found a letter from his god-father awaiting him at Port Said. Doña Pepa had died, and Labarta, working off the tearful heaviness of his low spirits, bade her farewell in a long canticle. Ulysses ran his eyes over the enclosed newspaper clipping containing the last verses of the poet. The stanzas were in Castilian. A bad sign!… After that there could be no doubt that his end must be very near.

Ferragut never again had an opportunity to see his god-father, who died while he was on one of his trips. Upon disembarking at Barcelona, Doña Cristina handed him a letter written by the poet almost in his death-agony. "Valencia, my son! Always Valencia!" And after repeating this recommendation many times, he announced that he had made his god-son his heir.

The books, the statues, all the glorious souvenirs of the poet-laureate, came to Barcelona to adorn the sailor's home. The little Telemachus amused himself pulling apart the old wreaths of the troubador, and tearing out the old prints from his volumes with the inconsequence of a lively child whose father is very far away and who knows that he is idolized by two indulgent ladies. Besides his trophies, the poet left Ulysses an old house in Valencia, some real estate and a certain amount in negotiable securities,—total, thirty thousand dollars.

The other guardian of his infancy, the vigorous *Triton*, seemed to be unaffected by the passing of the years. Upon his return to Barcelona, Ferragut frequently found him installed in his home, in mute hostility to Doña Cristina, devoting to Cinta and her son a part of the affection that he had formerly lavished upon Ulysses alone.

He was very desirous that the little Esteban should know the home of his great grandparents.

"You will let me have him?… You know well enough," he coaxed, "that down in the *Marina* men become as strong as though made of bronze. Surely you will let me have him?…"

But he quailed before the indignant gesture of the suave Doña Cristina. Entrust her grandson to the *Triton*, and let him awaken in him the love of maritime adventure, as he had done with Ulysses? … Behind me, thou blue devil!

The doctor used to wander around bewildered by the port of Barcelona…. Too much noisy bustle, too much movement! Walking proudly along by the side of Ulysses, he loved to recount to him the adventures of his life as a sailor and cosmopolitan vagabond. He considered his nephew the greatest of the Ferraguts, a true man of the sea like his ancestors but with the title of captain;—an adventurous rover over all oceans, as he had been, but with a place on the bridge, invested with the absolute command that responsibility and danger confer. When Ulysses reëmbarked, the *Triton* would take himself off to his own dominions.

"It will be next time, sure!" he would say in order to console himself for having to part with his nephew's son; and after a few months had passed by, he would reappear, each time larger, uglier, more tanned, with a silent smile which broke into words before Ulysses just as tempestuous clouds break forth in thunder claps.

Upon his return from a trip to the Black Sea, Doña Cristina announced to her son: "Your uncle has died."

The pious señora lamented as a Christian the departure of her brother-in-law, dedicating a part of her prayers to him; but she insisted with a certain cruelty in giving an account of his sad end, for she had never been able to pardon his fatal intervention in the destiny of Ulysses. He had died as he had lived,—in the sea, a victim, of his own rashness, without confession, just like any pagan.

Another legacy thus fell to Ferragut…. His uncle had gone out swimming one sunny, winter morning and had never come back. The old folks on the shore had their way of explaining how the accident had happened,—a fainting spell probably, a clash against the rocks. The *Dotor* was still vigorous, but the years do not pass without leaving their footprints. Some believed that he must have had a struggle with a shark or some other of the carnivorous fish that abound in the Mediterranean waters. In vain the fishermen guided their skiffs through all the twisting entrances and exits of the waters around the promontory, exploring the gloomy caves and the lower depths of crystalline transparency. No one was ever able to find the *Triton's* body.

Ferragut recalled the cortege of Aphrodite which the doctor had so often described to him on summer evenings, by the light of the far-away gleam of the lighthouse. Perhaps he had come upon that gay retinue of nereids, joining it forever!

This absurd supposition that Ulysses mentally formulated with a sad and incredulous smile, frequently recurred in the simple thoughts of many of the people of the *Marina*.

They refused to believe in his death. A wizard is never drowned. He must have found down below something very interesting and when he got tired of living in the green depths, he would probably some day come swimming back home.

No: the *Dotor* had not died.

And for many years afterwards the women who were going along the coast at nightfall would quicken their steps, crossing themselves upon distinguishing on the dark waters a bit of wood or a bunch of sea weed. They feared that suddenly would spring forth the *Triton*, bearded, dripping, spouting, returning from his excursion into the mysterious depths of the sea.

CHAPTER IV
FREYA

The name of Ulysses Ferragut began to be famous among the captains of the Spanish ports, although the nautical adventures of his early days contributed very little to this popularity. The most of them had encountered greater dangers, but they appreciated him because of the instinctive respect that energetic and simple men have for an intelligence which they consider superior to their own. Reading nothing except what pertained to their career, they used to speak with consternation of the numerous books that filled Ferragut's stateroom, many of them upon matters which appeared to them most mysterious. Some even made inexact statements in order to enlarge the prestige of their comrade.

"He knows much…. He is a lawyer as well as a sailor."

Consideration of his fortune also contributed to the general appreciation. He was an important share-holder of the company by which he was employed. His companions loved to calculate with proud exaggeration the riches of his mother, piling it up into millions.

He met friends on every ship carrying the Spanish flag, whatever might be its home port or the nationality of its crews.

They all liked him:—the Basque captains, economical in words, rude and sparing in affectionate discourse; the Asturian and Galician captains, self-confident and spendthrift in strange contrast to their sobriety and avaricious character when ashore; the Andalusian captains, reflecting in their witty talk white Cadiz and its luminous wines; the Valencian captains who talk of politics on the bridge, imagining that they are going to become the navy of a future republic; and the captains from Catalunia and Mallorca as thoroughly acquainted with business affairs as are their ship-owners. Whenever necessity obliged them to defend their rights, they immediately thought of Ulysses. Nobody could write as he could.

The old mates who had worked their way up from the lower ranks, men of the sea who had begun their career on coasting vessels and could only with great difficulty adjust their practical knowledge to the handling of books, used to speak of Ferragut with pride.

"They say that men of the sea are an uncultivated people…. Here they have *Don Luis* who is one of us. They may ask him whatever they wish…. A real sage!"

The name of Ulysses always made them stammer. They believed it a nickname, and not wishing to show any lack of respect, they had finally transformed it into "Don Luis." For some of them, Ferragut's only defect was his good luck. So far not a single boat of which he had had command had been lost. And every sailor constantly on the sea ought to have at least one of these misfortunes in his history in order to be a real captain. Only landlubbers never lose their boats.

When his mother died, Ulysses was very undecided about the future, not knowing whether to continue his sea life, or undertake something entirely different. His relatives at Barcelona, merchants quick to understand and appraise a fortune, added up what the notary and his wife had left him and put with that what Labarta and the doctor had contributed, until it amounted to a million pesetas…. And was a man with as much money as that to go on living like a poor captain dependent upon wages to maintain his family!…

His cousin, Joaquin Blanes, proprietor of a factory for knit goods, urged him repeatedly to follow his example. He ought to remain on shore and invest his capital in Catalan industry. Ulysses belonged to this country both on his mother's side and because he was born in the neighboring land of Valencia. There was great need of men of fortune and energy to take part in the government. Blanes was entering local politics with the enthusiasm of a middle-class man for novel adventure.

Cinta never said a word to influence her husband. She was the daughter of a sailor and had accepted the life of a sailor's wife. Furthermore, she looked upon matrimony in the light of the old

familiar traditions:—the woman absolute mistress of the interior of the home, but trusting outside affairs to the will of the lord, the warrior, the head of the hearth, without permitting herself opinions or objections to their acts.

It was Ulysses, therefore, who decided to abandon the seafaring life. Worked upon by the suggestions of his cousins, it needed only a little dispute with one of the directors of the shipping firm to make him hand in his resignation, and refuse to reconsider it, although urged by the protests and entreaties of the other stockholders.

In the first months of his existence ashore, he was amazed at the desperate immovability of everything. The world was made up of revolting rigidity and solidity. He felt almost nauseated at seeing all his possessions remain just where he left them, without the slightest fluctuation, or the least bit of casual caprice.

In the mornings upon opening his eyes, he at first experienced the sweet sensation of irresponsible liberty. Nothing affected the fate of that house. The lives of those that were sleeping on the other floors above and below him had not been entrusted to his vigilance…. But in a few days he began to feel that there was something lacking, something which had been one of the greatest satisfactions of his existence,—the sensation of power, the enjoyment of command.

Two maids were now always hastening to him with a frightened air at the sound of his voice, or the ringing of his bell. That was all that was left to him who had commanded dozens of men of such ugliness of temper that they struck terror to all beholders when they went ashore in the ports. Nobody consulted him now, while on the sea everybody was seeking his counsel and many times had to interrupt his sleep. The house could go on without his making the rounds daily from the cellars to the roof, overseeing even the slightest spigot. The women who cleaned it in the mornings with their brooms were always obliging him to flee from his office. He was not permitted to make any comment nor could he extend a gold-striped arm as when he used to scold the barefooted, bare-breasted deck-swabbers, insisting that the deck should be as clean as the saloon. He felt himself belittled, laid to one side. He thought of Hercules dressed as a woman and spinning wool. His love of family life had made him renounce that of a powerful man.

Only the considerate treatment of his wife, who surrounded him with assiduous care as though wishing to compensate for their long separations, made the situation bearable. Furthermore, his conscience was enjoying a certain satisfaction in being a land-father, taking much interest in the life of his son who was beginning to prepare to enter the institute, looking over his books, and aiding him in understanding the notes.

But even these pleasures were not of long duration. The family gatherings in his home or at his relatives' bored him unspeakably; so did the conversations with his cousins and nephews about profits and business deals, or about the defects of centralized tyranny. According to them, all the calamities of heaven and earth were coming from Madrid. The governor of the province was the "Consul of Spain."

These merchants interrupted their criticisms only to listen in religious silence to Wagner's music banged out on the piano by the girls of the family. A friend with a tenor voice used to sing *Lohengrin* in Catalan. Enthusiasm made the most excitable roar, "the hymn … the hymn!" It was not possible to misunderstand. For them there was only one hymn in existence, and in a trilling undertone they would accompany the liturgic music of *Los Segadores* (The Reapers). [The revolutionary song of Catalunia, originated by a band of reapers in the seventeenth century.]

Ulysses used to recall with homesickness his life as commander of a transatlantic liner,—a wide, universal life of incessant and varied horizons, and cosmopolitan crowds. He could see himself detained on deck by groups of elegant maidens who would beg him for new dances in the coming week. His footsteps were surrounded with white fluttering skirts, veils that waved like colored clouds, laughter and trills, Spanish chatter that appeared set to music:—all the frolicsome jargon of a cage of tropical birds.

Ex-presidents of the South American republics,—generals or doctors who were going to Europe to rest,—used to relate to him on the bridge, with Napoleonic gravity, the principal events in their history. The business men starting out for America confided to him their stupendous plans:—rivers turned from their courses, railroads built across the virgin forests, monstrous electric forces extracted from huge waterfalls varying in breadth, cities vomited from the desert in a few weeks, all the marvels of an adolescent world that desires to realize whatever its youthful imagination may conceive. He was the demi-urge of this little floating world: he disposed of joy and love as the spirit moved him.

In the scorching evenings around the equator, it was enough for him to give an order to rouse things and beings from their brutish drowsiness. "Let the music begin, and refreshments be served." And in a few moments dancers would be revolving the whole length of the deck, and smiling lips and eyes would become brilliantly alight with illusion and desire. Behind him, his praises were always being sounded. The matrons found him very distinguished. "It is plain to be seen that he is an exceptional person." Stewards and crew circulated exaggerated accounts of his riches and his studies. Some young girls sailing for Europe with imaginations seething with romance were very much aghast to learn that the hero was married and had a son. The solitary ladies stretched out on a *chaise-longue,* book in hand, upon seeing him would arrange the corolla of their petticoats, hiding their legs with so much precipitation that it always left them more uncovered; then fixing upon him a languishing glance, they would begin a dialogue always in the same way.

"How is it that any one so young as you has already become a captain?…"

Ah, the misery of it!… He who had gallantly passed many years cruising from one extreme of the Atlantic to the other with a rich, gay, perfumed world, at times resisting feminine caprice through mere prudence, yielding at others with the secrecy of a discreet sailor, now found himself with no other admirers than the mediocre tribe of the Blanes, with no other hallucinations than those which his cousin the manufacturer might suggest, when waxing enthusiastic because the great apostles of politics were taking a certain interest in the captain.

Every morning, on awaking, his taste now received a rude shock. The first thing that he contemplated was a room "without personality," a dwelling that was not characteristic of him in any way, arranged by the maids with excessive cleanliness and a lack of logic that was constantly changing the situation of his things.

He recalled with longing his compact and well-ordered stateroom where there was not a piece of furniture that could escape his glance nor a drawer whose contents he did not know down to the slightest detail. His body was accustomed to slip without embarrassment through the spaces of his cabin furnishings. He had adapted himself to all incoming and outgoing angles just as the body of the mollusk adapts itself to the winding curves of its shells. The cabin seemed formed by the secretions of his being. It was a covering, a sheath, that went with him from one extreme of the ocean to the other, heating itself with the high temperature of the tropics, or becoming as cosy as an Esquimo hut on approaching the polar seas.

His love for it was somewhat like that which the friar has for his cell; but this cell was a secular one, and entering it after a tempestuous night on the bridge, or a trip ashore in most curious and foreign ports, he found it always the same, with his papers and books untouched on the table, his clothes hanging from their hooks, his photographs fixed on the walls. The daily spectacle of seas and lands was always changing—the temperature, the course of the stars, and the people that one week were bundled up in winter greatcoats, and were clad in white the week after, hunting the heavens for the new stars of another hemisphere…. Yet his cozy little stateroom was always the same, as though it were the corner of a planet apart, unaffected by the variations of this world.

Upon awaking in it, he found himself every morning enwrapped in a greenish and bland atmosphere as though he might have been sleeping in the bottom of an enchanted lake. The sun traced over the whiteness of his ceiling and sheets a restless network of gold whose meshes constantly succeeded each other. This was the reflection of the invisible water. When his ship was immovable

in the ports, there always came in through his window the whirling noise of the cranes, the cries of the stevedores and the voices of those who were in the neighboring vessels. On the high sea the cool and murmuring silence of immensity used to fill his sleeping room. A wind of infinite purity that came perhaps from the other side of the planet—slipping past thousands of leagues, over the salty deserts without touching a single bit of corruption—would come stealing into Ferragut's throat like an effervescent wine. His chest always expanded to the impulses of this life-giving draught as his eyes roved over the sparkling, luminous blue of the horizon.

Here in his home, the first thing that he saw through the window upon awaking was a Catalunian edifice, rich and monstrous, like the palaces that the hypnotist evolves in his dreams,—an amalgamation of Persian flowers, Gothic columns, trunks of trees, with quadrupeds, reptiles and snails among the cement foliage. The paving wafted up to him through its drains the fetidity of sewers dry for lack of water; the balconies shed the dust of shaken rugs; the absurd palace appropriated, with the insolence of the new-rich, all the heaven and sun that used to belong to Ferragut.

One night he surprised his relatives by informing them that he was about to return to the sea. Cinta assented to this resolution in painful silence, as though she had foreseen it long before. It was something inevitable and fatal that she must accept. The manufacturer, Blanes, stammered with astonishment. Return to his life of adventures, when the great gentlemen of the district were becoming interested in his personality!… Perhaps in the next elections they might have made him a member of the municipal council!

Ferragut laughed at his cousin's simplicity. He wanted to command a vessel again, but one of his own, without being obliged to consider the restrictions of the ship owners. He could permit himself this luxury. It would be like an enormous yacht, ready to set forth according to his tastes and convenience, yet at the same time bringing him in untold profits. Perhaps his son might in time become director of a maritime company, this first ship laying the foundation of an enormous fleet in the years to come.

He knew every port in the world, every highway of traffic, and he would be able to find the places where, lacking transportation facilities, they paid the highest freight rates. Until now he had been a salaried man, brave and care-free. He was going to begin an absolutely independent life as a speculator of the sea.

Two months afterwards he wrote from England saying that he had bought the *Fingal*, a mail packet of three thousand tons that had made trips twice a week between London and a port of Scotland.

Ulysses appeared highly delighted with the cheapness of his acquisition. The *Fingal* had been the property of a Scotch captain who, in spite of his long illness, had never wished to give up command, dying aboard his vessel. His heirs, inland men tired by their long wait, were anxious to get rid of it at any price.

When the new proprietor entered the aft saloon surrounded with staterooms,—the only habitable place in the ship,—memories of the dead came forth to meet him. On the wall-panels were painted the heroes of the Scotch Iliad,—the bard Ossian with his harp, Malvina with the round arms and waving golden tresses, the undaunted warriors with their winged helmets and protruding biceps, exchanging gashes on their shields while awaking the echoes of the green lochs.

A deep and spongy arm chair opened its arms before a stove. There the owner of the ship had passed his last years, sick at heart and with swollen legs, directing from his seat a course that was repeated every week across the foggy winter waves tossing bits of ice snatched from the icebergs. Near the stove was a piano and upon its top an orderly collection of musical scores yellowed by time, —*La Sonnambula, Lucia*, Romances of Tosti, Neapolitan songs, breezy and graceful melodies that the old chords of the instrument sent forth with the fragile and crystalline tinkling of an old music box. The poor old captain with sick heart and legs of stone had always turned to the sea of light for

distraction. It was music that made appear in the foggy heavens the peaks of Sorrento covered with orange and lemon trees, and the coast of Sicily, perfumed by its flaming flora.

Ferragut manned his boat with friendly people. His first mate was a pilot who had begun his career in a fishing smack. He came from the same village as Ulysses' ancestors, and he remembered the *Dotor* with respect and admiration. He had known this new captain when he was a little fellow and used to go fishing with his uncle. In those days Toni was already a sailor on a coast-trading vessel, and his superiority in years had then justified his using the familiar thee and thou when talking with the lad Ulysses.

Finding himself now under his orders, he wished to change his mode of address, but the captain would not permit it. Perhaps he and Toni were distant relatives,—all those living in that village of the *Marina* had become related through long centuries of isolated existence and common danger. The entire crew, from the first engineer to the lowest seaman, showed an equal familiarity in this respect. Some were from the same land as the captain, others had been sailing a long time under his orders.

As shipowner, Ulysses now underwent numberless experiences whose existence he had never before suspected. He went through the anguishing transformation of the actor who becomes a theatrical manager, of the author who branches out into publishing, of the engineer with a hobby for odd inventions who becomes the proprietor of a factory. His romantic love for the sea and its adventures was now overshadowed by the price and consumption of coal, by the maddening competition that lowered freight rates, and by the search for new ports with fast and remunerative freight.

The *Fingal* which had been rebaptized by its new proprietor with the name of *Mare Nostrum*, in memory of his uncle, turned out to be a dubious purchase in spite of its low price. As a navigator Ulysses had been most enthusiastic upon beholding its high and sharp prow disposed to confront the worst seas, the slenderness of the swift craft, its machinery, excessively powerful for a freight steamer, —all the conditions that had made it a mail packet for so many years. It consumed too much fuel to be a profitable investment as a transport of merchandise. The captain during his navigation could now think only of the ravenous appetite of the boilers. It always seemed to him that the *Mare Nostrum* was speeding along with excess steam.

"Half speed!" he would shout down the tube to his first engineer.

But in spite of this and many other precautions, the expense for fuel was enormously disproportioned to the tonnage of the vessel. The boat was eating up all the profits. Its speed was insignificant compared with that of a transatlantic steamer, though absurd compared with that of the merchant vessels of great hulls and little machinery that were going around soliciting cargo at any price, from all points.

A slave of the superiority of his vessel and in continual struggle with it, Ferragut had to make great efforts in order to continue sailing without actual heavy loss. All the waters of the planet now saw the *Mare Nostrum* specializing in the rarest kind of transportation. Thanks to this expedient, the Spanish flag waved in ports that had never seen it before.

Under this banner, he made trips through the solitary seas of Syria and Asia Minor, skirting coasts where the novelty of a ship with a smoke stack made the people of the Arabian villages run together in crowds. He disembarked in Phoenician and Greek ports choked up with sand that had left only a few huts at the foot of mountains of ruins, and where columns of marble were still sticking up like trunks of lopped-off palm trees. He anchored near to the terrible breakers of the western coast of Africa under a sun which scorched the deck, in order to take on board india-rubber, ostrich feathers, and elephants' tusks, brought out in long pirogues by negro oarsmen, from a river filled with crocodiles and hippopotamuses, and bordered by groups of huts with straw cones for roofs.

When there were no more of these extraordinary voyages, the *Mare Nostrum* turned its course towards South America, resigning itself to competition in rates with the English and Scandinavians who are the muleteers of the ocean. His tonnage and draught permitted him to sail up the great rivers

of North America, even reaching the cities of the remote interior where rows of factory chimneys smoked on the border of a fresh-water lake converted into a port.

He sailed up the ruddy Paraná to Rosario and Colastiné, in order to load Argentine wheat; he anchored in the amber waters of Uruguay opposite Paysandú and Fray Ventos, taking on board hides destined to Europe and salt for the Antilles. From the Pacific he sailed up the Guayas bordered with an equatorial vegetation, in search of cocoa from Guayaquil. His prow cut the infinite sheet of the Amazon,—dislodging gigantic tree-trunks dragged down by the inundations of the virgin forest—in order to anchor opposite Pará or Manaos, taking on cargoes of tobacco and coffee. He even carried from Germany implements of war for the revolutionists of a little republic.

These trips that in other times would have awakened Ferragut's enthusiasm now resulted disastrously. After having paid all expenses and lived with maddening economy, there was scarcely anything left for the owner. Each time the freight boats were more numerous and the transportation rates cheaper. Ulysses with his elegant *Mare Nostrum* could not compete with the southern captains, drunken and taciturn, eager to accept freight at any price in order to fill their miserable transports crawling across the ocean at the speed of a tortoise.

"I can do no more," he said sadly to his mate. "I shall simply ruin my son. If anybody will buy the *Mare Nostrum,* I'm going to sell it."

On one of his fruitless expeditions, just when he was most discouraged, some unexpected news changed the situation for him. They had just arrived at Teneriffe with maize and bales of dry alfalfa from Argentina.

When Toni returned aboard after having cleared the vessel, he shouted in Valencian, the language of intimacy, "War, *Che*!"

Ulysses, who was pacing the bridge, received the news with indifference. "War?… What war is that?…" But upon learning that Germany and Austria had begun hostilities with France and Russia, and that England was just intervening in behalf of Belgium, the captain began quickly to calculate the political consequences of this conflagration. He could see nothing else.

Toni, less disinterested, spoke of the future of the vessel…. Their misery was at last at an end! Freightage at thirteen shillings a ton was going to be henceforth but a disgraceful memory. They would no longer have to plead for freight from port to port as though begging alms. Now they were on the point of achieving importance, and were going to find themselves solicited by consignors and disdainful merchants. The *Mare Nostrum* was going to be worth its weight in gold.

Such predictions, though Ferragut refused to accept them, began to be fulfilled in a very short time. Ships on the ocean routes suddenly became very scarce. Some of them were taking refuge in the nearest neutral ports, fearing the enemy's cruisers. The greater part were mobilized by their governments for the enormous transportation of material that modern war exacts. The German corsairs, craftily taking advantage of the situation, were increasing with their captures the panic of the merchant marine.

The price of freight leaped from thirteen shillings a ton to fifty, then to seventy, and a few days later to a hundred. It couldn't climb any further, according to Captain Ferragut.

"It will climb higher yet," affirmed the first officer with cruel joy. "We shall see tonnage at a hundred and fifty, at two hundred…. We are going to become rich!…"

And Toni always used the plural in speaking of the future riches without its ever occurring to him to ask his captain a penny more than the forty-five dollars that he was receiving each month. Ferragut's fortune and that of the ship, he invariably looked upon as his own, considering himself lucky if he was not out of tobacco, and could send his entire wages home to his wife and children living down there in the *Marina*.

His ambition was that of all modest sailors—to buy a plot of land and become an agriculturist in his old age. The Basque pilots used to dream of prairies and apple orchards, a little cottage on a peak and many cows. He pictured to himself a vineyard on the coast, a little white dwelling with an

arbor under whose shade he could smoke his pipe while all his family, children and grandchildren, were spreading out the harvest of raisins on the frame-hurdles.

A familiar admiration like that of an ancient squire for his paladin, or of an old subaltern for a superior officer, bound him to Ferragut. The books that filled the captain's stateroom recalled his agonies upon being examined in Cartagena for his license as a pilot. The grave gentlemen of the tribunal had made him turn pale and stutter like a child before the logarithms and formulas of trigonometry. But just let them consult *him* on practical matters and his skill as master of a bark habituated to all the dangers of the sea, and he would reply with the self-possession of a sage!

In the most difficult perils,—days of storm and sinister shoals in the neighborhood of the treacherous coasts, Ferragut could decide to rest only when Toni replaced him on the bridge. With him, he had no fear that, through carelessness, a wave would sweep across the deck and stop the machinery, or that an invisible ledge would drive its stony point into the vitals of the vessel. He held the helm to the course indicated. Silent and immovable he stood, as though sleeping on his feet; but at the right moment he always uttered the brief word of command.

He was very skinny, with the dried up leanness of the bronzed Mediterranean. The salt wind more than his years had tanned his face, wrinkling it with deep crevices. A capricious coloring had darkened the depths of these cracks while the part exposed to the sun appeared washed several shades lighter. His short stiff beard extended over all the furrows and crests of his skin. Furthermore, he had hair in his ears, hair in the nasal passages, coarse and vibrating growths, ready to tremble in moments of wrath or admiration…. But this ugliness disappeared under the light of his little eyes with pupils between green and olive color,—mild eyes with a canine expression of resignation, when the captain made fun of his beliefs.

Toni was a "man of ideas." Ferragut only knew of his having four or five, but they were hard, crystallized, tenacious, like the mollusks that stick to the rocks and eventually become a part of the stony excrescence. He had acquired them in twenty-five years of Mediterranean coast service by reading all the periodicals of lyric radicalism that were thrust upon him on entering the harbors. Furthermore, at the end of every journey was Marseilles; and in one of its little side alleys was a red room adorned with symbolic columns where sailors of all races and tongues met together, fraternally understanding each other by means of mysterious signs and ritual words.

Whenever Toni entered a South American port after a long absence, he particularly admired the rapid progress of the new villages,—enormous wharves constructed within the year, interminable streets that were not in existence on his former voyage, shady and elegant parks, replacing old, dried-up lakes.

"That's only natural," he would affirm roundly. "With good reason they are republics!"

Upon entering the Spanish ports, the slightest deviation in the docking, a discussion with the official employees, the lack of space for a good anchorage would make him smile with bitterness. "Unfortunate country!… Everything here is the work of the altar and the throne!"

In the Thames, and before the docks of Hamburg, Captain Ferragut would chaff his subordinate.

"There's no republic here, Toni!… But, nevertheless this is rather worth while."

But Toni never gave in. He would contract his hairy visage, making a mental effort to formulate his vague ideas, clothing them with words. In the very background of these grandeurs existed the confirmation of the idea he was so vainly trying to express. Finally he admitted himself checkmated, but not convinced.

"I don't know how to explain it; I haven't the words for it … but … it's the *people* who are doing all this."

Upon receiving in Teneriffe the news of war, he summed up all his doctrines with the terseness of a victor.

"In Europe there are too many kings…. If all the nations could be republics!… This calamity just had to come!"

And this time Ferragut did not venture to ridicule the single-mindedness of his second.

All the people of the *Mare Nostrum* showed great enthusiasm over the new business aspect of things. The seamen who in former voyages were taciturn, as though foreseeing the ruin or exhaustion of their captain, were now working as eagerly as though they were going to participate in the profits.

In the forward mess room many of them set themselves to work on commercial calculations. The first trip of the war would be equal to ten of their former ones; the second, perhaps, might bring in the profit of twenty. And recalling their former bad business ventures, they rejoiced for Ferragut, with the same disinterestedness as the first officer. The engineers were no longer called to the captain's cabin in order to contrive new economies in fuel. They had to take advantage of the time and opportunity; and the *Mare Nostrum* was now going at full steam, making fourteen knots an hour, like a passenger vessel, stopping only when its course was blocked at the entrance of the Mediterranean by an English destroyer, sending out an officer to make sure that they were not carrying on board enemy passengers.

Abundance reigned equally between bridge and forecastle where were the sailors' quarters and the galley,—the space respected by every one on the boat as the incontestable realm of Uncle Caragol.

This old man, nicknamed "Caracol" (snail), another old friend of Ferragut's, was the ship's cook, and, although he did not dare to talk as familiarly to the captain as in former times, the tone of his voice made it understood that mentally he was continuing to use the old, affectionate form. He had known Ulysses when he used to run away from the classrooms to row in the harbor and, on account of the bad state of his eyes, he had finally retired from the navigation of coast vessels, descending to be a simple bargeman. His gravity and corpulence had something almost priestly in character. He was the obese type of Mediterranean with a little head, voluminous neck and triple chin, seated on the stern of his fishing skiff like a Roman patrician on the throne of his trireme.

His culinary talent suffered eclipse whenever rice did not figure as the fundamental basis of his compositions. All that this food could give of itself, he knew perfectly. In the tropical ports, the crews surfeited with bananas, pineapples, and alligator-pears, would greet with enthusiasm the apparition of a great frying pan of rice with cod and potatoes, or a casserole of rice from the oven with its golden crust perforated by the ruddy faces of garbanzos and points of black sausage. At other times, under the leaden-colored sky of the northern seas, the cook made them recall their distant native land by giving them the monastic rice dish with beet roots, or buttery rice with turnips and beans.

On Sundays and the fiestas of the Valencian saints who for Uncle Caragol were the first in heaven,—*San Vicente Mártir, San Vicente Ferrer, La Virgin de los Desamparados* and the *Cristo del Grao*—would appear the smoking *paella*, a vast, circular dish of rice upon whose surface of white, swollen grains were lying bits of various fowls. The cook loved to surprise his following by distributing rotund, raw onions, with the whiteness of marble and an acrid surprise that brought tears to the eyes. They were a princely gift maintained in secret. One had only to break them with one blow and their sticky juices would gush forth and lose themselves in the palate like crisp mouthfuls of a sweet and spicy bread, alternating with knifefuls of rice. The boat was at times near Brazil in sight of Fernando de Noroña,—yet even while viewing the conical huts of the negroes installed on an island under an equatorial sun, the crews could almost believe—thanks to Uncle Caragol's magic—that they were eating in a cabin of the farmland of Valencia, as they passed from hand to hand the long-spouted jug filled with strong wine from Liria.

When they anchored in ports where fish was abundant, he achieved the great work of cooking a rice *abanda*. The cabin boys would bring to the captain's table the pot in which was boiled the rich sea food mixed with lobsters, mussels, and every kind of shell-fish available, but the *chef* invariably reserved for himself the honor of offering the accompanying great platter with its pyramid, of rice, every grain golden and distinct.

Boiled apart (*abanda*) each grain was full of the succulent broth of the stew-pot. It was a rice dish that contained within it the concentration of all the sustenance of the sea. As though he were performing a liturgical ceremony, the *chef* would go around delivering half a lemon to each one of those seated at the table. The rice should only be eaten after moistening it with this perfumed dew which called to mind the image of an oriental garden. Only the unfortunate beings who lived inland were ignorant of this exquisite confection, calling any mess of rice a Valencian rice dish.

Ulysses would humor the cook's notions, carrying the first spoonful to his mouth with a questioning glance…. Then he would smile, giving himself up to gastric intoxication. "Magnificent, Uncle Caragol!" His good humor made him affirm that only the gods should be nourished with rice *abanda* in their abodes on Mount Olympus. He had read that in books. And Caragol, divining great praise in all this, would gravely reply, "That is so, my captain." Toni and the other officers by this time would be chewing away with heads down, only interrupting their feast to regret that the old Ganymede should have skimped them when measuring the ambrosia.

In his estimation, oil was as precious as rice. In the time of their money-losing navigation, when the captain was making special efforts at economy, Caragol used to keep an especially sharp eye on the great oil bottles in his galley, for he suspected that the cabin boys and the young seamen appropriated it to dress their hair when they wanted to play the dandy, using the oil as a pomade. Every head that put itself within reach of his disturbed glance he grasped between his arms, raising it to his nose. The slightest perfume of olive oil would arouse his wrath. "Ah, you thief!"… And down would fall his enormous hand, soft and heavy as a fencing gauntlet.

Ulysses believed him quite capable of climbing the bridge, and declaring that navigation could not go on because of his having exhausted the leathern bottles of amethyst-colored liquid proceeding from the Sierra de Espadán.

In the ports, his short-sighted eyes recognized immediately the nationality of the boats anchored on both sides of the *Mare Nostrum*. His nose would sniff the air sadly. "Nothing!…" They were unsavory barks, barks from the North that prepared their dinner with lard or butter,—Protestant barks, perhaps.

Sometimes he would sneak along the gunwale, following an intoxicating trail until he planted himself in front of the galley of the neighboring boat, breathing in its rich perfume. "Hello, brothers!" Impossible to fool him, they were probably Spaniards and, if not, they were from Genoa or Naples, —in short, were compatriots accustomed to live and eat in all latitudes just as though they were in their own little inland sea. Soon they would begin a speech in the Mediterranean idiom, a mixture of Spanish, Provençal and Italian, invented by the hybrid peoples of the African coast from Egypt to Morocco. Sometimes they would send each other presents, like those that are exchanged between tribes,—fruits from distant countries. At other times, suddenly inimical, without knowing why, they would shake their fists over the railing, yelling insults at each other in which, between every two or three words, would appear the names of the Virgin and her holy Son.

This was the signal for Uncle Caragol, religious soul, to return in haughty silence to his galley. Toni, the mate, used to make fun of his devout enthusiasm. On the other hand, the foremast hands, materialistic and gluttonous, used to listen to him with deference, because he was the one who doled out the wine and the choicest tid-bits. The old man used to speak to them of the *Cristo del Grao*, whose pictures occupied the most prominent site in the kitchen, and they would all listen as to a new tale, to the story of the arrival by sea of the sacred image, mounted upon a ladder in a boat that had dissolved in smoke after discharging its miraculous cargo.

This had been when the *Grao* was no more than a group of huts far from the walls of Valencia and threatened by the raids of the Moorish pirates. For many years Caragol, barefooted, had carried this sacred ladder on his shoulder on the day of the fiesta. Now other men of the sea were enjoying such honor and he, old and half-blind, would be waiting among the public for the procession to pass in order that he might throw himself upon the enormous relic, touching his clothes to the wood.

All his outer garments were sanctified by this contact. In reality they weren't very many, since he usually strolled about the boat very lightly clad, with the immodesty of a man who sees poorly and considers himself above human preoccupations.

A shirt with the tail always floating, and a pair of pantaloons of dirty cotton or yellow flannel, according to the season, constituted his entire outfit. The bosom of the shirt was open on all occasions, leaving visible a thatch of white hair. The pantaloons were fastened together with a single button. A palm leaf hat always covered his head even when he was working among his cooking pots.

The *Mare Nostrum* could not be shipwrecked nor suffer any harm while it carried him aboard. In the days of tempest, when waves were sweeping the deck from prow to poop, and the sailors were treading warily, fearing that a heavy sea might carry them overboard, Caragol would stick his head out through the door of the galley, scorning a danger which he could not see.

The great water-spouts would pass over him, even putting out his fires, but only increasing his faith. "Courage, boys! Courage, lads!" The *Cristo del Grao* had special charge of them and nothing bad could happen to the ship… Some of the seamen were silent, while others said this and that about the image without arousing the indignation of the old devotee. God, who sends dangers to the men of the sea, knows that their bad words lack malice.

His religiosity extended to the very deeps. He did not wish to say anything about the ocean fish, for they inspired him with the same indifference as those cold and unperfumed boats that were ignorant of olive oil, and all that was cooked with "pomade." They must be heretics.

He was better acquainted with the fish of the Mediterranean and even came to believe that they must be good Catholics, since in their own way they proclaimed the glory of God. Standing near the taffrail on torrid evenings in the tropics, he would recount, in honor of the inhabitants of his distant sea, the portentous miracle which had taken place in the glen of Alboraya.

A priest was one day fording on horseback the mouth of a river in order to carry the eucharist to a dying person, when his beast stumbled and the ciborium, falling open, the Hosts fell out and were carried off by the current. From that time on, mysterious lights glowed every night on the water, and at sunrise a swarm of little fishes would come to range themselves opposite the glen, their heads emerging from the water, in order to show the Host which each one of them was carrying in his mouth. In vain the fishermen wished to take them away from them. They fled to the inland sea with their treasures. Only when the clergy, with cross erect and with the same priest, fell on their knees in the glen did they decide to approach; and one after the other deposited his Host in the ciborium, retiring then from wave to wave, gracefully waggling their little tails.

In spite of the vague hope for a jug of choice wine that was animating most of his hearers, a murmur of incredulity always arose at the end of this tale. The devout Caragol then became as wrathful and foul-mouthed as a prophet of old when he considered his faith in danger. "Who was that son of a flea?… Who *was* that son of a flea daring to doubt what I myself have seen?…" And what he had seen was the fiesta of the *Peixet* that was celebrated every year, simply listening to most learned men discoursing about the miracle in a commemorative chapel built on the banks of the glen.

This prodigy of the little fishes was almost always followed with what he called the miracle of the *Peixot*, endeavoring with the weight of such a marvelous fish tale to crush the doubts of the impious.

The galley of Alphonso V of Aragon (the only sailor king of Spain), upon coming out of the Gulf of Naples, once struck a hidden rock near the island of Capri which took away a side of the ship without making it leak; and the vessel continued on with all sails spread, carrying the king, the ladies of his court, and the retinue of mail-clad barons. Twenty days afterward they arrived at Valencia safe and sound like all sailors who in moments of danger ask aid of the *Virgen del Puig*. Upon inspecting the hull of the galley, the master calkers beheld a monstrous fish detach itself from its bottom with the tranquility of an upright person who has fulfilled his duty. It was a dolphin sent by the most holy

Señora in order that his side might stop up the open breach. And thus, like a plug, it had sailed from Naples to Valencia without allowing a drop of water to pass in.

The *chef* would not admit any criticisms nor protests. This miracle was undeniable. He had seen it with his own eyes, and they were good. He had seen it in an ancient picture in the monastery of Puig, everything appearing on the tablet with the realism of truth,—the galley, the king, the *peixòt* and the Virgin above giving the order.

At this juncture the breeze would flap the narrator's shirt tail, disclosing his abdomen divided into hemispheres by the tyranny of its only pantaloon button.

"Uncle Caragol, look out!" warned a teasing voice.

The holy man would smile with the seraphic calm of one who sees beyond the pomps and vanities of existence, and would begin the relation of a new miracle.

Ferragut used to attribute his cook's periods of exaltation to the lightness of his clothing in all weathers. Within him was burning a fire incessantly renewed. On foggy days he would climb to the bridge with some glasses of a smoking drink that he used to call *calentets*. Nothing better for men that had to pass long hours in the inclement weather in motionless vigilance! It was coffee mixed with rum, but in unequal proportions, having more alcohol than black liquid. Toni would drink rapidly all the glasses offered. The captain would refuse them, asking for clear coffee.

His sobriety was that of the ancient sailor,—the sobriety of Father Ulysses who used to mix wine with water in all his libations. The divinities of the old sea did not love alcoholic drinks. The white *Amphitrite* and the Nereids only accepted on their altars the fruits of the earth, sacrifices of doves, libations of milk. Perhaps because of this the seafaring men of the Mediterranean, following an hereditary tendency, looked upon intoxication as the vilest of degradations. Even those who were not temperate avoided getting frankly drunk like the sailors of other seas, dissimulating the strength of their alcoholic beverage with coffee and sugar.

Caragol was the understudy charged with drinking all which the captain refused, together with certain others which he dedicated to himself in the mystery of the galley. On warm days he manufactured *refresquets*, and these refreshments were enormous glasses, half of water and half of rum upon a great bed of sugar,—a mixture that made one pass like a lightning flash, without any gradations, from vulgar serenity to most angelic intoxication.

The captain would scold him upon seeing his inflamed and reddened eyes. He was going to make himself blind…. But the guilty one was not moved by this threat. He had to celebrate the prosperity of the vessel in his own way. And of this prosperity the most interesting thing for him was his ability to use oil and brandy lavishly without any fear of recriminations when the accounts were settled. *Cristo del Grao*!… would that the war would last forever!…

The *Mare Nostrum's* third voyage from South America to Europe came suddenly to an end in Naples, where they were unloading wheat and hides. A collision at the entrance of the port, with an English hospital ship that was going to the Dardanelles, injured her stern, carrying away a part of the screw.

Toni roared with impatience upon learning that they would have to remain nearly a month in enforced idleness. Italy had not yet intervened in the war, but her defensive precautions were monopolizing all naval industries. It was not possible to make the repairs sooner, although Ferragut well knew what this loss of time would represent in his business. Valuable freight was waiting for him in Marseilles and Barcelona, but, wishing to tranquillize himself and to pacify his mate, he would say repeatedly:

"England will indemnify us…. The English are just."

And in order to soothe his impatience he went ashore.

Compared with other celebrated Italian cities, Naples did not appear to him of much importance. Its true beauty was its immense gulf between hills of orange trees and pines, with a

second frame of mountains one of which outlined upon the azure heavens its eternal crest of volcanic vapors.

The town did not abound in famous edifices. The monarchs of Naples had generally been foreigners who had resided far away and had governed through their delegates. The best streets, the palaces, the monumental fountain, had come from the Spanish viceroys. A sovereign of mixed origin, Charles the III, Castilian by birth and Neapolitan at heart, had done the most for the city. His building enthusiasm had embellished the ancient districts with works similar to those that he erected years afterward, upon occupying the throne of Spain.

After admiring the Grecian statuary in the museum, and the excavated objects that revealed the intimate life of the ancients, Ulysses threaded the tortuous and often gloomy arteries of the popular districts.

There were streets clinging to the slopes forming landings flanked with narrow and very high houses. Every vacant space had its balconies, and from every railing to its opposite were extended lines spread with clothes of different colors, hung out to dry. Neapolitan fertility made these little alleys seethe with people. Around the open-air kitchens there crowded patrons, eating, while standing, their boiled macaroni or bits of meat.

The hucksters were hawking their goods with melodious, song-like cries, and cords to which little baskets were fastened were lowered down to them from balconies. The bargaining and purchases reached from the depth of the street gutters to the top of the seventh floor, but the flocks of goats climbed the winding steps with their customary agility in order to be milked at the various stair landings.

The wharves of the Marinela attracted the captain because of the local color of this Mediterranean port. Italian unity had torn down and reconstructed much of it, but there still remained standing various rows of little low-roofed houses with white or pink facades, green doors, and lower floors further forward than the upper ones, serving as props for galleries with wooden balustrades. Everything there that was not of brick was of clumsy carpentry resembling the work of ship calkers. Iron did not exist in these terrestrial constructions suggestive of the sailboat whose rooms were as dark as staterooms. Through the windows could be seen great conch-shells upon the chests of drawers, harsh and childish oil paintings representing frigates, and multi-colored shells from distant seas.

These dwellings repeated themselves in all the ports of the Mediterranean just as though they were the work of the same hand. As a child, Ferragut had seen them in the *Grao* of Valencia and continually ran across them in Barcelona, in the suburbs of Marseilles, in old Nice, in the ports of the western islands, and in the sections of the African coast occupied by Maltese and Sicilians.

Over the town, lined up along the Marinela, the churches of Naples reared their domes and towers with glazed roofs, green and yellow, which appeared more like pinnacles of Oriental baths than the roofs of Christian temples.

The barefooted *lazzarone* with his red cap no longer existed, but the crowd,—clad like the workmen of all ports—still gathered around the daubed poster that represented a crime, a miracle or a prodigious specific, listening in silence to the harangue of the narrator or charlatan. The old popular comedians were declaiming with heroic gesticulations the epic octavos of Tasso, and harps and violins were sounding accompaniments to the latest melody that Naples had made fashionable throughout the entire world. The stands of the oyster-men constantly sent forth an organic perfume from the spent wave, and all around them empty shells scattered their disks of pearly lime over the mud.

Near to the ancient Captaincy of the port, the palace of Charles III,—blue and white, with an image of the immaculate conception,—were assembled the unloading trucks, whose teams still preserved their ancient hybrid originality. In some instances the shafts were occupied by a white ox, sleek with enormous and widely branching horns, an animal similar to those that used to figure in the religious ceremonies of the ancients. At his right would be hooked a horse, at his left, a great raw-boned mule, and this triple and discordant team appeared in all the carts, standing immovable

before the ships the length of the docks, or dragging their heavy wheels up the slopes leading to the upper city.

In a few days the captain grew tired of Naples and its bustle. In the cafés of the Street of Toledo and the Gallery of Humbert I, he had to defend himself from some noisy youths with low-cut vests, butterfly neckties and little felt hats perched upon their manes, who, in low voices, proposed to him unheard-of spectacles organized for the diversion of foreigners.

He had also seen enough of the paintings and domestic objects excavated from the ancient cities. The lewdness of the secret cabinets finally irritated him. It appeared to him the reverse of recreation to contemplate so many childish fantasies of sculpture and painting having the antique symbol of masculinity as its principal motif.

One morning he boarded a train and, after skirting the smoking mountain of Vesuvius, passing between rose-colored villages surrounded with vineyards, he stopped at the station of Pompeii.

From the funereal solitudes of hotels and restaurants, the guides came forth like a suddenly awakened swarm of wasps, lamenting that the war had cut off the tourist trade. Perhaps he would be the only one who would come that day. "*Signor*, at your service, at any price whatever!…" But the sailor continued on alone. Always, in recalling Pompeii, he had wished to see it again alone, absolutely alone, so as to get a more direct impression of the ancient life.

His first view of it had been seventeen years ago when, as a mate of a Catalan sailing vessel anchored in the port of Naples, he had taken advantage of the cheapness of Sunday rates and had seen everything as one of a crowd that was pushing and treading on everybody's feet so as to listen to the nearest guide.

At the head of the expedition had been a priest, young and elegant, a Roman *Monsignor*, clad in silk, and with him two showy foreign women, who were always climbing up in the highest places, raising their skirts rather high for fear of the star lizards that were writhing in and out of the ruins. Ferragut, in humble admiration, always remained below, glimpsing the country from behind their legs. "Ay! Twenty-two years!…" Afterwards when he heard Pompeii spoken of, it always evoked in his memory several strata of images. "Very beautiful! Very interesting!" And in his mind's eye he saw again the palaces and temples, but as a secondary consideration, like a shrouded background, while in the forefront were four magnificent legs standing forth,—a human colonnade of slender shafts swathed in transparent black silk.

The solitude so long desired for his second visit was now aggressively in evidence. In this deserted, dead city there were to-day no other sounds than the whirring of insect wings over the plants beginning to clothe themselves with springtime verdure, and the invisible scampering of reptiles under the layers of ivy.

At the gate of Herculaneum, the guardian of the little museum left Ferragut to examine in peace the excavations of the various corpses, petrified Pompeiians of plaster still in the attitudes of terror in which death had surprised them. He did not abandon his post in order to trouble the captain with his explanations; he scarcely raised his eyes from the newspaper that he had before him. The news from Rome,—the intrigues of the German diplomats, the possibility that Italy might enter the war, —were absorbing his entire attention.

Afterwards on the solitary streets the sailor found everywhere the same preoccupation. His footsteps resounded in the sunlight as though treading the depths of the hollow tombs. The moment he stopped, silence again enveloped him,—"A silence of two thousand years," thought Ferragut to himself, and in the midst of this primeval silence sounded far-away voices in the violence of a sharp discussion. They were the guardians and the employees of the excavations who, lacking work, were gesticulating and insulting each other in these strongholds twenty centuries old so profoundly isolated from patriotic enthusiasm or fear of the horrors of war.

Ferragut, map in hand, passed among these groups without annoyance from insistent guides. For two hours he fancied himself an inhabitant of ancient Pompeii who had remained alone in the

city on a holiday devoted to the rural divinities. His glance could reach to the very end of the straight streets without encountering persons or things recalling modern times.

Pompeii appeared to him smaller than ever in this solitude,—an intersection of narrow roads with high sidewalks paved with polygonal blocks of blue lava. In its interstices Spring was forming green grass plots dotted with flowers. Carriages,—of whose owners not even the dust was left,—had with their deep wheels opened up ridges in the pavement more than a thousand years ago. In every crossway was a public fountain with a grotesque mask which had spouted water through its mouth.

Certain red letters on the walls were announcements of elections to be held in the beginning of that era,—candidates for aedile or duumvir who were recommended to the Pompeiian voters. Some doors showed above, the *phallus* for conjuring the evil eyes; others, a pair of serpents intertwined, emblem of family life. In the corners of the alleyways, a Latin verse engraved on the walls asked the passerby to observe the laws of sanitation, and there still could be seen on the stuccoed walls caricatures and scribbling, handiwork of the little street gamins of Caesar's day.

The houses were lightly constructed upon floors cracked by minor earthquakes before the arrival of the final catastrophe. The lower floors were of bricks or concrete and the others, of wood, had been devoured by the volcanic fire, only the stairways remaining.

In this gracious city of amiable and easy-going life, more Greek than Roman, all the lower floors of the plebeian houses had been occupied by petty traders. They were shops with doors the same size as the establishment, four-sided caves like the Arabian *zocos* whose furthermost corners were visible to the buyer stopping in the street. Many still had their stone counters and their large earthen jars for the sale of wine and oil. The private dwellings had no facades, and their outer walls were smooth and unapproachable, but with an interior court providing the surrounding chambers with light as in the palaces of the Orient. The doors were merely half-doors of escape, parts of larger ones. All life was concentrated around the interior, the central patio, rich and magnificent, adorned with fish ponds, statues and flower-bordered beds.

Marble was rare. The columns constructed of bricks were covered with a stucco that offered a fine surface for painting. Pompeii had been a polychrome city. All the columns, red or yellow, had capitals of divers colors. The center of the walls was generally occupied with a little picture, usually erotic, painted on black varnished walls varied with red and amber hues. On the friezes were processions of cupids and tritons, between rustic and maritime emblems.

Tired of his excursion through the dead city, Ferragut seated himself on a stone bench among the ruins of the temple, and looked over the map spread out on his knees, enjoying the titles with which the most interesting constructions had been designated because of a mosaic or a painting,—Villa of Diomedes, the House of Meleager, of the wounded Adonis, of the Labryinth, of the Faun, of the Black Wall. The names of the streets were not less interesting: The Road of the Hot Baths, the Road of the Tombs, the Road of Abundance, the Road of the Theaters.

The sound of footsteps made the sailor raise his head. Two ladies were passing, preceded by a guide. One was tall, with a firm tread. They were wearing face-veils and still another larger veil crossing behind and coming over the arms like a shawl. Ferragut surmised a great difference in the ages of the two. The stout one was moving along with an assumed gravity. Her step was quick, but with a certain authority she planted on the ground her large feet, loosely shod and with low heels. The younger one, taller and more slender, tripping onwards with little steps like a bird that only knows how to fly, was teetering along on high heels.

The two looked uneasily at this man appearing so unexpectedly among the ruins. They had the preoccupied and timorous air of those going to a forbidden place or meditating a bad action. Their first movement was an impulse to go back, but the guide continued on his way so imperturbably that they followed on.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.