

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott
Swift Chekhov Newton



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The Torrent Entre Naranjos

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THE TORRENT
(ENTRE NARANJOS)

By **VICENTE BLASCO IBAÑEZ**

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY

ISAAC GOLDBERG

AND

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1921

THE TORRENT

PART ONE

I

"Your friends are waiting for you at the Club. They saw you for a moment only, this morning; they'll be wanting to hear all your stories about life in Madrid."

Doña Bernarda fixed upon the young deputy a pair of deep, scrutinizing, severely maternal eyes that recalled to Rafael all the roguish anxieties of his childhood.

"Are you going directly to the Club?..." she added. "Andrés will be starting too, right away."

Rafael, in reply, wished a blunt "good-afternoon" to his mother and don Andrés, who were still at table sipping their coffee, and strode out of the dining-room.

Finding himself on the broad, red-marble staircase in the silence of that ancient mansion, of such princely magnificence, he experienced the sudden sense of comfort and wellbeing that a traveler feels on plunging into a bath after a tedious journey.

Ever since he had arrived, with the noisy reception at the station, the hurrahs, the deafening music, handshakes here, crowding there, the pushing and elbowing of more than a thousand people who had thronged the streets of Alcira to get a close look at him, this was the first moment he had found himself alone, his own master, able to do exactly as he pleased, without needing to smile automatically in all directions and welcome with demonstrations of affection persons whose faces he could scarcely recall.

What a deep breath of relief he drew as he went down the deserted staircase, which echoed his every footstep! How large and beautiful the *patio* was! How broad and lustrous the leaves of the plantains flourishing in their green boxes! There he had spent the best years of his childhood. The little boys who in those days used to be hiding behind the wide portal, waiting for a chance to play with the

son of the powerful don Ramón Brull, were now the grown men, the sinewy orchard workers, who had been parading from the station to his house, waving their arms, and shouting *vivas* for their deputy—Alcira's "favorite son."

This contrast between the past and present flattered Rafael's conceit, though, in the background of his thoughts, the suspicion lurked that his mother had been not a little instrumental in the preparation of his noisy reception, not to mention don Andrés, and numerous other friends, ever loyal to anyone connected with the greatness of the Brulls, *caciques*—political bosses—and leading citizens of the district.

To enjoy these recollections of childhood and the pleasure of finding himself once more at home, after several months in Madrid, he stood for some time motionless in the *patio*, looking up at the balconies of the first story, then at the attic windows—from which in mischievous years gone by he had many a time withdrawn his head at the sound of his mother's scolding voice—and lastly, at the veil of luminous blue above—a patch of sky drenched in that Spanish sunlight which ripens the oranges to clusters of flaming gold.

He thought he could still see his father—the imposing, solemn don Ramón—sauntering about the *patio*, his hands behind his back, answering in a few impressive words the questions flung at him by his party adherents, who followed him about with idolatrous eyes. If the old man could only have come back to life that morning to see how his son had been acclaimed by the entire city!...

A barely perceptible sound like the buzzing of two flies broke the deep silence of the mansion. The deputy looked toward the only balcony window that was open, though but slightly. His mother and don Andrés were still talking in the dining-room—and of him, as usual, without a doubt! And, lest they should call him, and suddenly deprive him of his keen enjoyment at being alone, he left the *patio* and went out into the street.

It was only the month of March; but at two in the afternoon the air was almost uncomfortably hot. Accustomed to the cold wind of Madrid and to the winter rains, Rafael inhaled, with a sense of voluptuous pleasure, the warm breeze that wafted the perfume of the blossoming orchards through the narrow lanes of the ancient town.

Once, years before, he had been in Italy on a Catholic pilgrimage, entrusted by his mother to the care of a priest from Valencia, who would not think of returning to Spain without paying a visit to don Carlos. A memory of a Venetian *calle* now came back to Rafael's mind as he traversed the streets of old Alcira—shadowy, cramped, sunk deep as wells between rows of high houses. With all the economy of a city built on an island, Alcira rears its edifices higher and higher as its population grows, leaving just enough space free for the bare needs of traffic.

The streets were deserted. The noisy, orchard workers who had welcomed Rafael had gone back to the fields again. All the idlers had fled to the cafés, and as the deputy walked smartly by in front of these, warm waves of air came out upon him through the windows, with the clatter of poker chips, the noise of billiard balls, and the uproar of heated argument.

Rafael reached the Suburban Bridge, one of the two means of egress from the Old City. The Júcar was combing its muddy, reddish waters on the piles of the ancient structure. A number of row-boats, made fast to the houses on the shore, were tugging at their moorings. Rafael recognized among them the fine craft that he had once used for lonely trips on the river. It lay there quite forgotten, gradually shedding its coat of white paint out in the weather.

Then he looked at the bridge itself; the Gothic-arched gate, a relic of the old fortifications; the battlements of yellowish, chipped rock, which looked as if all the rats of the river had come at night to nibble at them; then two niches with a collection of mutilated, dust-laden images—San Bernardo, patron Saint of Alcira, and his estimable sisters. Dear old San Bernardo, *alias* Prince Hamete, son of the Moorish king of Carlet, converted to Christ by the mystic poesy of the Christian cult,—and still wearing in his mangled forehead the nail of martyrdom!

As Rafael walked past the rude, disfigured statue he thought of all the stories his mother, an uncompromising clerical and a woman of credulous faith, had told him of the patron of Alcira, particularly the legend of the enmity and struggle between San Vicente and San Bernardo, an ingenuous fancy of popular superstition.

Saint Vincent, who was an eloquent preacher arrived at Alcira on one of his tours, and stopped at a blacksmith's shop near the bridge to get his donkey shod. When the work was done the horseshoer asked for the usual price for his labor; but San Vicente, accustomed to living on the bounty of the faithful, waxed indignant, and looking at the Júcar, exclaimed, vindictively:

"Some day folks will say: 'This is where Alcira used to be!'"

"Not while Bernardo is here!" the statue of San Bernardo remarked from its pedestal.

And there the statue of the saint still stood, like an eternal sentinel, watching over the Júcar to exorcise the curse of the rancorous Saint Vincent! To be sure the river would rise and overflow its banks every year, reaching to the very feet of San Bernardo sometimes, and coming within an ace of pulling the wily saint down from his perch. It is also true that every five or six years the flood would shake houses loose from their foundations, destroy good farm land, drown people, and commit other horrible depredations—all in obedience to the curse of Valencia's patron; but the saint of Alcira was the better man of the two for all of that! And, if you didn't believe it, there the city was, still planted firmly on its feet and quite unscathed, except for a scratch here and there from times when the rains were exceptionally heavy and the waters came down from Cuenca in a great roaring torrent!

With a smile and a nod to the powerful saint, as to an old friend of childhood, Rafael crossed the bridge and entered the *arrabal*, the "New City," ample, roomy, unobstructed, as if the close-packed houses of the island, to get elbow-room and a breath of air, had stampeded in a flock to the other bank of the river, scattering hither and thither in the hilarious disorder of children let loose from school.

The deputy paused at the head of the street on which his club was located. Even from there he could hear the talking and laughing of the many members, who had gathered in much greater number than usual because of his arrival. What would he be in for down there? A speech, probably! A speech on local politics! Or, if not a speech, idle talk about the orange crop, or cock-fighting. He would be expected to tell them what kind of a man the Premier was—and

then spend the afternoon analyzing the character of every minister! Then don Andrés would be there, that boresome Mentor who, at the instance of Rafael's mother, would never let him out of sight for a moment. Bah! The Club could wait! He would have plenty of time later in the day to stifle in that smoke-filled parlor where, the moment he showed his face, everybody would be upon him and pester the life out of him with questions and wire-pulling!

And more and more yielding to the lure of the southern sunshine and to those perfumes of May floating about him in wintertime, he turned off into a lane that led to the fields.

As he emerged from the ancient Ghetto and found himself in the open country, he drew a deep breath, as if to imprison in his lungs all the life, bloom and color of his native soil.

The orange orchards lined both banks of the stream with straight rows of green, round tree-tops. The sun glistened off the varnished leaves; the wheels of irrigating machines sounded from the distance like humming insects. The moisture rising from the canals, joined the clouds from the chimneys of the motors, to form a thin veil of mist over the countryside, that gave a pearly transparency to the golden light of the afternoon.

To one side rose the hill of San Salvador, its crest topped with the Hermitage, and the pines, the cypresses, and the prickly pears around that rough testimonial of popular piety. The sanctuary seemed to be talking to him like an indiscreet friend, betraying the real motive that had caused him to evade his appointment with his political friends and disobey his mother into the bargain.

Something more than the beauty of the fields had enticed him from the city. When the rays of the rising sun had awakened him that morning on the train, the first thing he had seen, before opening his eyes even, was an orange orchard, the bank of the Júcar, and a house painted blue,—the very one that was now in sight a-way off there, among the round tree-tops along the river.

How many times in past months his thoughts had lingered on the memory of that same scene!

Afternoons, in the Congress, while the Premier on the Blue Bench would be answering the interpellations of the Opposition in sharp

incisive tones, Rafael's brain would begin to doze, reduced to jelly, as it were, by the incessant hammering of words, words, words! Before his closed eyes a dark veil would begin to unroll as if the moist, cellar-like gloom in which the Chamber is always plunged, had thickened suddenly, and against this curtain, like a cinema dream, rows of orange-trees would come into view, and a blue house with open windows; and pouring through the windows a stream of notes from a soft voice, ever so sweet, singing *lieder* and ballads as an accompaniment to the hard, sonorous paragraphs snapping from the Premier's teeth. Then applause and disorder! The moment for voting had arrived, and the fading outlines of the Blue House still hovering before his dreamy eyes, the member for Alcira would ask his neighbor:

"How do we vote? Yes or no?"

The same it was at night at the Opera, where music served only to remind him of a familiar voice winding like a thread of gold out across the orchards through the orange trees; and the same again, after dinner with his colleagues on committees, when the deputies, their cigars tilted cockily upwards between their lips, and with all the voluptuous gaiety inspired by good digestions, would troop off to see the night out in some trustworthy house of assignation where their dignity as representatives of the country would not be compromised!

Now that blue house was actually before his eyes! And he was hurrying toward it,—not without some hesitation; a vague uneasiness he could not explain. His heart was in his mouth, it seemed, and he found it hard to breathe.

Orchard workers came along the road, occasionally, stepping aside to make room for the famous man, though he answered their greeting absent-mindedly. What a nuisance! They would all be sure to tell where they had seen him! His mother would know all about it within half an hour! And, that evening, a scene in the dining-room! As Rafael walked on toward the Blue House, he thought bitterly of his situation. Why was he going there anyhow? Why insist on living in a stew all the time? He had had two or three short but violent scenes with his mother a few months before. What a fury that stern, pious, and puritanic woman became when she

found out that her son had been calling down at the Blue House and was on friendly terms with a strange lady, an outsider, whom the respectable folk of the city would have nothing to do with, and of whom not a good word was ever heard except from the men at the Club, when they were sure their wives were not in hearing distance!

Tempestuous scenes they had been! He was running for Congress at the time. Was he trying—she wanted to know—to dishonor the family and compromise his political future? Was that what his poor father had lived for—a life of sacrifice and struggle, of service to "the Party," which, many a time, had meant shouldering a gun? And a loose woman was to be allowed to ruin the House of Brull, which for thirty years had been putting every cent it owned into politics, for the benefit of My Lords up in Madrid! And just when a Brull was about to reap the reward of so many sacrifices at last, and become a deputy—the means perhaps of clearing off the property, which was lousy with attachments and mortgages!...

Rafael had been no match for that energetic mother, the soul of "the Party." Meekly he had promised never to return to the Blue House, never to call again on that "loose woman"—doña Bernarda actually hissed as she said the word.

However, the upshot of it all had been that Rafael simply discovered how weak he was. Despite his promise, he returned to the Blue House often, but by round-about ways and over long detours, skulking from cover to cover, as he had done in childhood days when stealing oranges from the orchards. There he was, a man whose name was on the lips of the whole county, and who at any moment might be invested with authority from the people, thus realizing the life-long dream of his father! But the sight of a woman in the fields, a child, a beggar, would make him blanch with terror! And that was not the worst of it! Whenever he entered the Blue House now he had to pretend he came openly, without any fear whatever. And so things had gone on down to the very eve of his departure for Madrid.

As Rafael reached this point in his reminiscences, he asked himself what hope had led him to disobey his mother and brook her truly formidable wrath.

In that blue house he had found only frank, disinterested friendship,—a somewhat ironic comradeship, the condescending tolerance of a person compelled by solitude to choose as her comrade the least repulsive among a host of inferiors. Alas! How clearly he remembered and could again foresee the sceptical, cold smile with which his words were always received, though he was sure he had crammed them with burning passion! What a laugh she had given,—as insolent and as cutting as a lash,—the day he had dared to declare his love!

"Now the soft-pedal on slush, eh, Rafaelito?... If you want us to go on being friends, all right, but it's on condition you treat me as a man. Comrades, eh, and nothing more."

And with a look at him through those green, luminous, devilish eyes of hers, she had taken her seat at the piano and begun one of her divine songs, as if she thought the magic of her art might raise a barrier between them.

On another occasion, she was irritable rather; Rafael's appealing eyes, his words of amorous adoration, seemed to provoke her, and she had said with brutal frankness:

"Don't waste your breath, please! I am through with love. I know men too well! But even if anyone were to upset me again, it would not be you, Rafaelito dear."

And yet he had persisted, insensible to the irony and the scorn of this terrible *amigo* in skirts, and indifferent as well to the conflicts that his blind passion might provoke at home if his mother knew.

He tried to free himself from his infatuation, but unsuccessfully. With that in view he fixed his attention on the woman's past; it was said that despite her beauty, her aristocratic manners, the brilliancy of mind with which she had dazzled him—a poor country boy—she was only an adventuress who had made her way over half the globe from one pair of arms to another. Well, in that case, it would be a great exploit to win a woman whom princes and celebrated men had loved! But since that was impossible, why go on, why continue endangering his career and having trouble with his mother all the time?

To forget her, he stressed, before his own mind, words and attitudes of hers that might be judged defects; and he would taste the joy of duty well done when, after such gymnastics of the will, he could think of her without great emotion.

At the beginning of his life in Madrid he imagined he had recovered. New surroundings; continuous and petty satisfactions to vanity; the kow-towing of doorkeepers in Congress; the flattery of visitors from here, there and everywhere who came with requests for passes to admit them to the galleries; the sense of being treated as a comrade by celebrities, whose names his father had always mentioned with bated breath; the "honorable" always written before his name; all Alcira speaking to him with affectionate familiarity; this rubbing elbows, on the benches of the conservative majority, with a battalion of dukes, counts and marquises— young men who had become deputies to round out the distinction conferred by beautiful sweethearts or winning thoroughbreds,— all this had intoxicated him, filled his mind completely, crowding out all other thoughts, and persuading him that he had been completely cured.

But as he grew familiar with his new life, and the novelty of all this adulation wore off, tenacious recollections rose again in his memory. At night, when sleep relaxed the will to forget, which his vigilance kept at painful tension, that blue house, the green, diabolical eyes of its principal denizen, that pair of fresh lips with their ironic smile that seemed to quiver between two rows of gleaming white teeth, would become the inevitable center of all his dreams.

Why resist any longer? He could think of her as much as he pleased—that, at least, his mother would never learn. And he gave himself up to the imagination of love, where distance lent an ever stronger enchantment to that woman.

He felt a vehement longing to return to his city. Absence seemed to do away with all the obstacles at home. His mother was not so formidable as he had thought. Who could tell whether, when he went back—changed as he felt himself to be by his new experiences—it would not be easier to continue the old relations? After so much isolation and solitude she might receive him in more cordial fashion!

The Cortes were about to adjourn, so, in obedience to repeated urging from his fellow-partisans, and from doña Bernarda, to *do something*—anything at all—to show interest in the home town—he took the floor one afternoon at the opening of the session, when only the president, the sergeant-at-arms, and a few reporters asleep in the press-gallery, were present, and, with his lunch rising in his throat from emotion, asked the Minister of Internal Affairs to show a little more despatch in the matter of flood protection at Alcira—a bill still in its in-fancy, though it had been pending some seventy years.

After this he was free to return with the halo of a "business-like" deputy shining about his head—"a zealous defender of the region's interests," the local weekly and party organ called him. And that morning, as he stepped off the train, the deputy, deaf to the Royal March and to the *vivas*, stood up on tiptoe, trying to descry through the waving banners the Blue House nestling in the distance among the orange-trees.

As he approached the place that afternoon he was almost sick with nervousness and emotion. For one last time he thought of his mother, so intent upon maintaining her prestige and so fearful of hostile gossip; of the demagogues who had thronged the doors of the cafes that morning, making fun of the demonstration in his honor; but all his scruples vanished at sight of the hedge of tall rose-bays and prickly hawthorns and of the two blue pillars supporting a barrier of green wooden bars. Resolutely he pushed the gate open, and entered the garden.

Orange-trees stretched in rows along broad straight walks of red earth. On either side of the approach to the house was a tangle of tall rose-bushes on which the first buds, heralds of an early spring, were already beginning to appear.

Above the chattering of the sparrows and the rustle of the wind in the trees, Rafael could hear the sound of a piano—the keys barely touched by the player's fingers—and a soft, timid voice, as if the song were meant for the singer alone.

It was she. Rafael knew the music: a *Lied* by Schubert—the favorite composer of the day; a master "whose best work was still unknown," as she said in the cant she had learned from the critics, allu-

ding to the fact that only the least subtle of the melancholy composer's works had thus far been popularized.

The young man advanced slowly, cautiously, as if afraid lest the sound of his footsteps break in upon that melody which seemed to be rocking the garden lovingly to sleep in the afternoon's golden sunlight.

He reached the open space in front of the house and once more found there the same murmuring palms, the same rubblework benches with seats and backs of flowered tile that he knew so well. There, in fact, she had so often laughed at his feverish protestations.

The door was closed; but through a half-opened window he could see a patch of silk; a woman's back, bending slightly forward over the music.

As Rafael came up a dog began to bark at the end of the garden. Some hens that had been scratching about in sand of the drive, scampered off cackling with fright. The music stopped. A chair scraped as it was pushed back. The lady was rising to her feet.

At the balcony a flowing gown of blue appeared; but all that Rafael saw was a pair of eyes—green eyes, that seemed to fill the entire window with a flood of light.

"Beppa! Beppina!" cried a firm, a warm, a sonorous, soprano voice. "*Apri la porta*. Open the door."

And with a slight inclination of her splendid head of thick auburn hair that seemed to crown her with a helmet of old gold, she smiled to him with a friendly, somewhat mocking, intimacy:

"Welcome, Rafaelito. I don't know why, but I was expecting you this afternoon. We have heard all about your triumphs; the music and the tumult reached even to our desert. My congratulations to the Honorable don Rafael Brull. Come right in, *I su señoría*."

II

From Valencia to Játiva, in all that immense territory covered with rice-fields and orange groves which Valencians embrace under the general and rather vague designation of *La Ribera*, there was no one unfamiliar with the name of Brull and the political power it stood for.

As if national unity had not yet been effected and the country were still divided into *taifas* and *waliatos* as in the days when one Moorish King reigned over Carlet, another over Denia, and a third over Játiva, the election system maintained a sort of inviolable rulership in every district; and when the Administration people came to Alcira in forecasting their political prospects, they always said the same thing:

"We're all right there. We can rely on Brull."

The Brull dynasty had been bossing the district for thirty years, with ever-increasing power.

The founder of this sovereign house had been Rafael's grandfather, the shrewd don Jaime, who had established the family fortune by fifty years of slow exploitation of ignorance and poverty. He began life as a clerk in the *Ayuntamiento* of Alcira; then he became secretary to the municipal judge, then assistant to the city clerk, then assistant-registrar of deeds. There was not a subordinate position in those offices where the poor come in contact with the law that he did not get his hands on; and from such points of vantage, by selling justice as a favor and using power or adroitness to subdue the refractory, he felt his way along, appropriating parcel after parcel of that fertile soil which he adored with a miser's covetousness.

A brazen charlatan he was, every moment talking of "Article Number So-and-So" of the law that applied to the case. The poor orchard workers came to have as much awe for his learning as fear of his malice, and in all their controversies they sought his advice and paid for it, as if he were a lawyer.

When he had gotten a small fortune together, he continued holding his menial posts in the city administration to retain the superstitious respect which is inspired in peasant-folk by all who are on good terms with the law; but not content with playing the eternal beggar, dependent on the humble gratuities of the poor, he took to pulling them out of their financial difficulties, lending them money on the collateral of their future harvests.

But six per cent seemed too petty a profit for him. The real plight of these folk came when a horse died and they had to buy another. Don Jaime became a dealer in dray horses, buying more or less defective animals from gypsies in Valencia, praising their virtues to the skies, and reselling them as thoroughbreds. And no sale on the instalment plan! Cash down! The horses did not belong to him—as he vowed with his hand pressed solemnly to his bosom—and their owners wished to realize on their value at once. The best he could do in the circumstances prompted by his greatness of heart, which always overflowed at the sight of poverty was to borrow money for the purchase from a friend of his.

The peasant in his desperate need would fall into the snare, and carry off the horse after signing all kinds of notes and mortgages to cover the loan of money he had not seen! For the don Jaime who spoke for the unknown party in the deal transferred the cash to the same don Jaime who spoke for the owner of the horse. Result: the rustic bought an animal, without chaffering, at double its value, having in addition borrowed a lot of money at cut-throat interest. In every turn-over of this sort don Jaime doubled his principal. New straits inevitably developed for the dupe; the interest kept piling up; hence new concessions, still more ruinous than the first, that don Jaime might be placated and give the purchaser a month's reprieve.

Every Wednesday, which was market-day in Alcira and brought a great crowd of orchard-folk to town, the street where don Jaime lived was the busiest in the city. People came in droves to ask for renewal of their notes, each leaving a tip of several *pesetas* usually, not to be counted against the debt itself. Others, humbly, timidly, as if they had come to rob the grasping Shylock, would ask for loans; and the strange thing about it, as the malicious noted, was that all these people, after leaving everything they owned in don Jaime's

hands, went off content, their faces beaming with satisfaction, as if they had just been rescued from a danger.

This was don Jaime's chief skill. He had the trick of making usury look like kindness; he always spoke of *those fellows*, those hidden owners of the money and the horses—heartless wretches who were "after him," holding him responsible for the short-comings of all their debtors. The burdens he thus supposedly assumed won him a reputation as a kind-hearted soul, and such confidence was the wily old demon able to instill in his victims that when mortgages were foreclosed on homes or fields, many of the unfortunates despoiled, would say, resignedly:

"It's not his fault. What could the poor man do if they forced him to it? It's those *other fellows* who are sucking the blood of us poor folks."

And so, quietly, leisurely, tranquilly, don Jaime got possession of a field here, then another there, then a third between the two; and in a few years he had rounded out a beautiful orchard of orange-trees with virtually no expenditure of capital at all. Thus his property went on increasing, and, with his radiant smile, his spectacles on his forehead and his paunch growing fatter and fatter, he could be seen surrounded by new victims, addressing them with the affectionate *tu*, patting them on the back, and vowing that this weakness he had for the doing of favors would some day bring him to dying like a dog in the gutter.

Thus he went on prospering. Nor was all the scoffing of city people of any avail in shaking the confidence reposed in him by that flock of rustics, who feared him as they feared the Law itself and believed in him as they believed in God.

A loan to a spendthrift eldest son made him the proprietor of the fine city mansion, which came to be known as "the Brull place." From that date he began to hob-nob with the large real-estate owners of the city, who, though they despised this upstart, made a small place for him in their midst with the instinctive solidarity that characterizes the freemasonry of money. To gain a little more standing for his name, he became a votary of San Bernardo, contributed to the funds for church festivals, and danced attendance on the *alcalde*, whoever that "mayor" might be. In his eyes now, the

only people in Alcira were such as collected thousands of *duros*, whenever harvest time came around. The rest were rabble, rabble, sir!

Then, at last he resigned the petty offices he had been filling; and handing his usury business over to those who formerly had served him as go-betweens, he set himself to the task of marrying off his son and sole heir, Ramon, an idling ne'er-do-well, who was always getting into trouble and upsetting the tranquil comfort that surrounded old Brull as he rested from his plunderings.

The father felt the satisfaction of a bully in having such a tall, strong, daring and insolent son, a boy who compelled respect in cafes and clubs more with his fists than with the special privileges conferred in small towns by wealth. Let anyone dare make fun of the old usurer when he had such a fire-eater to protect him!

Ramon had wanted to join the Army; but every time he referred to what he called his vocation, his father would fly into a rage. "Do you think that is what I've worked for all these years?" He could remember the time when, as a poor clerk, he had been forced to fawn on his superiors and listen humbly, cringingly, to their reprimands. He did not want a boy of his to be shoved about hither and thither like a mere machine. "Plenty of brass buttons," he exclaimed with the scorn of a man never to be taken in by external show, "and plenty of gold braid! But after all, a slave, a slave!"

No, he wanted to see his son free and influential, continuing the conquest of the city, completing the family greatness of which he had laid the foundations, getting power over people much as he himself had gotten power over money. Ramón must become a lawyer, the only career for a man destined to rule others. It was a passionate ambition the old pettifogger had, to see his scion enter through the front door and with head proudly erect, the precincts of the law, into which he had crawled so cautiously and at the risk, more than once, of being dragged out with a chain fastened to his ankle.

Ramón spent several years in Valencia without getting beyond the elementary courses in Common Law. The cursed classes were held in the morning, you see, and he had to go to bed at dawn—the hour when the lights in the pool-rooms went out. Besides, in his